



FRAGMENTS OF THE PAST: MEMORY AND THE FORMATION OF IDENTITY IN LITERATURE

Jumanova Gozzal Joldasbaevna

**The student of the Nukus Branch of the Uzbekistan
State Institute of Arts and Culture**

ARTICLE INFO

Received: 07th May 2026

Accepted: 09th May 2026

Online: 11th May 2026

KEYWORDS

This essay argues that memory in modern literature is not merely a tool for recalling the past but a dynamic force that shapes identity, distorts reality, and challenges objective truth

ABSTRACT

Memory plays a central role in shaping both individual identity and narrative structure in modern literature. Unlike earlier literary traditions that often emphasized linear storytelling, modern works frequently explore fragmented, unreliable, and subjective memories. These representations reflect a growing awareness that identity is not fixed but continuously constructed through personal experience and recollection.

Introduction

Memory plays a central role in shaping both individual identity and narrative structure in modern literature. Unlike earlier literary traditions that often emphasized linear storytelling, modern works frequently explore fragmented, unreliable, and subjective memories. These representations reflect a growing awareness that identity is not fixed but continuously constructed through personal experience and recollection.

This essay argues that memory in modern literature is not merely a tool for recalling the past but a dynamic force that shapes identity, distorts reality, and challenges objective truth. Through the exploration of narrative techniques and character development, modern authors reveal how memory influences perception and self-understanding.

Memory as a Constructive Force

In modern literature, memory is often portrayed as selective and reconstructive rather than accurate. Individuals do not simply remember events as they happened; instead, they reinterpret them based on current emotions and perspectives. This process highlights the instability of identity, as personal history becomes subject to change.

Philosopher Paul Ricoeur emphasizes that memory and identity are deeply interconnected, suggesting that individuals create a sense of self through narrative reconstruction (Ricoeur, 2004). In literature, this idea is reflected in characters who constantly reshape their past in order to understand their present. As a result, memory becomes an active force rather than a passive record. It allows characters to make sense of their experiences, but it can also lead to distortion and self-deception.

Fragmentation and Narrative Structure

Modern literary texts often mirror the fragmented nature of memory through non-linear storytelling. Flashbacks, shifts in perspective, and disrupted timelines reflect how memory operates in the human mind. This technique challenges traditional narrative forms and forces readers to engage more actively with the text.

According to Henri Bergson, memory is not stored in a fixed sequence but exists as a fluid and continuous process (Bergson, 1911). Many modern writers adopt this concept by presenting narratives that move freely between past and present. This fragmentation not only reflects psychological reality but also emphasizes uncertainty. Readers are often left questioning what is real and what is imagined, reinforcing the idea that memory cannot always be trusted.

Memory, Trauma, and Identity

Another important aspect of memory in modern literature is its connection to trauma. Painful experiences often disrupt normal memory processes, leading to gaps, repetition, or distorted recollections. These disruptions significantly affect a character's sense of identity, as individuals may struggle to integrate traumatic events into a coherent personal narrative. Instead of forming a stable understanding of themselves, they remain trapped between past and present.

Literary critic Cathy Caruth argues that trauma is not fully experienced in the moment but returns later through fragmented and intrusive memories (Caruth, 1996). This delayed response means that characters often relive traumatic events without fully understanding them, which intensifies their emotional and psychological instability. In many modern texts, this is represented through recurring flashbacks, disjointed narration, or sudden shifts in perspective.

Moreover, trauma can silence memory as much as it can distort it. Some characters are unable to articulate their experiences, leading to omissions or gaps in the narrative. This absence of memory is just as meaningful as its presence, as it reflects the limits of language in expressing extreme emotional pain. As a result, identity becomes fragmented, shaped not only by what is remembered but also by what cannot be remembered or expressed.

Through such representations, authors highlight the difficulty of achieving a coherent sense of self. Memory, instead of providing clarity, becomes a source of confusion, repetition, and emotional conflict. Ultimately, trauma reveals that identity is not a stable or unified construct but a fragile and evolving process deeply influenced by past experiences.

The Limits of Objective Truth

Modern literature frequently questions whether objective truth can exist when memory is subjective. Different characters may recall the same event in different ways, suggesting that truth is shaped by individual perception.

This idea reflects broader philosophical debates about the nature of reality. If memory is unreliable, then personal narratives cannot be fully trusted. As Ricoeur suggests, storytelling is always influenced by interpretation, meaning that truth is never entirely fixed (Ricoeur, 2004). In literature, this uncertainty creates complexity and depth. Readers must navigate multiple perspectives and decide for themselves what to believe, making the reading experience more interactive and intellectually engaging.

Conclusion

Memory in modern literature is far more than a narrative device; it is a central force that shapes identity, structure, and meaning. As this essay has shown, memory functions as a constructive, fragmented, and often unreliable process that influences both characters and storytelling. Through the insights of Ricoeur, Bergson, and Caruth, it becomes clear that modern literature uses memory to explore the complexities of human experience. By challenging the idea of objective truth and emphasizing the fluid nature of identity, these works reflect a deeper understanding of how individuals perceive themselves and the world around them. Ultimately, the portrayal of memory in modern literature reveals that identity is not a stable entity but an ongoing process shaped by interpretation, experience, and time..

References:

Bergson, H. (1911). Matter and memory. George Allen & Unwin.

Caruth, C. (1996). Unclaimed experience: Trauma, narrative, and history. Johns Hopkins University Press.

Ricoeur, P. (2004). Memory, history, forgetting. University of Chicago Press.

