

INTERSECTING FORMS OF VIOLENCE AND TRAUMA IN KATHLEEN GLASGOW'S *GIRL IN PIECES*: A LITERARY-SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF FEMALE MENTAL HEALTH

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Abstract

This article analyzes the complex representation of violence and trauma in Kathleen Glasgow's *Girl in Pieces*, focusing on the protagonist Charlie Davis. Through Johan Galtung's violence typology—direct, structural, and symbolic—the study reveals how Glasgow constructs an emotionally resonant narrative of trauma that is deeply rooted in systemic and interpersonal failures. Charlie's self-harm, institutional neglect, and internalized shame illustrate how violence is experienced not only through physical abuse but also through social and cultural mechanisms. The research applies a sociological approach to literature and trauma theory, situating the novel within the broader context of Young Adult (YA) fiction that foregrounds psychological suffering. This approach reveals that *Girl in Pieces* is not merely a coming-of-age story but a social critique of how institutions respond to marginalized female trauma. Using qualitative content analysis, the article contributes to discussions in trauma-informed literary pedagogy and young adult mental health literature. Findings suggest that literature, when interpreted through a sociological and trauma-sensitive lens, holds critical potential for reshaping understandings of mental illness, recovery, and gendered pain. The study supports the integration of trauma narratives into educational spaces as a means to foster empathy, awareness, and policy reform around youth mental health.

Keywords: *female trauma; sociological criticism; symbolic violence; trauma fiction; trauma theory; young adult literature*

1. Introduction

In recent years, Young Adult (YA) literature has become an important platform for exploring themes of adolescent mental health, trauma, and identity. Contemporary YA fiction has moved beyond traditional coming-of-age narratives to address urgent psychological and social realities, including depression, self-harm, abuse, substance use, and systemic neglect. This shift reflects a growing demand for emotionally authentic and psychologically nuanced storytelling that speaks to the lived experiences of young

readers. As noted by Salt-Raper (2023) and Boyd and Darragh (2019), this evolution in YA literature corresponds with broader cultural movements advocating for greater visibility, empathy, and destigmatization of mental illness and emotional vulnerability in youth populations.

Among the most impactful contributions to this emerging field is Kathleen Glasgow's 2016 novel, *Girl in Pieces*. The narrative follows Charlie Davis, a seventeen-year-old girl recovering from a suicide attempt and navigating the aftermath of trauma that includes abandonment, physical and sexual abuse, poverty, and homelessness. Glasgow's portrayal of Charlie's interior life is rendered in fragmented, poetic prose that mirrors the disorientation and chaos of trauma itself. The novel does not offer easy resolutions or romanticized healing arcs; instead, it presents a complex and often painful depiction of survival in a society where support systems frequently fail to protect the most vulnerable. *Girl in Pieces* therefore functions as both an intimate account of personal trauma and a broader social commentary on the institutional and cultural mechanisms that perpetuate youth suffering.

This article analyzes the experiences of Charlie Davis using Johan Galtung's (1990) typology of violence, which distinguishes between direct, structural, and symbolic forms of harm. Galtung's model provides a valuable framework for examining how violence operates not only through overt acts such as physical abuse, but also through systemic exclusion and cultural silencing. By applying this tripartite model, the study illustrates how Charlie's pain is sustained by a convergence of interpersonal brutality, institutional failure, and ideological domination. Her self-harm and silence are not solely products of individual pathology but are informed by deeper societal dynamics that condition her to internalize blame and suppress her voice.

In addition to Galtung's framework, the article draws on trauma theory, particularly the work of Judith Herman (2015) and Bessel van der Kolk (2014). Herman's theory of complex trauma emphasizes the cumulative effects of chronic interpersonal violence, particularly when compounded by betrayal and abandonment. Van der Kolk's work on the somatic dimensions of trauma—how the body “remembers” and reenacts unprocessed pain—provides crucial insight into Charlie's self-injury, emotional dissociation, and fragmented narrative voice. These theoretical approaches help elucidate how trauma in *Girl in Pieces* is both embodied and structurally embedded, highlighting the interplay between psychological damage and social injustice.

By examining *Girl in Pieces* through the lens of sociological and trauma-centered criticism, this article aims to contribute to a growing body of scholarship that recognizes YA literature as a critical site for understanding how young people experience and survive violence. It argues that literary texts such as Glasgow's do more than reflect trauma; they expose the cultural and institutional systems that normalize it. In doing so, they call for trauma-informed readings that foreground the interconnectedness of emotional, social, and ideological harm.

2. Literature Review

Young Adult (YA) literature has undergone a notable transformation over the past two decades, becoming increasingly engaged with the psychological, social, and cultural realities faced by adolescents. In particular, recent works have embraced themes of trauma, mental illness, identity crises, and systemic inequality, acknowledging that contemporary youth often confront deeply embedded emotional and institutional

challenges. Scholars such as Salt-Raper (2023), Boyd and Darragh (2019), and Malo-Juvera and Greathouse (2020) have emphasized that trauma narratives in YA fiction do more than depict suffering—they enable readers to identify with characters, process their own experiences, and challenge the stigmatization of mental health issues. These scholars argue that literature can function as both a mirror and a window: a mirror in which readers see their internal struggles reflected, and a window through which they gain insight into others' pain.

At the theoretical core of this study is Johan Galtung's theory of violence (1990, 2013), which proposes that violence occurs not only in its visible, physical form (direct violence), but also through systemic inequalities (structural violence) and cultural mechanisms that legitimize or conceal harm (symbolic violence). Galtung's model has proven especially useful in analyzing texts that deal with marginalized identities, as it enables a layered reading of harm that goes beyond individual perpetrators to consider institutional and ideological contributors. In the context of YA literature, this framework reveals how trauma is not solely a personal affliction but a consequence of broader social failures.

In studies directly related to *Girl in Pieces*, several scholars have highlighted the novel's thematic focus on trauma, abandonment, and self-destruction. Purwarno and Surayya (2022), Sitepu (2020), and Bounefla (2024) analyze the text through psychological and feminist lenses, identifying recurring motifs of cutting, homelessness, and relational betrayal as central to Charlie Davis's journey. These works underscore how Glasgow's protagonist is shaped by repeated exposure to direct trauma—often inflicted by family, romantic partners, and caregivers. Imraini and Harianto (2021) extend this analysis by exploring how gender intensifies Charlie's marginalization, arguing that her emotional expression and vulnerability are penalized in ways that reflect patriarchal norms. The intersection of trauma with gendered expectations illustrates how certain identities are more likely to be rendered voiceless, misdiagnosed, or dismissed.

Trauma theorists such as Judith Herman (2015) and Bessel van der Kolk (2014) provide critical insights into the psychological and embodied impact of long-term trauma, particularly among young people. Herman's concept of complex trauma—sustained and repeated exposure to interpersonal violence—aligns with Charlie's experience of chronic abandonment, instability, and emotional suppression. Van der Kolk's work further explains how unprocessed trauma can be stored in the body and expressed through physical symptoms, dissociation, or self-harming behaviors. This understanding is particularly useful for interpreting Charlie's non-verbal coping mechanisms, including her cutting and emotional withdrawal.

Additionally, Pierre Bourdieu's (2001) theory of symbolic violence offers a framework for understanding how Charlie internalizes her suffering. Symbolic violence refers to the subtle, often invisible, ways in which power is exercised through cultural norms and language, leading individuals to accept their own subjugation as natural or deserved. In *Girl in Pieces*, Charlie often blames herself for the abuse she endures, a response that can be read as a direct consequence of internalized ideological messages about worth, silence, and survival. Bourdieu's theory thus helps explain the deeper, unseen forms of violence that shape Charlie's psychological reality and sense of identity.

More broadly, the field of literary trauma studies has offered significant contributions to understanding how texts represent and interrogate experiences of pain.

Scholars such as Piątek (2014), Armie and Membrive (2023), and Chrisman (2024) contend that trauma narratives in literature serve not only as artistic renderings of psychological states but also as interventions into social discourse. These scholars emphasize that trauma literature dismantles dominant narratives that suppress or simplify emotional complexity, especially in female characters. By highlighting fragmented narrative structures, disrupted chronologies, and stylistic silences, these works illustrate how trauma disrupts traditional storytelling and requires new forms of literary expression.

Taken together, these theoretical and critical perspectives provide a robust foundation for examining *Girl in Pieces* as both a psychological and sociopolitical narrative. The novel does not isolate trauma as an individual affliction; rather, it situates it within a matrix of interpersonal betrayal, institutional failure, and cultural silencing. This literature review establishes the interdisciplinary grounding necessary to analyze the multiple dimensions of violence in the novel, and to explore how YA fiction can serve as a powerful site for trauma-informed critique.

3. Research Method

This study adopts a qualitative content analysis approach to investigate the representation of violence and trauma in Kathleen Glasgow's *Girl in Pieces* (2016), with particular attention to the experiences of the protagonist, Charlie Davis. The aim is to identify, categorize, and interpret how various forms of violence—direct, structural, and symbolic—manifest within the narrative and contribute to the construction of adolescent trauma. This methodology allows for a nuanced reading of literary texts where both form and content are essential to meaning-making (Krippendorff, 2013; Schreier, 2012).

3.1 Theoretical Framework and Analytical Tools

The analysis is grounded in Johan Galtung's (1990) Triangle of Violence, which conceptualizes violence as operating across three interrelated dimensions:

- Direct violence (physical or behavioral harm),
- Structural violence (institutional or systemic harm),
- Symbolic violence (ideological or internalized harm).

This model was selected due to its versatility in analyzing both visible and invisible forms of violence in sociocultural narratives. It enables an intersectional reading of Charlie's experiences, allowing the study to trace how institutional and cultural forces compound individual trauma.

Complementing Galtung's framework, the study employs insights from trauma theory (Herman, 2015; van der Kolk, 2014), which focus on the psychological, embodied, and narratological consequences of trauma. These perspectives inform the interpretation of Charlie's self-harm, fragmented identity, and struggles with memory and voice.

Lastly, the study draws upon sociological literary criticism, particularly Bourdieu's (2001) theory of symbolic power, to understand how cultural norms and language shape the internalization of violence and marginality. Together, these theories form an interdisciplinary lens that situates *Girl in Pieces* as both a psychological and sociopolitical text.

3.2 Data Source and Sampling

The primary data source for this research is the full text of *Girl in Pieces* (Delacorte Press, 2016). The novel was read multiple times to ensure familiarity with its language, character arcs, thematic patterns, and narrative structure.

Purposive sampling was used to select key textual elements, including:

- Narrative events (e.g., hospitalization, homelessness, abuse scenes),
- Character interactions (e.g., Charlie and her mother, Riley, Blue, Casper),
- Interior monologues and stream-of-consciousness passages (e.g., moments of self-harm, reflection, or silence).

These selections were chosen for their thematic density and potential to illuminate how violence operates on multiple levels.

3.3 Coding and Analysis Procedure

The analysis proceeded through several stages:

1. Initial Reading and Memoing

During the first two readings, analytical memos were generated to document initial impressions, recurring motifs (e.g., silence, scars, blood, isolation), and thematic triggers related to trauma and violence.

2. Category Formation

A coding framework was developed using a hybrid approach—both deductive categories based on Galtung’s typology (e.g., direct, structural, symbolic violence), and inductive subcategories derived from the text (e.g., "shelter compliance," "shame and silence," "scars as narrative").

3. Textual Coding

Each selected excerpt was coded and annotated within these categories. For instance, the line “I came here with no clothes... blood seeping through the flowered sheet” was coded as both direct violence (abandonment) and symbolic violence (shaming through exposure and helplessness).

4. Thematic Synthesis

Coded segments were grouped to form larger thematic constructs that illustrate how violence converges. Attention was paid to the cumulative effect of trauma, how various systems (family, education, mental health care) reinforce harm, and how internalized narratives of worthlessness emerge.

5. Theory Integration

In the final phase, findings were mapped back onto the theoretical frameworks. Trauma theory provided interpretive depth for Charlie’s emotional fragmentation and coping mechanisms, while sociological criticism contextualized the systemic dimensions of her suffering.

4. Discussion

4.1 Direct Violence

Direct violence in Kathleen Glasgow’s *Girl in Pieces* functions as both a literal and symbolic force that shapes the protagonist’s psyche, identity, and relationships.

Charlie Davis's world is punctuated by repeated experiences of physical assault, emotional rejection, verbal degradation, and ultimately, self-directed violence. While some aggressors are external—such as her abusive mother and exploitative partners—Charlie's self-harm emerges as an inward manifestation of these unresolved external traumas. The violence is relentless, cyclical, and immersive, conveyed through raw, visceral language that reflects the embodied experience of trauma.

The novel opens with a visceral image of abandonment:

“Like an orphan, I came here with no clothes. Like an orphan, I was wrapped in a bedsheet and left on the lawn of Regions Hospital in the freezing sleet and snow, blood seeping through the flowered sheet.”
(*Glasgow*, 2016, p. 8)

This chilling scene encapsulates the convergence of physical vulnerability and emotional abandonment. The floral sheet, an object typically associated with comfort or domesticity, becomes soaked with Charlie's blood—a potent symbol of how spaces and objects meant to provide safety have instead become complicit in harm. The repetition of “like an orphan” emphasizes her severed familial ties and heightens the image of a child rejected not only by her caregivers but by the very institutions tasked with her protection.

This act of abandonment is an instance of direct neglect, often overlooked in broader discussions of violence. It represents an ultimate disavowal of responsibility by her family and society. It is important to note that the neglect is not passive; it is enacted and intentional—placing a wounded girl in freezing weather without medical assistance is a clear act of direct harm, regardless of its non-physical expression in that moment.

As the narrative unfolds, Charlie's acts of self-harm emerge as an extension of this early external violence. Her body becomes a battleground on which trauma is re-enacted and re-inscribed:

“You could drink, slice, do meth, snort coke, burn, cut, stab, slash, rip out your eyelashes, or fuck till you bleed, and it's all the same thing: self-harm.” (*Glasgow*, 2016, p. 33)

The deliberate use of anaphora (“you could...”) and the extensive list of damaging behaviors normalize and echo the chaotic, compulsive nature of trauma responses. Glasgow's prose is relentless here—breathless, rhythmic, overwhelming—mirroring Charlie's internal state. Each verb conveys immediacy and danger, and their cumulative effect collapses the boundaries between external action and internal intention, showing how trauma can be compulsively re-enacted through the body.

This aligns closely with Bessel van der Kolk's (2014) concept of *the body keeping the score*, whereby trauma that is not processed cognitively is stored somatically. Charlie's body becomes a text written in scars, burns, and bruises—a silent archive of violence that cannot be articulated verbally. Her compulsion to self-injure is not irrational but rather a method of regulation—a perverse attempt at equilibrium.

She articulates this need explicitly:

“My body is on fire all the time, burning me away day and night. I have to cut the black heat out... When I clean myself... I feel better. Cooler inside and calm.” (*Glasgow*, 2016, p. 29)

This metaphor of *fire* suggests intense, unrelenting emotional pain that cannot be extinguished through conventional means. The phrase “cut the black heat out” is particularly evocative—it presents cutting not as violence but as surgery, a desperate, self-administered form of emotional triage. “Cleaning” becomes a ritual of temporary relief, akin to purification—a need to rid herself of psychological toxins.

These acts are rooted in deeper feelings of worthlessness, guilt, and shame, often conditioned by long-standing abuse. Charlie is not simply acting out; she is reenacting what has been done to her. Self-harm becomes a way to assert control over a life marked by powerlessness, where even basic safety has been denied. It is a form of communication when all other avenues have failed, and a method of survival when survival seems undeserved.

Glasgow does not romanticize self-harm but demystifies it. Through unflinching depictions and unsanitized language, she makes readers confront its origins—not as a choice or flaw—but as the culmination of compounding violence. Direct violence, then, is not merely a narrative theme in *Girl in Pieces*, but a foundational condition from which all else—emotional numbness, institutional abandonment, symbolic silencing—emerges.

Overall, direct violence in *Girl in Pieces*: a. Begins externally through parental abuse, neglect, and exploitation, b. Continues internally through cutting, substance abuse, and emotional withdrawal, c. Functions symbolically through language and imagery of fire, blood, and erasure, and d. ultimately reflects a broader societal failure to interrupt cycles of trauma.

This unrelenting portrayal invites not pity but radical empathy—a call for readers to recognize trauma not as a flaw in character, but as a logical consequence of enduring violence and the absence of safety.

4.2 Structural Violence

Structural violence, as defined by Johan Galtung (1990), refers to harm embedded within the very architecture of social systems—where institutions such as healthcare, education, shelter services, and family mechanisms fail to meet human needs or actively marginalize individuals. In *Girl in Pieces*, Charlie Davis’s suffering is not merely the result of interpersonal cruelty but also of systemic dysfunction that prevents her from accessing safety, healing, and dignity. Structural violence in her life is invisible yet omnipresent, revealed through seemingly mundane interactions with schools, hospitals, and shelters.

One scene that powerfully illustrates this occurs when Charlie reflects on her place in the school ecosystem:

“You can spot the girls who will get by because they’re tough, or athletic. And then there’s me... that disheveled kid... who gets shoved in the hallway and called names, because that’s her slot.” (Glasgow, 2016, p. 66)

The term “slot” is damning—it implies a pre-assigned social role, rigid and limiting. Charlie is not just bullied; she is institutionally cast as the expendable, silent sufferer. Schools, ostensibly designed for support and development, become breeding grounds for social exclusion, where certain students—especially those with trauma, poverty, or visible vulnerability—are shunted into roles that reflect broader societal hierarchies.

This echoes Pierre Bourdieu's (2001) theory of symbolic power, in which institutions use implicit rules and classifications to reinforce social divisions. Charlie is aware of her "disheveled" appearance and the labels attached to her, and rather than receiving intervention or empathy, she is relegated to structural invisibility.

The novel also demonstrates how institutional "care" often comes at the cost of personal agency, especially in shelters and transitional homes. Consider this reflection:

"I'm inside and warm and I can do this if it means I get to stay. That's what matters right now: following the rules so I can stay inside."

(Glasgow, 2016, p. 28)

This line speaks volumes about conditional survival. Basic human needs—shelter, warmth, protection—are made contingent upon docility and compliance. Charlie's survival is not a right but a privilege she must earn through silence and conformity. The rules are not designed with trauma sensitivity; instead, they are rigid, paternalistic, and often insensitive to the psychological volatility of trauma survivors.

Shelters in the novel become disciplinary spaces rather than healing ones. These spaces surveil and regulate behavior, reinforcing the notion that victims must "perform" recovery in acceptable ways to be deemed worthy of care. This reinforces a cycle of dependence and voicelessness, where Charlie's need for safety silences her self-expression.

Further highlighting the erosion of relational trust is a moment from group therapy, when Casper, the counselor, asks:

"Who keeps your secrets?"

This deceptively simple question lays bare a foundational absence in Charlie's world. She has no confidant, no consistent source of emotional safety. Her secrets—representing her trauma, fears, and truth—are unshared and unprocessed. This failure is not just personal; it is structural, rooted in a society that stigmatizes vulnerability and fails to create environments for disclosure and healing.

In trauma-informed frameworks, the absence of "a safe other" is considered one of the most damaging aspects of chronic trauma (Herman, 2015). Charlie's isolation is both an effect and a cause of structural violence. Her family, school, state, and care institutions all abdicate their responsibility, forcing her into a precarious emotional survival mode. As a result, she internalizes mistrust and shame, which compounds her self-destructive behavior.

Importantly, *Girl in Pieces* does not portray institutions as neutral or merely ineffective—it reveals them as active participants in Charlie's continued suffering. Even when she seeks help, the bureaucratic or impersonal nature of these systems alienates her further. Their "help" often resembles containment more than compassion.

Structural violence in *Girl in Pieces* does not occur in isolation. Rather, it: Reinforces direct violence by failing to intervene when abuse is visible, Precedes symbolic violence by embedding shame in the very structures that claim to offer support, and Perpetuates silence by making expression risky and costly.

It is through these systems—education, shelters, and health care—that Charlie learns her suffering must be quiet, compliant, and hidden to earn the bare minimum of subsistence.

4.3 Symbolic Violence

Symbolic violence, as theorized by Pierre Bourdieu (2001), refers to the invisible, internalized harm caused by dominant ideologies—where people come to accept and normalize their own subordination. Unlike direct or structural violence, symbolic violence does not require a visible aggressor; it operates through language, norms, silence, and the internalization of social hierarchies. In *Girl in Pieces*, symbolic violence saturates Charlie Davis's self-perception, shaping not only how she views herself but also what she believes she deserves.

A pivotal expression of this internalized narrative occurs when Charlie reflects:
“Girls like me don't get better. We don't get the best friend, the boy, the new life. We get pills and jail.” (Glasgow, 2016, p. 248)

This statement exposes a deeply rooted cultural script about broken girls—those who self-harm, live in poverty, or struggle with trauma. Charlie's internal monologue shows that she has absorbed the belief that healing and happiness are for “others.” Her identity is confined to socially ascribed roles: *the broken one, the burden, the liability*. This is symbolic violence in its purest form—when oppression is no longer enforced externally because it is policed from within.

Further, Glasgow draws attention to the gendered double standards embedded in trauma discourse:

“There are stories of boys who break, but people forgive them. There are stories of girls who break, but people hate them.” (Glasgow, 2016, p. 259)

This sharp contrast illustrates how cultural sympathy is unequally distributed. Boys are seen as tragic, misunderstood; girls are treated as problems to be silenced or erased. Glasgow here indicts the misogynistic framing of trauma, where feminine pain is often pathologized or punished rather than healed. The result is that girls like Charlie are not just suffering—they are stigmatized for suffering.

Charlie's response to this is not rebellion but silence—a trauma-adapted strategy of invisibility:

“When you're a girl like me, silence is safer. Words are dangerous—they get you noticed. And when you get noticed, you get hurt.” (Glasgow, 2016, p. 203)

Symbolic violence teaches Charlie that *visibility is vulnerability*. Her silence is not a lack of voice but a conditioned behavior: she has learned that speaking results in disbelief, punishment, or abandonment. Judith Herman (2015) notes that one of the first casualties of trauma is voice—survivors lose the sense that their story matters, or that anyone will listen.

The novel's style also embodies symbolic fragmentation. Glasgow's fragmented syntax, poetic prose, and white space mirror the broken narrative of trauma. These stylistic choices are not merely aesthetic—they are structural representations of Charlie's fractured consciousness. Language itself becomes uncertain, unstable—reflecting not only trauma's disruption of linear memory (van der Kolk, 2014) but also a cultural system that denies coherence to female pain.

Furthermore, the shaming of female emotion is an insidious force of symbolic violence. Charlie frequently censors her own emotional responses, fearing they will be

interpreted as weakness, instability, or manipulation. Even when she begins to heal, her progress is clouded by guilt over taking up space, over needing care. These beliefs are not irrational—they are learned behaviors, acquired through years of cultural messaging and social rejection. The symbolic tells her she is unworthy before she ever opens her mouth.

4.4 Interrelation of Violence Types

While Johan Galtung's model of violence distinguishes between direct, structural, and symbolic forms, *Girl in Pieces* demonstrates that these categories are deeply entangled, functioning less like isolated modes of harm and more like interlocking systems. For Charlie Davis, these layers of violence form a self-reinforcing matrix, where each form not only causes pain but legitimizes and sustains the others. Her trauma cannot be understood through any single lens—only through the convergence of personal, institutional, and ideological injury.

Charlie's self-harm (direct violence) cannot be reduced to a symptom of mental illness or individual dysfunction. Instead, it emerges from the failure of external systems (structural violence) to offer protection, stability, or care, and from her internalized belief that she is unworthy of healing (symbolic violence).

This entanglement is exemplified when Charlie reflects on her abandonment and lack of connection: "*Who keeps your secrets?*" – a recurring question posed by her counselor, Casper.

Charlie's inability to answer reveals relational trauma: no family member, institution, or peer has ever provided a safe container for her truth. The trauma is not only in what happened to her, but in the absence of witnesses—people who could have seen and responded, but didn't. This absence is not accidental. It reflects a broader social logic that invisibilizes the pain of girls like Charlie—those who are poor, damaged, and nonconforming.

Her trauma, then, is not only chronic but culturally sanctioned:

- Cultural narratives normalize institutional failures: Girls who self-harm are often labeled "attention-seeking" or unstable, reducing the urgency to offer them meaningful support.
- Institutions neglect those culturally framed as troubled: If Charlie is already viewed as deviant, her needs are deprioritized or dismissed by the very systems meant to help her.
- Direct abuse is overlooked because symbolic and structural frameworks have already declared her life marginal.

This is what Bourdieu (2001) calls the "misrecognition of violence"—where systemic harm is rendered invisible because its targets are deemed unworthy of protection. Charlie's story becomes emblematic of how girls in pain are not only silenced but held responsible for their own suffering.

The novel offers repeated evidence of how this convergence breeds chronic emotional instability. Charlie's trauma is not healed over time—it is sustained by an environment that constantly echoes her perceived disposability. Each time she tries to reach out—to Blue, to Riley, to her mother—she is met with betrayal, indifference, or further harm. This repeated cycle of retraumatization underscores Herman's (2015) claim that recovery cannot begin in an unsafe environment.

More profoundly, this convergence makes Charlie feel as though her pain is not only expected but deserved: *"I'm not worth the effort. I know it."* Such statements reveal the ultimate victory of symbolic violence: when the subject of oppression not only accepts their dehumanization but self-polices their need for help.

Despite the pervasive entrapment of Galtung's triangle, *Girl in Pieces* does not resign itself to despair. Glasgow threads the narrative with subtle but powerful moments of resistance—acts that, though small, signal the possibility of breaking the cycle.

Charlie's return to drawing and mural painting marks her first attempt to reclaim her narrative. Art functions not only as therapy but as counter-speech—a language she controls. It becomes a site where she is not reduced to diagnoses or files, but allowed to create, to assert presence.

Relationships with characters like Blue and Linus, though imperfect, offer glimpses of non-extractive care. They allow Charlie to exist without needing to justify her pain. These connections demonstrate the importance of relational repair in trauma recovery—a key component in Herman's (2015) model of healing through reconnection.

The novel's final chapters show Charlie speaking more openly in group sessions, confronting past relationships, and setting boundaries. While these acts are not dramatic, they mark a shift from passive survival to active agency. Her voice, once stifled by symbolic violence, begins to re-emerge—not loud, but deliberate: *"Maybe I don't have to be that girl anymore. Maybe I can be something else."* (Glasgow, 2016, p. 314) This moment of self-reflection is not a full resolution—but a refusal of determinism. It signals that healing is not a destination, but a subversive act: a refusal to remain defined by the violence done to you.

5. Conclusion

Kathleen Glasgow's *Girl in Pieces* powerfully dramatizes how trauma in a young woman's life is never singular. It is direct and interpersonal, but also structural and systemic—and most dangerously, symbolic and internalized. Charlie Davis does not merely endure harm; she lives in a social world that repeatedly affirms that her pain is inevitable, her voice irrelevant, and her future foreclosed.

By using Galtung's model of violence as a critical lens, we uncover a matrix of mutually reinforcing harms that helps explain why trauma, particularly for marginalized girls, is so difficult to escape. The novel's literary choices—fragmented prose, symbolic imagery, and fluid temporalities—are not just stylistic flourishes but narrative enactments of trauma's chaos and recurrence.

Yet Glasgow insists that while trauma may fracture identity, it does not erase the possibility of rebuilding. In portraying Charlie's slow, halting journey toward recovery—through art, community, and language—*Girl in Pieces* becomes not just a narrative of suffering, but also of subversion. It offers readers a profound insight: that violence can be structural, but so can resistance.

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