

OPEN ACCESS

Volume: 12

Special Issue: 3

Month: April

Year: 2025

E-ISSN: 2582-0397

P-ISSN: 2321-788X

Citation:

Sri Priyadharsini, V., and G. Vinothkumar. “Rediscovering Life Through Adversity: Physical Trauma in Lisa Genova’s *Left Neglected*.” *Shanlax International Journal of Arts, Science and Humanities*, vol. 12, no. S3, 2025, pp. 154–57.

DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.34293/sijash.v12iS3-Apr.9077>

Rediscovering Life Through Adversity: Physical Trauma in Lisa Genova’s *Left Neglected*

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Abstract

*This article examines the physical trauma suffered by the protagonist, Sarah Nickerson, in Lisa Genova’s novel *Left Neglected*. After a car accident, Sarah developed left neglect, a neurological disorder that renders her incapable of perceiving or engaging with her left side. The story goes into the deep physical and emotional struggles Sarah undergoes, such as loss of independence, arduous rehabilitation, and disconnect between mind and body. The article also looks at how Sarah’s physical trauma triggers a reassessment of her priorities, towards personal development and increased love for family and health. Secondly, it indicates societal views on disability and emphasizes the value of empathy and inclusion. Through the life of Sarah, Genova captures the resilience of the human spirit and the potential for transformation from adversity, and provides a moving investigation of trauma and recovery.*

Keywords: Trauma, Illness, Disability, Empathy, Rehabilitation.

Introduction

Lisa Genova’s *Left Neglected* presents a powerful portrayal of physical trauma and its far reaching consequences for the human soul. In the life of Sarah Nickerson a successful executive who contracts left neglect after a devastating car accident, the novel explores the crossroads of bodily, emotional and social aspects of living with a disability. This article explores Sarah’s physical trauma experience, recovery journey that is fraught with difficulties, and the transcendental learning she achieves in the process.

Methodology

This article uses qualitative analysis of Lisa Genova’s *Left Neglected* and its representation of physical trauma and recovery. Through the examination of the lived experience of the protagonist, the study explores themes of disability, resilience, and transformation. Secondary sources, including medical texts on left neglect and sociocultural studies of disability, are drawn on to locate Sarah Nickerson’s experience. This enables a thorough examination of the novel’s thematic richness and its reflection on the human condition.

Understanding the Left Neglect

Left neglect, or hemispatial neglect, is a neurological disorder that makes people oblivious to the left side of their body and environment. Usually caused by injury to the brain's right hemisphere, this disorder presents severe difficulties in activities of daily living. For Sarah, the disorder exists as a lack of being able to perceive or interact with her left side, significantly changing her sense of self and independence. Genova's depiction of left neglect is clinically precise as well as profoundly compassionate. She dramatizes Sarah's first bewilderment and anger, which give way to a begrudging accommodation once she learns how to cope in this new world. Through the eyes of Sarah, readers can grasp the viscerally upsetting mind-body split that comes with this condition. From everyday activity such as getting dressed to highly intricate interactions between self and body and world, left neglect resets Sarah's own sense of place and control within the world around her. Sarah's physical trauma carries over beyond the initial stages of the car crash.

Her condition tests her physically as she deals with the loss of autonomy and the perpetual necessity for support. Once a strongly independent woman, Sarah is now forced to face the vulnerability is exacerbated by the emotional cost of her trauma, which involves feelings of frustration, helplessness, and mourning over her previous way of life. The novel movingly illustrates Sarah's struggle with rehabilitation. Physical therapy sessions, tedious exercises, and the agonizingly slow road to rehabilitation are all chronicled in agonizing detail, drawing out the difficulty of her process. The physical and deep seated psychological readjustment requires Sarah to accept her limitations and redefine her sense of self. The estrangement between Sarah's body and mind is the primary theme of the novel. Her failure to see her left side metaphorizes the general task of aligning her pre-and post-accident selves. The disconnect creates an atmosphere of alienation, both from her body and from her former life. But it also spurs growth, challenging Sarah to discover new aspects of herself and her relationships.

Rehabilitation and Resilience

Recovery from left neglect is not automatic or linear, and Genova's account does this fact justice. Sarah's rehabilitation process is marked by incremental successes and setbacks, and the strength it requires to undergo such a basic transformation. The novel emphasizes the worth of persistence, social support, and professional advice in recovery. One of the strongest features of Sarah's recovery is her changing understanding of being "whole." Early obsessed with returning to her former ability, Sarah eventually moves towards acceptance of her new circumstances. This transformation does not occur easily; she frequently battles inadequacy and the desire for what was lost. Yet as she learns to embrace progress, gradual, Sarah finds a reservoir of inner strength. Sarah's resilience is additionally supported by family, friends, and therapists. Her mother and husband, Bob, are the most important factors in her process, offering physical support and moral support. Such relationships become strong sources of resilience, showing the interdependence of human resilience. The physical trauma Sarah incurs acts as an in-depth wake up call and makes her re-prioritize. Before the accident, Sarah's life was such that her pressure job dominated her daily life, leaving little time for family or self-esteem. Her illness is what makes her slow down and reflect on what really counts. In the process of recovery, Sarah learns to appreciate the simple pleasures of living with her family. Time spent with her children, which she used to consider interruptions to her professional pursuits, become an epitome of richness and fulfillment. This shift reflects a broader theme in the novel: the capacity of trauma to realign one's values and foster a deeper appreciation for life's intangible treasures. Additionally, Sarah's journey highlights the importance of self-care and balance. Her pre-accident lifestyles, characterized by overwork and constant striving, is revealed as unsustainable. The book gently criticizes social pressure to focus on productivity at the expense of well-being, proposing that success comes from building significant relationships and living a balanced life.

Societal Attitudes toward Disability

Left Neglected also explores society's perception of disability, informing the audience about issues that accompany existing with physical disability. Sarah's encounters with society reveal implicit prejudice and ignorance of her condition. Such situations are a reminder to society to become more understanding and tolerant of disability obstacles, ranging from mobility in public places to adapting to different social circumstances. These difficulties are added to by the emotional burden of being rejected or devalued in the perception of others. Genova's work promotes a society that is more inclusive and acknowledges the dignity and worth of disabled people. Simultaneously, Sarah's journey is a vindication of human resilience. Acts of kindness, whether by her family members, therapist, or strangers, are important actors in her healing. These moments remind us of the value of community and the powerful effect of empathy.

The Transformative Potential of Adversity

Genova explores the human spirit's resilience and the redemptive nature of adversity through the story of Sarah. Although physical trauma inflicted upon Sarah seems a seemingly insurmountable hindrance at the outset, adversity becomes a potent catalyst for individual change. The path is not about reverting to her previous self but shaping a new being that acknowledges strength and weakness alike. Sarah's personal transformation also finds reflection in her relationships. The more she is tuned to her vulnerabilities and needs, the more empathetic she becomes towards others. The new empathy strengthens her relationship with her family and makes her fight for more awareness about disabilities. The ending of the novel is hopeful and full of possibilities. Even as Sarah continues to recover, her life story shows renewal and reinvention can happen in the midst of trauma. Sarah's tale is finally one of transformation. Her physical harm, though cataclysmic, serves as the catalyst for reevaluating priorities, deepening relationships, and discovering a new sense of purpose. In her ordeal, Genova pays tribute to resilience of the human spirit and the potential for renewal and growth that lies.

Summation

Lisa Genova's *Left Neglected* is a compelling study of physical trauma and its far-reaching effects. Through the experiences of Sarah Nickerson, the novel probes the physical and mental challenges of existence with left neglect, strength required for recovery, and the rich lessons that emerge from adversity. Placing emphasis on social opinion regarding disability and highlighting the necessity of compassion and acceptance, Genova's novel offers an astute commentary on the human. *Left Neglected* is a survival story and a tribute to the redemptive power of meeting life's challenges with courage and dignity.

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