

Research Article

The Implementation of Creative Writing Technique in Short Story with Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) Themes as the Initial Product of Digital Audio-visual Illustration for Trauma Healing Alternative

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Abstract.

This research aims to create short stories with PTSD themes by applying the creative writing technique for short stories as the initial product of digital audio-visual illustration, which will be used as an alternative for trauma healing. The product of this research is a part of art therapy that can assist in expressing various emotions of both the creator of the work and its audience. This study applies the creative writing technique for short stories by Edward Archibald Markham, consisting of 10 key points in creative writing for short stories, namely: (1) preparing for the short story, (2) revision, (3) the opening paragraph, (4) revision 2 - paying attention to detail, (5) shape: structure and form, (6) revision 3, (7) character, (8) dialogue, (9) literary conceits and extended metaphors, and (10) advanced exercises. This technique was chosen because it is highly relevant in developing a short story that vividly portrays traumatic experiences for the readers to empathize with. This research is a continuous study and a collaboration of researchers from the Faculty of Language and Arts at Universitas Negeri Jakarta, with expertise in literary studies, music composition, and visual arts. Therefore, this short story serves as the initial product that will be further developed into a digital audio-visual illustration (mixed art) that will play a role as an alternative art therapy for trauma healing.

Keywords: creative writing, short story, PTSD, trauma healing, narrative text

1. Introduction

Widiger (2021) emphasizes the clinical phenomena of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), which stems from traumatic occurrences [1]. The diagnostic was first used by the American Psychiatric Association in 1980. PTSD is caused by an individual's reaction to trauma, which results in physiological, behavioral, emotional, and cognitive adaptations. Reliving traumatic situations, avoiding reminders, and increased alertness

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Published 15 March 2024

Publishing services provided by
Knowledge E

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Selection and Peer-review under the responsibility of the

I-CALLED Conference

Committee.

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and responsiveness are all symptoms. The PTSD diagnosis stresses the significance of a person's reaction to trauma. It is of paramount importance to bear in mind that not everyone who undergoes a distressing incident will develop an anxiety disorder. The manifestation of anxiety disorders is influenced by the magnitude and duration of the trauma, an individual's personal history, and the contextual factors. Therefore, it is imperative to extend support and provide care to those who have experienced trauma, aiding them in their journey to address the traumatic experiences and mitigating the risk of developing PTSD.

The fields of literature and art play a role as an alternative support system for addressing trauma through art therapy. When it comes to expressing negative feelings like worry, rage, and poor self-esteem, art therapy may be a suitable tool. Patients or clients can express themselves and work through their difficulties and worries through art therapy, a sort of therapy that uses diverse art media as its interventions [2-3]. This research constitutes an ongoing investigation aimed at developing a mixed art form (Digital Audio-Visual Illustration) that addresses the theme of PTSD as an alternative method for trauma healing. This paper represents the initial phase of the research, which is primarily centered on the creation of a short story with a PTSD theme, serving as the precursor to the eventual mixed art product.

Regarding the reason behind the creation of the short story containing PTSD theme, there was research that conducted by James Pennebaker. Moran (2013) conducted an interview with social psychologist James Pennebaker to illustrate the healing potential of trauma writing for individuals suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder [4]. During the conversation, Pennebaker urged people to write about important feelings in a methodical and entirely personal way. Moran (2013) claims that this type of writing significantly improved the respondents' physical health, as evidenced by a review of their medical records [4]. Another research from Hays (2023) found that Psalms 105 and 106, when taken together, exemplify the Psalms book's ability to equip readers to confront adversity, recover, and build resilience through poetic expression, storytelling, and communal engagement [5]. These psalms recount a shared history, recognizing its positive and negative aspects, and encourage active involvement and reflection. Furthermore, this research aims to bring to light their suppressed voices due to stigma and their struggle in recognizing PTSD symptoms through a short story. The output of this study is expected to inspire individuals with PTSD to speak out and courageously process their trauma, translating it into narratives. The process of listening and writing these stories will serve as an alternative means of coping with the range of emotions brought about by PTSD.

2. Material and Methods

This research employs a method for crafting short narratives that has been influenced by the distinguished Montserratian poet, dramatist, novelist, and academic E.A. Markham. Mr. Markham is renowned for his refined, witty, and intellectually stimulating poetry, which deliberately challenges the conventional tropes and norms prevalent in English and Caribbean poetry [6]. This approach encompasses: (1) Preparing for the short story, (2) Revision, (3) The opening paragraph, (4) Revision 2 - paying attention to detail, (5) Shape: structure and form, (6) Revision 3, (7) Character, (8) Dialogue, (9) Literary conceits and extended metaphors, and (10) Advanced exercises.

3. Results and Discussion

The first step is the preparation, the creative process of crafting a short story begins with the preparation of relevant references related to the theme to be explored. These references may encompass short stories sharing a similar theme, journals discussing the effects of war and their correlation with PTSD, as well as video interviews with war veterans sharing their experiences on the battlefield. Beside that, the journal revealed the public stigma to veterans also read. The primary findings of research conducted by Correll et al (2021) regarding military status indicated that individuals viewed the person in military attire as more menacing, capable of instilling fear, and requiring isolation compared to the civilian [7]. This finding was included in the worldview conveyed by the short story.

After the data was gathered, the writing process decided on the title and characters. "Palung Jiwa," or "Abyss of the soul," was the title chosen, and it represented the range of emotions experienced by people with trauma disorder that come to the surface because of traumatic events. The general theme of the story is a war condition experienced by both civilian and the military personnel on duty. After deciding the theme, the character and characterization were designed and divided into major and minor character on the next step namely revision step as can be seen on Table 1.

[Table 1 here]

Identifying the story's context, point of view, and the people or backgrounds affecting the character's actions are additional factors to take into account in addition to character and characterization. At this point, the author develops inquiries and tactics concerning the relationship between the worldview that is being built within the tale and the story itself. By emphasizing the act of storytelling rather than the theory of story writing, the

reading and editing processes play a major role in raising the caliber of the work [8]. The writer's critical thinking is aided by this process, which results in work that is not only important and meaningful but also amusing.

In its implementation, the context or setting of the story, in terms of place and time, is intentionally left unspecified to direct the reader's focus towards the desired worldview and the development of each character. Meanwhile, the physical setting is depicted on the battlefield during an ongoing firefight. After determining the setting, the next step is to define the worldview, which eases the writer in weaving the sequence of events and the relationships between characters. The intended worldview is that war is an arena constructed by those who possess capital or power. The warring parties, like pawns on a chessboard, are orchestrated and controlled by "invisible hands." Both the soldiers and civilians involved are victims of capitalist greed. The effects are not limited to the physical realm, such as physical health and material possessions, but also extend to the mental well-being of those engaged in war. Both the duty-bound personnel, such as soldiers, and civilians have an equal chance of experiencing traumatic disorders. The worldview is conveyed implicitly through the plot and the development of both the main and secondary characters. The narrative is presented from a third-person perspective. The author presents oneself in the third person, as though they are aware of every detail in the narrative. The names of the characters and a few more characters are usually used by the author, for example:

This time, Dirga couldn't afford to fail again; these were his last bullets. He tried hard to focus on the target, but it always turned into the faces of the people he loved every time he was about to shoot. He aimed his target at an old man dressed in grayish-green camouflage. For a moment, he wondered how an old man ended up in such a brutal war. His focus began to waver. The longer he peered through the sniper scope at the old man's face, the more he realized that the old man was his father!

In the next stage, which is the third step, writing the opening paragraph, the source of the story can come from anywhere. It can be from personal experiences, whether they are pleasant, heart-wrenching, or amusing. The belief that our unique experiences will drive the creation of an engaging piece of writing that also makes readers feel like they've been in a similar situation. Markham (2007) further explains that anything around us, be it sound, scent, memories, or anything else, can be a source of inspiration in storytelling [8]. Additionally, starting the opening paragraph can also be implemented by reconstructing the end of someone else's story with a similar theme. The opening paragraph will contain characters, a perspective, and a setting that will form the initial

foundation for building the storyline. The storyline will frame the worldview within the larger narrative.

The opening paragraph of this story immediately portrays the chaotic atmosphere on the battlefield. Its purpose is to make the readers feel the tense wartime atmosphere right from the very first reading.

Here’s the opening sentence from the first paragraph:

“Dirga! Aim at 11 o’clock, don’t miss this time!” Ben shouted while swiftly loading his sniper rifle with bullets.

TABLE 1: the character and characterization.

Characters' Name	Types of character	Physical Appearance	Personality	Occupation
Dirga	Major character	A 25-year-old man with Brown-haired, fair-skinned, tall and slender, with a melancholic gaze and a countenance that appears gloomy.	Amiable, a devoted family man, serene, and not very talkative.	Military personnel
Ben	Secondary character	A 25-year-old man with Blonde-haired, fair-skinned, muscular and tall, with a piercing and spirited gaze.	Outgoing, chatty, somewhat careless, determined, and prone to occasional outbursts.	Military personnel
Dirga's Father	Supporting Character	An elderly man in his seventies, of slender build, bearing a melancholic countenance with wrinkles and creases on his skin.	A composed man, fond of smiling, and diligently works to provide for his family.	Farmer
Dirga's Mother	Supporting Character	A 65-year-old woman with white hair and a warm gaze.	Not described in the story as her role is merely as a supporting character.	Housewife
Dirga's Sister	Supporting Character	A 17-year-old teenage girl, beautiful, fair-skinned, with a sweet smile.	Not described in the story as her role is merely as a supporting character.	Student
The Unnamed Doctor	Supporting Character	A 35-year-old young doctor, well-groomed, with a smug smile.	Intelligent, quick-witted, yet cunning.	Doctor

The opening sentence above serves as a gateway that guides the reader toward the intended worldview. Subsequently, in the fourth stage, the second revision is carried out. According to Markham, authors sometimes generalize a particular event within the narrative, necessitating specification. The reader is an individual external to the work who cannot access the world constructed within the narrative. Therefore, detailed elements that construct specific scenes are required to comprehend the context and facilitate the reader’s imaginative process. In this second revision process, the story is further developed by providing details of the PTSD symptoms exhibited by the main

character, which include emotional reactions such as anxiety disorders and difficulties in concentration. These emotional reactions are expressed by creating internal conflicts in which the main character is confronted with a dilemma. The main character, Dirga, is depicted as preparing to take a shot at an opponent who, in his perception, resembles an older man strongly resembling his father. This conflict intensifies as his friend Ben urges him to take the shot immediately, while Dirga hesitates due to his uncertainty regarding his perception, ultimately claiming it to be a delusion.

The fifth stage involves paying attention to the structure and form of the story, which closely relates to the interactions between characters and how they react to the conflicts they face. Exploring other characters who influence the main character's decision-making and delving into the backstory behind the main character's decision-making process to reach a resolution will help expand the social complexity within the story's world. This complexity will aid the writer in describing the emotions of the main character brought about by the conflicts that unfold. This stage is closely related to the details in the fourth stage, where Dirga's reactions to the conflict he experiences are further explored by delving into the characterization of Ben and how it influences Dirga's final decisions. Ben's portrayal as stubborn, emotional, and short-sighted becomes one of the factors that exacerbates the situation and drives the main character, Dirga, to make the wrong decision. In the end, Dirga takes the fateful shot at the old man, only to discover that the man was, in fact, his own father.

In the sixth stage of the process, Markham recommends using literary evaluation guidelines from the Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts (CEMA), established in post-World War II London to promote artistic appreciation in England. These guidelines encompass linguistic vitality, ensuring the language and word choice effectively convey events, such as trauma, to readers without resorting to clichés. They also involve an innovative narrative structure that goes beyond reader expectations, making the story more engaging. Additionally, it emphasizes the importance of maintaining emotional truthfulness in characters, allowing them to express their thoughts and reactions to conflicts independently, free from the sentimental biases of the writer. In its implementation, character development focuses on portraying the character's experience of PTSD, completely detached from the writer's own experiences. Characterizing a character experiencing PTSD is researched through scientific journals and official websites dedicated to PTSD and the treatment of patients with PTSD. Additionally, the reader is initially led to sympathize with Dirga and blame Ben for exacerbating the situation. However, towards the end of the story, Ben is revealed as a

character who is, in fact, a victim and also experiences symptoms of PTSD. The story's conclusion is enlivened by a plot twist, making it more engaging for the reader.

Subsequently, this character development is further implemented in the next stages. The seventh stage involves character development and making adjustments to the chosen diction, as well as using appropriate figurative language to provide detailed characterization of the characters within the story. The eighth stage, which is a part of characterization, entails determining the dialogue between characters as well as the narrative elements in the story to create an atmosphere that can be felt by the reader. Meanwhile, in the ninth stage, Markham emphasizes that the writing process requires discipline but should not neglect its enjoyable aspect. It's not necessary to write up to 70,000 words because what matters most is how the writing is effective both experimentally for the writer and engaging for the reader [8]. In this point, Ben is portrayed as someone lacking compassion and humanity. Here is an example of the characterization of Ben through the narrative he conveys to Dirga when he hesitates to take the shot, *"What are you doing, you fool?! Quickly, aim at the old man and fire your shot. This is the real world, you can't keep daydreaming about home. We're in the midst of a battlefield now; **you kill to survive unless you want to end up as food for vultures in this desolate land!**"* his comrade yelled. The bolded sentence employs figurative language in the form of a metaphor, likening their situation on the battlefield to a life-and-death struggle where if they don't kill, they will be killed. To further reinforce Ben's heartless characterization, in the falling action of the narrative, it is described how Ben shows no mercy to Dirga, who has just taken the life of his own father. Here's an example of a quote that illustrates this characterization:

*"I... I'm sorry, buddy... that old man was indeed your father. He was captured and forced by the enemy to fight because they were short of soldiers. I didn't know beforehand that he was your father; the conditions of war blurred my senses completely. I thought they were all our enemies! **But there's one thing you should be grateful for, and that's our victory, my friend! We succeeded, and your father would be happy if he were still alive...**"*

In the tenth point, Markham (2007) recommends reading and analyzing classic stories, paying attention to whether there are supporting characters given specific roles in scenes and influential in the story's plot. Subsequently, in the tenth stage, a revision of the work is carried out, taking into account the components outlined in the preceding points. Finally, maintaining the narrative's pace and tone is consistently upheld to keep the audience engaged. If it is realized that the writing has become overly fixated on a particular conflict, during the revision stage, the story can be modified to reintroduce

dynamism and maintain reader engagement. In this stage, supporting characters are presented with minimal narrative but play significant roles in the story's resolution and its connection to the intended worldview. These supporting characters include the father and the doctor. The father character represents a civilian who not only becomes a victim of war but is also exploited by the enemy as a shield. In the story, the father is forced to become an enemy soldier under the threat that his family's safety will be jeopardized if he refuses, even though in the end, the enemy still eliminates his wife and daughter. The presence of the father character significantly influences the plot, serving as the trigger for Dirga's internal conflict and his conflict with his friend Ben. Additionally, the character of the doctor represents an authority figure who should uphold humanity but instead exploits the situation for maximum profit. In this part, the doctor agrees to Dirga's request for euthanasia and the sale of Dirga's organs for his own benefit. The doctor, who should prevent Dirga's actions, instead takes advantage of the situation, revealing how the conditions of war have eroded human principles and values. The doctor's presence strengthens the worldview that the story conveys, where the war is controlled by those in power who are outside the actual battlefield. Their presence may be invisible but can manipulate the situations of those involved, from civilians and soldiers to the authorities.

The final resolution of the story sees Dirga ending his life through euthanasia, and Ben also choosing to end his life out of guilt towards his friend. The part about Ben's end is not explicitly described but is left open-ended for readers to interpret. The story closes with Dirga reuniting with his family and his friend Ben in a place that is depicted as heaven-like. It's at this point that readers can infer on their own that Ben himself is a victim and also experiences PTSD. Here is the open-ended narration:

"How could you..." before he could finish his question, Ben replied...

"The words you said at the hospital brought me here, Dirga," Ben said, smiling broadly.

The excerpt above describes the situation after Dirga's passing, where he is surprised to see not only his family but also Ben. The bolded quote signifies the end of the story, suggesting that Ben eventually chooses to end his own life due to the remorse of his heartless words and actions towards Dirga, who is burdened by the unintended act of killing his own father. While this story may not have a happy ending, its message underscores the importance of people with PTSD symptoms needing support from their surroundings and medical assistance. Sometimes, they may appear strong, but they are fragile and broken on the inside, as represented by the character of Ben. Furthermore, the story provides an insight into the experiences of PTSD-afflicted individuals during

and after wars. It also conveys the message that war will not solve problems and will always result in many sacrifices.

4. Conclusion

The creative writing method employed by Markham in crafting a story that encompasses PTSD experiences can effectively capture the emotional reactions of individuals with PTSD, particularly in the context of wartime conditions. Additionally, the underlying worldview of the narrative is closely linked to the state of war, where all parties involved become victims. This condition is highly relevant to the real-world scenario where those in power may profit, while their puppets, such as soldiers, also fall victim to PTSD. Furthermore, civilians suffer both physically and materially. These aspects are undoubtedly influenced by the political interests of those in power. This short story serves as a voice for those experiencing PTSD symptoms without access to medical treatment or a support system from their environment. This short story functions as the initial product or foundation for the creation of mixed-media art, such as audiovisual works, which will be employed for trauma healing and amplifying the experiences of those with PTSD symptoms and the situations that trigger them. This research is still in its early stages, and in the subsequent phase, after the audiovisual work has been completed, it will be tested on patients with PTSD.

Acknowledgment

We extend our gratitude to the Faculty of Languages and Arts at Universitas Negeri Jakarta for providing the funding for this research, and to all those whose contributions we may not mention individually.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Funding

This research receives no external funding.

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