

Juliette Ferrars's Fragmented Mental State in Tahereh Mafi's *Shatter Me*: A Study of First-Person Internal Focalization

Andi Nur Aisyah Ramadhani
andiaisyahr2410@gmail.com

Abdullah
abdullah5891@unm.ac.id

Riola Haya Nur
riola.haya.nur@gmail.com

Universitas Negeri Makassar

ABSTRACT

This study examines how first-person internal focalization constructs Juliette Ferrars's fragmented mental state in Tahereh Mafi's *Shatter Me*. The research focuses on how first-person internal focalization allows readers to experience Juliette's thoughts, emotions, and psychological struggles through her subjective perspective. Using Genette's concept of internal focalization, this study employs a descriptive qualitative method and close reading to analyze selected narrative passages from the novel. The findings show that first-person internal focalization Juliette's fragmented mental state is represented through contradiction, repetition, self-censorship, limited perception, memory intrusion, and sudden emotional shifts. These narrative features reflect her fear, trauma, loneliness, insecurity, and emotional instability while living in a dystopian society. As both narrator and focalizer, Juliette provides readers with direct access to her consciousness, creating an intimate portrayal of her psychological condition. The study concludes that first-person internal focalization plays a significant role in constructing Juliette's fragmented mental state and enhancing readers' understanding of her emotional and psychological experiences. The study concludes that first-person internal focalization plays a significant role in constructing Juliette's fragmented mental state and enhancing readers' understanding of her emotional and psychological experiences. This study contributes to narratological studies of young adult dystopian fiction by demonstrating how narrative perspective can construct and represent psychological fragmentation through a character's subjective consciousness.

Keywords: Internal Focalization; Fragmented Mental; Narratology; *Shatter Me*; Juliette Ferrars

INTRODUCTION

Young adult dystopian fiction often presents characters who struggle with fear, trauma, isolation, and identity crisis within oppressive social systems. These psychological struggles are not only shown through plot and characterization, but

also through narrative perspective. In Tahereh Mafi's *Shatter Me*, Juliette Ferrars is portrayed as a young woman who lives under isolation because of her lethal touch. Her fear of harming others, her loneliness, and her traumatic memories shape the way she understands herself and the world around her

One important narrative feature in *Shatter Me* is its use of first-person narration. The story is told through Juliette's own voice, allowing readers to experience events from inside her consciousness. This narrative position is closely related to Genette's concept of internal focalization, which explains how a story can be limited to the perception and knowledge of a particular character. In the novel, Juliette functions not only as the narrator who tells the story, but also as the focalizer through whom the events are seen, felt, remembered, and interpreted. As a result, readers do not receive an objective view of the dystopian world, but understand it through Juliette's subjective mental and emotional condition.

Previous studies on young adult dystopian fiction have examined issues such as oppression, resistance, identity, trauma, and social control, often emphasizing what characters experience within oppressive social systems. In studies of *Shatter Me*, scholars have also discussed Juliette's character development, female agency, dystopian society, and psychological struggles. However, these approaches tend to focus on the thematic or psychological dimensions of Juliette's experience rather than on how narrative perspective constructs that experience. In particular, the function of first-person internal focalization in representing Juliette's fragmented consciousness and psychological trauma remains insufficiently explored. This gap is important because Juliette's fear, isolation, traumatic memories, and contradictory emotional responses are not merely described by the narrative; they are experienced by readers through her restricted perception and subjective consciousness. Therefore, examining Genette's concept of internal focalization provides a way to understand how narrative perspective itself contributes to the representation of psychological fragmentation in *Shatter Me*. The way Juliette narrates her thoughts, memories, fears, and contradictions is important because it shows that her psychological condition is not only described by the story, but also constructed through the structure of narration itself.

This study focuses on how first-person internal focalization constructs the fragmented portrayal of Juliette Ferrars's mental state in *Shatter Me*. Fragmentation in this study refers to the unstable, divided, and often contradictory condition of Juliette's consciousness, which appears through contradiction, repetition, self-censorship, limited perception, memory intrusion, and sudden emotional shifts. These features are closely related to her psychological trauma, fear, isolation, and difficulty establishing emotional intimacy. By applying Genette's concept of internal focalization, this study examines how Juliette's position as both narrator and focalizer makes her psychological experience accessible through her own restricted consciousness. In this way, the study contributes to narratological research on young adult dystopian fiction by demonstrating how first-person

narrative perspective can function not only as a means of telling a story but also as a formal mechanism for constructing psychological fragmentation and trauma.

Therefore, the aim of this study is to analyze the role of first-person internal focalization in representing Juliette's fragmented mental state. This study is expected to contribute to narratological studies, especially in understanding how narrative perspective can represent psychological fragmentation in young adult dystopian fiction.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Narratology is the study of narrative structure and the ways stories are organized and communicated. It examines such elements as narration, perspective, temporality, and the relationship between storyteller and story. In literary analysis, narratology is useful for understanding not only what is told in a narrative, but also how it is told and how this mode of telling shapes meaning. One of the central concepts in narratology is focalization. Genette (1980) distinguishes between narration and focalization by separating the questions of "who speaks?" and "who sees?" Narration concerns the voice that tells the story, whereas focalization concerns the perspective through which the events of the story are perceived and presented. Focalization therefore determines the extent to which readers can access a character's knowledge, perceptions, emotions, memories, and interpretations. This distinction is particularly important in first-person narratives because the character who tells the story may also function as the focalizer through whom the fictional world is experienced.

Genette (1980) identifies three basic types of focalization: zero focalization, internal focalization, and external focalization. Zero focalization occurs when the narrator knows more than the characters, while external focalization restricts the narrative to observable actions and events. Internal focalization, in contrast, restricts narrative information to the knowledge and perception of a particular character. As a result, readers encounter events through the focal character's subjective consciousness rather than through an unrestricted narrative perspective. This restriction can make the character's emotions, memories, perceptions, and psychological conflicts central to the reader's experience of the narrative.

In *Shatter Me*, Juliette Ferrars functions as both narrator and focalizer. Because the novel is narrated in the first person, readers encounter the fictional world primarily through Juliette's consciousness. The narrative therefore does not provide an objective or complete account of events; instead, events are filtered through Juliette's perceptions, memories, emotions, and interpretations. This narrative restriction is significant for the representation of her fragmented mental state because psychological instability becomes visible not only through what Juliette experiences but also through the way those experiences are narrated.

Fragmented Mental State in First-Person Narrative

The concept of a fragmented mental state in this study refers to the unstable, divided, and often contradictory condition of Juliette's consciousness as represented in the narrative. Rather than presenting thoughts in a stable and coherent manner, the novel frequently depicts Juliette's mind through discontinuity, hesitation, contradiction, repetition, emotional shifts, and self-censorship. These features suggest that her consciousness is shaped by trauma, fear, repression, and a persistent conflict between the desire for intimacy and the fear of harming others.

In first-person narratives, psychological fragmentation can be represented through both the content of a character's thoughts and the structure of narration. Because the narrative is restricted to the character's perspective, readers encounter changes in perception, emotional fluctuations, contradictory thoughts, and interruptions in consciousness from within the character's own viewpoint. Internal focalization therefore provides an important narratological framework for examining how psychological instability is constructed through narrative perspective.

In *Shatter Me*, Juliette's fragmented mental state is closely related to her experiences of isolation, fear, trauma, and uncertainty. Her first-person narration repeatedly presents competing impulses, unstable perceptions, intrusive memories, and sudden changes in emotional response. For example, Juliette may simultaneously desire emotional closeness and fear physical intimacy because of her lethal touch. Such contradictions are not presented from an external narrator's perspective; instead, they emerge directly within her own consciousness. Consequently, readers experience her psychological conflict through the same restricted perspective that shapes her understanding of the fictional world.

This relationship between focalization and psychological representation is central to the present study. Rather than treating fragmentation only as a psychological characteristic of Juliette, the study examines how the narrative perspective itself contributes to its representation. First-person internal focalization makes Juliette's consciousness the primary filter through which events, memories, emotions, and perceptions are communicated. The narrative form therefore becomes an important means of constructing her fragmented mental state.

Previous Studies

Previous studies on *Shatter Me* and young adult dystopian fiction have examined issues such as oppression, identity, female agency, character development, and psychological struggle. These studies provide important contextual understanding of Juliette Ferrars and the dystopian world in which she lives. However, fewer studies have focused specifically on the relationship between narrative perspective and the representation of Juliette's psychological fragmentation. Suphap (2025), for example, discusses Juliette Ferrars as a female protagonist within the dystopian society of the *Shatter Me* series. The study emphasizes Juliette's experiences of

oppression, struggle, and personal growth within a dystopian social system. This research is relevant because it demonstrates how Juliette's character is shaped by the social and political conditions of the fictional world. However, its primary focus is Juliette's characterization and development rather than the narratological mechanisms through which her psychological condition is represented.

The studies by Ramos and Navas (2016) and Henderson (2024) further demonstrate the importance of first-person narration and point of view in YA literature. Ramos and Navas emphasize the role of internal focalization as a filter through which adolescent characters experience and interpret their surroundings, while Henderson demonstrates how narrative voice and point of view contribute to the construction of character experience in contemporary YA fiction. Building on these studies, the present research focuses specifically on how first-person internal focalization constructs Juliette Ferrars's fragmented mental state in Tahereh Mafi's *Shatter Me*. The study does not treat fragmentation solely as a thematic or psychological issue. Instead, it examines how contradiction, self-censorship, repetition, unstable perception, memory intrusion, sudden emotional shifts, and attachment-avoidance conflict become visible through Juliette's restricted narrative perspective. In doing so, this study contributes to YA narratological research by demonstrating how narrative perspective can function as a formal mechanism for representing psychological fragmentation.

METHOD

Design and Samples

This study employed a descriptive qualitative design to examine how Juliette Ferrars's fragmented mental state is represented through first-person internal focalization in Tahereh Mafi's *Shatter Me* (2011). A qualitative design was considered appropriate because the study focused on interpreting narrative representation, psychological fragmentation, and perspective in a literary text rather than measuring numerical data. The analysis was conducted through close reading and narratological interpretation in order to understand how Juliette's thoughts, emotions, and perceptions are constructed in the novel. The primary source of data in this study was Tahereh Mafi's *Shatter Me* (2011). The data were selected through purposive sampling based on their relevance to the research questions. The selected excerpts were required to meet three criteria. First, the excerpts had to be narrated through Juliette Ferrars's first-person perspective and demonstrate internal focalization. Second, they had to provide access to Juliette's thoughts, emotions, memories, perceptions, or interpretations, particularly when these elements reflected her fragmented mental state. Third, the excerpts had to contain textual features relevant to the identified forms of psychological fragmentation. The selection was conducted across the novel to ensure that the data represented different stages of Juliette's psychological experiences rather than focusing on a single narrative section. The data collection process involved a close reading of *Shatter Me*. The researcher first identified passages narrated from Juliette's first-

person perspective. These passages were then examined to determine whether they demonstrated internal focalization and contained relevant representations of psychological fragmentation. The passages that met the selection criteria were recorded, organized, and classified according to the textual features they represented before being analyzed using Genette's concept of internal focalization.

Instrument and Procedure

The main instrument of this study was the researcher, who functioned as the primary instrument in collecting, selecting, classifying, and interpreting the data. In qualitative literary research, the researcher plays a central role because the analysis requires close interpretation of textual details, narrative perspective, and psychological meaning. The data collection procedure was conducted through several steps. First, the researcher read *Shatter Me* repeatedly to gain a comprehensive understanding of the plot, characterization, and Juliette's first-person narration. Second, relevant narrative passages were identified from the novel based on predetermined sampling criteria. A passage was selected when it (1) was presented through Juliette's first-person narration, (2) revealed an aspect of her fragmented mental state, and (3) demonstrated a clear connection between her consciousness and the way events, emotions, or perceptions were narrated. Third, passages that met these criteria were selected from different narrative moments to avoid relying on a single scene and to capture recurring patterns in Juliette's psychological representation. Finally, the selected passages were organized and classified according to recurring forms of fragmentation and their relevance to first-person internal focalization.

To ensure consistency in the classification process, the selected passages were coded according to recurring textual patterns identified during close reading. The coding categories included contradiction and self-censorship, sudden emotional shifts and unstable perception, repetition and obsessive emotional pressure, and attachment-avoidance conflict. These categories were used to organize the data according to how Juliette's fragmented consciousness was represented through the narrative.

The data were verified through repeated rereading and cross-checking between each selected passage and its original context in the novel. The researcher also reviewed the classification and interpretation of each passage to ensure that the textual evidence supported the assigned category and the application of Genette's concept of internal focalization. No peer debriefing or investigator triangulation was applied, as the study employed a single-researcher qualitative close-reading approach. Instead, consistency was maintained through repeated textual checking and systematic comparison of the selected passages with the analytical criteria.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using close reading and interpreted through Gérard Genette's concept of internal focalization. The analysis focused on how the narrative is restricted to Juliette Ferrars's perspective and how this restriction contributes to the representation of her fragmented mental state. Each selected passage was examined to identify how Juliette's consciousness shapes the presentation of events, emotions, perceptions, and psychological experiences. The analysis was conducted in three stages. First, the selected passages were coded according to the recurring forms of fragmentation identified during the data collection process: contradiction and self-censorship, sudden emotional shifts and unstable perception, repetition and obsessive emotional pressure, and attachment-avoidance conflict. Second, each passage was interpreted in relation to Juliette's position as both narrator and focalizer, with particular attention to the information available through her consciousness. Third, the findings were synthesized to explain how first-person internal focalization functions as a narrative strategy in constructing Juliette's fragmented mental state. In interpreting the data, the analysis considered both the content of Juliette's thoughts and the narrative form through which those thoughts are presented. Particular attention was given to shifts, contradictions, repetitions, and limitations in her perception because these features demonstrate how the narrative remains closely restricted to her consciousness. The interpretation was then cross-checked against the original passages and their surrounding contexts to ensure that the findings remained grounded in the textual evidence.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The analysis shows that Juliette Ferrars's fragmented mental state in *Shatter Me* is constructed through first-person internal focalization. Because Juliette functions as both narrator and focalizer, readers experience events through her subjective consciousness rather than through an external or objective perspective. The selected passages reveal recurring patterns of fragmentation, including contradiction and self-censorship, sudden emotional shifts and unstable perception, repetition and obsessive emotional pressure, and attachment-avoidance conflict. These patterns demonstrate that Juliette's psychological fragmentation is conveyed not only through what she experiences but also through the way her consciousness shapes the narration.

Data 1: Contradiction and Self-Censorship

One important feature of Juliette's fragmented mental state is contradiction within her own consciousness. This contradiction often appears when Juliette suppresses one thought while allowing another to surface in the narration. For example, when Adam asks her name, Juliette internally responds with two conflicting impulses: one defensive and one relational.

“What’s your name?” he asks.

None of your business.

~~What’s your name?~~

(Mafi, 2011, p. 4)

This passage presents two conflicting responses within Juliette’s consciousness. The statement “None of your business” functions as defensive response, reflecting her tendency to protect herself from interpersonal contact. Immediately afterward however, the repeated question “What’s your name?” reveals her hidden desire to respond, connect, and know the other person. Through first-person internal focalization, the reader does not observe this conflict from the outside; rather, the conflict is experienced from within Juliette’s own mind. This makes her consciousness appear unstable because it simultaneously produces rejection and curiosity. The passage therefore shows that fragmentation in Juliette’s mind emerges through self-censorship and contradiction.

The crossed-out or censored phrases are also significant because they visually distinguish between what Juliette initially thought and what she allowed to remain in her narrative. Rather than presenting her responses as direct statements, this narrative reveals the process by which a thought is rejected or censored. This provides insight into the conflict taking place within her consciousness. From the first-person internal focus perspective, this contradiction is experienced directly through Juliette’s point of view. The reader is not given an external explanation for why she responds defensively while at the same time wanting to engage. Instead, both impulses are presented through her own consciousness. Thus, the internal focus makes the instability of her psychological state an integral part of the narrative experience itself.

Data 2: Sudden Emotional Shift and Unstable Perception

Juliette’s fragmented mental state is also depicted through sudden shifts between emotionally contrasting perceptions. These shifts occur when thoughts related to death, despair, or suffering are juxtaposed with ordinary observations. One example can be found in the following excerpt:

...The start of the same end. Another day. ~~Maybe I will die today.~~ Maybe a bird will fly today.

(Mafi, 2011, p. 27)

The juxtaposition of death and the image of a bird creates an emotionally unstable atmosphere. Juliette’s attention shifts from the possibility of her own death to a simple observation of the outside world. This shift indicates that her consciousness does not remain fixed on a single emotional state, but rather shifts rapidly between despair and ordinary perception. The visual presentation of crossed-out thoughts further reinforces this instability. Her original thoughts remain visible even after

they have been rejected or suppressed. As a result, the narrative simultaneously presents what Juliette is thinking and what she subsequently allows to remain in her conscious narrative. Thus, the typography works in tandem with the first-person internal focus to represent the movement and instability of her consciousness. Rather than being explained by an external narrator, these emotional shifts are presented from Juliette's own perspective. This limited access means the reader experiences the shifts in perception just as Juliette does. This section ultimately demonstrates how the internal focus contributes to the depiction of psychological fragmentation through unstable perceptions and sudden emotional shifts.

Data 3: Repetition and Obsessive Emotional Pressure

Another recurring feature of Juliette's fragmented mental state is repetition. In the selected passage, repetition does not merely emphasize an emotion but also reflects the pressure and persistence of Juliette's thoughts:

so desperate so desperate so desperate to be close so desperate to be far away.
(Mafi, 2011, p. 37)

The repeated phrase "so desperate" creates a sense of urgency and emotional intensity. Rather than portraying Juliette's desire as a calm or structured reflection, the repetition illustrates the persistence of that thought in her consciousness. The repetition of these words gives the impression that the thought keeps circling without reaching a stable resolution. This passage also contains a direct contradiction between "being close" and "being far away." Juliette simultaneously desires both closeness and distance. Therefore, the repetition reinforces this contradiction because the same emotional tension is attached to both of these conflicting desires. Her consciousness seems unable to settle on a single position

This effect is closely tied to internal focalization. Because the narrative is confined to Juliette's consciousness, readers experience these repetitions as part of her immediate thought process. The narrative does not explain her conflict from an external point of view; rather, the repeated words allow readers to feel the tension and instability within her own mental perspective. Thus, repetition serves a purpose beyond mere stylistic emphasis. It functions as a narrative marker of psychological fragmentation by revealing the persistence, urgency, and contradictions of Juliette's inner experience.

Data 4: Attachment-Avoidance Conflict and Fear of Intimacy

Juliette's fragmented mental state is further represented through an attachment-avoidance conflict. Her desire for emotional closeness repeatedly appears alongside fear of physical intimacy. One example is presented in the following passage:

We're all alone in a new room.

"Please ~~don't let go of me~~ put me down," I tell him.

(Mafi, 2011, p. 64)

This section depicts two conflicting impulses within a single moment of consciousness. The statement "Please don't let me go" reveals Juliette's desire for emotional security, comfort, and human connection. After prolonged isolation, closeness provides a temporary sense of security. However, the direct command "put me down" disrupts that desire and reveals her simultaneous aversion to physical contact. The combination of these two statements is crucial because attachment and avoidance are presented side by side, rather than as separate experiences. Juliette wants to stay close to others, yet at the same time wants to distance herself from physical intimacy. This conflict reinforces the instability identified in the previous data.

The internal first-person narrative focus allows this conflict to be understood through Juliette's subjective perspective. Readers are not placed outside the situation as observers of her behavior. Instead, they confront conflicting impulses through Juliette's own narration. As a result, this section of the text constructs psychological fragmentation through the simultaneous presentation of conflicting desires. Therefore, this section demonstrates that Juliette's fragmented mental state is represented not only through the content of her thoughts but also through a narrative perspective that grants readers direct access to these conflicting thoughts. The internal focalization transforms her emotional conflict into a narrative experience that is immediately felt.

These findings reveal that the internal first-person narrative focus plays a crucial role in depicting Juliette Ferrars' fragmented mental state in *Shatter Me*. Because Juliette serves a dual role as both narrator and subject of the narrative focus, events are presented through her emotionally unstable subjective consciousness. Contradictions, self-censorship, repetition, sudden emotional shifts, and the conflict between the desire to form attachments and the desire to avoid them as found in the selected excerpts indicate that her perceptions are not always stable or consistent. This creates a form of psychological unreliability, as readers experience these events through Juliette's fluctuating thoughts and perceptions, rather than through an objective narrative perspective.

At the same time, this limited point of view creates an emotional closeness between Juliette and the reader. By providing direct access to her conflicting thoughts, fears, and desires, the first-person internal focus allows the reader to experience her psychological struggle from the inside. Juliette's desire for closeness and her fear of intimacy, for example, make her emotional conflict immediately palpable to the reader. Thus, the internal focus does more than simply depict Juliette's fractured psyche; it allows the reader to experience the emotional instability and tension that shape their understanding of this dystopian world. Overall, the findings demonstrate that psychological fragmentation in *Shatter Me* is constructed not only through what

Juliette thinks, but also through how her consciousness controls the narration. Genette's concept of internal focalization therefore helps explain how the novel uses Juliette's restricted perspective to create both psychological unreliability and emotional intimacy, making her fragmented mental experience central to the narrative structure.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that first-person internal focalization plays a crucial role in representing Juliette Ferrars's fragmented mental state in Tahereh Mafi's *Shatter Me*. Because Juliette functions as both narrator and focalizer, the narrative is consistently filtered through her subjective consciousness, allowing readers to experience her fear, trauma, loneliness, insecurity, and emotional instability from within. The analysis shows that Juliette's fragmented mental state is represented through contradiction, self-censorship, repetition, sudden emotional shifts, and attachment-avoidance conflict. These features reveal that Juliette's consciousness is unstable and divided, shaped by prolonged isolation, traumatic experience, and the fear of harming others through physical intimacy. The study therefore demonstrates that Juliette's fragmented mental state is not represented only through thematic content, but also through narrative form. By restricting the story to Juliette's inner perspective, first-person internal focalization contributes to psychological unreliability while also creating emotional intimacy between Juliette and the reader. In conclusion, this study highlights the importance of narrative perspective in understanding psychological representation in contemporary young adult dystopian fiction. For literature educators, the findings suggest that Genette's concept of internal focalization can be applied as an analytical framework for guiding students to examine how narrative perspective shapes characters' psychological experiences and readers' responses to contemporary fiction.

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