

The Cognitive Approaches to Trauma in Literature Studies

DR.KIRAN RAKIBE

KTHM COLLEGE, SHIVAJI NAGAR, GANGAPUR ROAD,

NASHIK-422002.

RESEARCHER

MS. ARCHANA HIMMATRAO PATIL

Abstract

When considering the memory process, trauma is described as an unconscious occurrence that leads to ego separation. Using Janet's research on dissociation, the authors write, "the splitting of consciousness which is so striking in the well-known classical cases under the form of 'double conscience' is present to a rudimentary degree in every hysteria, and that a tendency to such dissociation, and with it the emergence of abnormal states of consciousness, is the basic phenomenon of this neurosis." Dissociation, which the authors claim is a defence mechanism that comes from suppression, is central to the "phenomenon of hysteria;" forgetfulness is another way of defence. Freud bases much of his work on the idea that traumatic experiences might lead to dissociation or a void inside the mind. Later in his career, Freud modifies his definition of trauma, but his original ideas continue to inform how literary critics today think about what it means to have experienced a traumatic event. These ideas include the latency period between the event and its pathological effects, the fragmentation of the psyche, the potential for dissociation, and the constant wreaking of havoc or infection.

Keywords

Cognitive Approach, Trauma Studies, Literature Studies

▪ Introduction

The field of trauma studies emerged in the 1990s, and its foundational model of trauma, based on Freudian theory, postulates that a person might have a traumatic event so intense that it stretches the boundaries of language and potentially ruptures

meaning. Based on this trauma model, it seems that pain may be modelled. A more pluralistic model of trauma soon followed the classic one, suggesting that the presumed nonspeakability of trauma is only one of many reactions to an intense incident. Even as other techniques have taken their place, the concept that a traumatic event tests the boundaries of language, shattering the psyche and rupturing meaning, has completely established the discipline and continues to define the critical discourse.

▪ **Content Analysis**

Trauma studies first developed in the 1990s and relied on Freudian theory to develop a model of trauma that imagines an extreme experience which challenges the limits of language and even ruptures meaning altogether. This model of trauma indicates that suffering is unrepresentable. Quickly following the traditional model was a more pluralistic model of trauma that suggests the assumed unspeakability of trauma is one among many responses to an extreme event rather than its defining feature. The idea that a traumatic experience challenges the limits of language, fragments the psyche, and even ruptures meaning altogether set the initial parameters of the field and continues to impact the critical conversation even while alternative approaches displace this notion.

The injury hypothesis and the ways in which damage affects memory and character are discussed as essential ideas indicating the major improvement in injury focusses on grant. These ideas were popularized by Sigmund Freud, who hypothesized that traumatic experiences are replayed incessantly, create mental compartments, have a more pronounced effect on memory than pleasant ones, and can only be generated first via a narrative of the past. This research, along with its successors, use psychoanalytic strategies to examine the expression of extreme suffering in literature and other media, as well as the use of language to convey tragedy, discord, and disintegration. The approach puts to the test assumptions about how harm affects the human mind by looking at one person's account of a horrifying shared experience, creating a link between that person and the community, and between that person and the political system. In specifically, the first or standard Freudian injury model postulates that injury is a representable event that considerably

fractures the mind, with its core notions being inactivity, pathology, separation, and sickness.

Trauma is thus defined in relation to the process of remembering and as an event harboured within the unconscious that causes a splitting of the ego or dissociation. The authors, citing Janet's work on dissociation, write: "the splitting of consciousness which is so striking in the well-known classical cases under the form of 'double conscience' is present to a rudimentary degree in every hysteria, and that a tendency to such dissociation, and with it the emergence of abnormal states of consciousness ... is the basic phenomenon of this neurosis" (1955: 9). The fundamental "phenomenon of hysteria" involves dissociation which the authors argue is a defense mechanism that arises from repression; another mode of defense is amnesia (1955: 248, 793). The notion that trauma causes dissociation or a gap in the psyche is taken up by Freud throughout his career. The concept of the latency period between the event and its pathological effects, along with the idea that trauma fragments the psyche, can cause dissociation, and continuously wreaks havoc or infects it, are principles that Freud adjusts later in his career but still influence the contemporary definition of trauma for literary critics.

The classic trauma paradigm, developed by Cathy Caruth, considers trauma to be an experience that shatters awareness and precludes clear verbalization. The paradigm emphasizes the gravity of suffering by positing that exposure to trauma leaves a person's mind permanently altered. Trauma is a shattered identity that cannot be reconstructed via ordinary means of remembering or telling the story. The theory of transhistorical trauma is predicated on the premise that traumatic events directly create fragmentation or dissociation, and that this capacity allows one to relate unpleasant experiences that have occurred both individually and collectively. Since the intensity of fear undermines the mind's capacity to interpret and linguistically categorize the experience, traumatic events and the dissociation they entail prevent any attempt to assign a definite value to them. The event functions like a tumour in the mind, wounding the self even though it is never fully described or named. The traumatic incident has a deleterious and, often, pathological impact on the mind and memory, preventing the past from being integrated into the person's story. This theory puts the

spotlight on the agony that results when something from the outside causes alterations in the mind that are permanent and fundamental to one's sense of self. The inscrutability of trauma is highlighted severely on the grounds that extreme trauma breaks down both language and awareness, leaving lifelong scars and calling for unique narrative styles. The horrific event has been removed from daily consciousness but preserved in an eternal, wordless state, where it continues to inflict pain on the psyche. Because of its peculiar absence but ghostlike presence in awareness, trauma's shadow does not normally integrate into memory or narrative, but it still casts a shadow that indirectly alludes toward trauma's importance and the truth of the past.

The narrative of traumatic memory thus creates different claims to the past since multiple determinacies of value arise which are not bound to the concept of a speechless absence. Pursuing an approach without being bound by the traditional model's view of language allows an interpretation that establishes language's ability to multiply depict the various meanings of traumatic experience. The linguistic potential to specifically identify the particular origin and impact of trauma thus permits a particular view of the psyche and identity. The narrative that depicts trauma's specificity in textual representations demonstrates direct knowledge of the event. To a certain degree, then, trauma's variability in both concept and form within the pluralistic model reveals the diversity of values that change over time to define trauma's impact, rather than revealing an essentialized and indecipherable absence that both marks and remains ambiguously unclaimed by the individual or group. However, the type of trauma definition employed is unrelated to the narrative potential to locate determinate knowledge of the traumatic past, which is to say that the unspeakable model of defining trauma remains dominant even while the attention of criticism is focused on determinate value in textual representations. The shift in criticism to focus on trauma's specificity came along with a renewed interest in the relationship between individual and collective experiences of violence and suffering most prevalent in a cultural studies oriented approach.

Examining the cultural context of an individual or collective group's experience of trauma enables greater attention to representations of extreme experience such as rape, war, the Holocaust, the Gulag, American slavery, colonial

oppression, and racism. Scholarship in Holocaust studies as well as feminist studies and postcolonial criticism deals with a network of social and cultural factors that influence the linguistic and ethical terms of representing trauma. Ann Cvetkovich, Naomi Mandel, and Greg Forter demonstrate in their work a pluralistic trauma model that although influenced to greater or lesser degrees by the foundational Freudian concepts of trauma extend a critical analysis beyond the shattering trope, in large part by emphasizing the cultural dimensions of trauma.

Mandel's *Against the Unspeakable: Complicity, the Holocaust, and Slavery in America* (2006) argues that the traditional concept of trauma as unspeakable is a "discursive production" that evades moral responsibility in representing atrocity by privileging the "problems inherent in speech" rather than addressing the "ethical obligations involved in such representations (Mandel 2006: 4, 5). In her analysis of trauma and the paradoxes of memorialization in Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved*, Mandel writes that "silence and forgetting are as much a strategic and self-conscious gesture on the part of the subjugated as they are the product of the subjugating culture's demands and requirements" (2006: 172).

Ann Cvetkovich's *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures* (2003) establishes a view of traumatic experience beyond that of pathology by examining trauma's specificities and variations in butch-femme discourses and the public culture that arises around trauma. Her analysis examines sexual trauma and focuses on lesbian culture to argue that "affect, including the effects associated with trauma, serves as the foundation for the formation of public cultures" (Cvetkovich 2003: 10). Cvetkovich acknowledges the potential for trauma to be unrepresentable and dissociative but focuses on the ways that traumatic experience, specifically sexual trauma, creates new value in representations and cultural practices.

The psychodynamic difficulty for trauma researchers, according to this view, is that traumatic experiences are not easily integrated into consciousness and recollection. Drawing on the theories of Freud and Lacan, Caruth believes that trauma is "not locatable in the fundamental violent or original event in the individual's experience," but rather, is characterized by "the way it is precisely not known in the first instance—returns to haunt the survivor thereafter" (Caruth 1996: 17). Trauma

produces an internal conflict between the need to grasp the importance of the past and the inability to do so, as well as a crisis in the traumatic narrative that pits the threat of death against the urge to live. Caruth writes, "Immediacy, strangely, may take the form of belatedness; the most immediate witnessing of a terrible incident may occur as a complete inability to recognize it" (1996: 92). Because traumatic event is processed in the brain differently than daily experience, it leaves behind an anomalous memory that is resistant to narrative representation, thus all that can be gained from recalling something like this is a feeling of what occurred rather than absolute knowledge. The same shift in traumatic memory that prevents individuals from learning about the past also applies to the "historical memory" function when it comes to a terrible experience shared by a group or culture as a whole. According to Caruth's reading of Freud's *Moses and Monotheism*, "history, like trauma, is never simply one's own, that history is precisely the way we were implicated in each other's traumas," highlighting a universalist view of trauma as a damaging experience that elicits a shared response across time and space. From this vantage point, it is clear that trauma has an intrinsic transhistorical or intergenerational aspect that may be passed on from one generation to the next. Trauma's contagious nature is linked with the universality of a severe event that defies rote recollection. From this vantage point, the transhistorical potential of trauma indicates that the painful experiences of a historical cultural group may be a part of the psyche of a modern member of that same cultural group.

The universal consequences of trauma on identity and memory, in particular the fragmentation or dissociation of consciousness, are strengthened by tying together the individual and communal experiences of trauma. Trauma's intrinsic latency, along with dissociation, leaves a void in time where the experience's significance and worth are unclear. "a shock that looks to operate very much like a physiological danger but is, in reality, a disruption in the mind's sense of time," as defined by Caruth (Caruth 1996: 61). The emotional pain and the inability to "find" the event's significance are both brought on by the dissociative split in time. While the representable past cannot give epistemological or ethical determinacy, it does surround awareness, creating an absence that alludes to the occurrence. "The idea that traumatic events like war and

genocide are inadequately represented in history is based on extrapolating the impact of a representable and unknowable traumatic experience on the individual psyche to the collective emotional experience of cultural groups, despite the fact that any representation is a form of fiction.”

Over the following two decades, a plethora of studies built on Caruth's foundational idea that trauma is intrinsically unrepresentable. Feminism, racial, and postcolonial theory are all examples of critiques that expand upon the conventional paradigm's intellectual underpinnings; however, they share the traditional paradigm's focus on the inextricable bond between the individual and their cultural group, as well as the isolating and muting effects of trauma. J. Brooks Bouson, Suzette Henke, Deborah Horvitz, Michael Rothberg, and Laurie Vickroy are some of the critics who have employed the Freudian-Caruthian concept of trauma and its delayed impact to probe the relationship between individual and societal trauma.

In addition, a theoretical pluralism counter to the dominant Caruth paradigm has emerged as a result of the critical tradition. Because of the dissociative effects of trauma on consciousness and memory, the unspeakable cliché becomes problematic when applied to the cultural components of trauma and the variety of narrative representation, which the pluralistic model of trauma aims to understand. Rather from seeing trauma as a pathological breakdown, as the traditional view does, the pluralistic perspective sees it as revealing new connections between experience, language, and knowledge that provide light on the social significance of trauma. This approach to trauma analysis takes into account the many ways in which trauma is shown.

Authors like Ann Cvetkovich, Greg Forster, Amy Hungerford, and Naomi Mandel have all produced critical essays along these lines. According to this framework, trauma is seen as a life-altering experience that radically transforms one's sense of themselves and the world around them, but which also leads to the development of novel insights into both. Traumatic experiences may produce a shift in perspective that might include both a fuzzy sense of meaning and a clearer understanding of its referents. Recognizing that a traumatic experience may have a wide range of origins, outcomes, and symbolic significance is one way to illustrate the varying importance placed on recalling such an experience.

The adaptability of the psychoanalytic damage theory is shown by its flexibility for case-specific modifications. There is a risk of essentializing injury's properties into general reactions when applying the concept to the analysis of scholarly depictions of the mind at both the individual and collective levels; however, the pluralistic model is compelled to place emphasis on the occasion's and memory's determinate qualities. In doing so, it devalues the binary basis of the standard paradigm, which necessitates a dissociative quality and bloated referentiality of trauma. Since there are two possible ways to learn about a traumatic event, this may indicate that trauma has different impacts depending on the specific circumstances in which it occurs. This perspective puts greater emphasis on the external stressor in order to illustrate how trauma is situated within particular embodiments, historical moments, cultural contexts, and geographical locations, all of which shape how trauma is understood and represented.

One might get a deeper understanding of the connections between individual and communal trauma by conceptualizing the impact of trauma on identity and memory as the result of a complex interaction of external and internal influences, personality characteristics, and cultural contexts. Representations of trauma often centre on the role played by the memory processes. The conventional trauma model is well-suited to the idea that memory is a static process in which all events in life are retained accurately and literally, since this leaves the traumatic experience in a perpetually frozen and haunting condition. However, if we see memory as more of a construction site than a storage facility, then the traumatic past is not fixed in one place but rather is produced and rebuilt during times of introspection. The way we recall traumatic experiences is governed, according to psychiatrist Laurence Kirmayer's research, by "social conditions and cultural models for memories, narratives, and life stories." What is socially possible to speak about and what must be buried and unacknowledged, as well as what is valued and how it is perceived and encoded at the time of registration, are all influenced by cultural norms (Kirmayer 1996: 191). In contrast to the classic concept, which holds that trauma is inherently unspeakable owing to its neurobiological functions, what stays unsaid in a story about trauma might be the product of cultural norms.

Although recalling and processing traumatic experiences may be difficult, the pluralistic model of trauma recognizes that not all traumatic memories lead to pathological symptoms. After considering the internal, psychological variables that play a role in how a traumatic event is understood, we now look at the external, cultural aspects that influence narrative memory and the creation of information from the past. The idea that memory is formed in part at the time of recall is supported by the assumption that remembering is a dynamic process of producing meaning rather than a fixed object that can perfectly reduplicate the past. This perspective holds that the speaker's values are represented in the process of recounting a painful incident, giving the recollection a unique significance. Although the traumatic event interferes with the memory's ability to operate, it does not negate the experience's epistemic potential.

The field of trauma studies continues to develop and adapt the foundational poststructural approach as well as incorporate new perspectives from postcolonialism, feminist theory, ethnic studies, and ecocriticism in scholarship that examines trauma's significance in literature and society. Recent collections such as *Contemporary Approaches in Literary Trauma Theory* and *The Future of Trauma Theory* include further exploration of sociocultural and semiotic implications of trauma in literature (Balaev 2014; Buelens et al. 2014). The breadth of current criticism attests to the versatility of trauma studies and its relevance to literary theory.

Because of the emergence of alternative determinacies of value untethered from the idea of a mute absence, the narrative of traumatized memory gives rise to competing assertions about the past. By breaking free of the constraints of the conventional model of language, we may arrive at an interpretation that shows how language can be used to express trauma in many ways. One's perspective on their own mind and identity might be shaped by the language's ability to pinpoint the trauma's point of genesis and its unique effects. Direct awareness of the incident is shown by a story that vividly captures the details of a traumatic experience in words. Instead of uncovering an essentialized and garbled absence that leaves an impression and is never fully claimed by the individual or group, the inconsistency of the idea and type of injury within the pluralistic model reveals the variety of values that change over

time to characterize injury's effect. Despite the fact that fundamental attention has been given to its determinate value in written depictions, the terrible model of defining injury persists; yet, the kind of damage definition chosen is unrelated to the story's capacity to identify specific information about the dreadful past. Experts draw attention to the details of injuries, and with this shift comes a renewed focus on how social investigations may provide light on the connection between individuals' and communities' experiences of cruelty and resilience.

▪ **Conclusion**

A greater appreciation for depictions of shocking experiences like assault, war, the Holocaust, the Gulag, American bondage, pilgrim abuse, and intolerance is enabled by examining the societal context in which they occurred. There is an established structure of social and societal elements that influence the semantic and moral language used to handle harm, and Grant in Holocaust studies, women's activist studies, and postcolonial study controls this structure. Through their research, Ann Cvetokovich, Naomi Mandel, and Greg Forter reveal a pluralistic model of physical issues that, although influenced to varying degrees by the central Freudian ideas of damage, generally stretches a crucial evaluation beyond the limit by emphasizing the social aspects of harm. Grant that investigates the significance of injury in writing and society is where the field of injury focuses on creating and adjusting the fundamental post primary methodology and consolidating new perspectives from post imperialism, the women's activist hypothesis, ethnic examinations, and eco-analysis. "Contemporary Approaches in Literary Trauma Theory and The Future of Trauma Theory, both from recent anthologies; provide new research on the sociocultural and semiotic effects of trauma on literature." The scope of the present study demonstrates the adaptability of injury research and its significance to creative speculation.

▪ **References**

1. Bouson, J. Brooks.(2000), "*Quiet As It's Kept: Shame, Trauma, and Race in the Novels of Toni Morrison*", New York: State University of New York Press.
2. Buelens, Gert, Sam Durrant, and Robert Eaglestone (eds.). (2014), "*The Future of Trauma Theory: Contemporary Literary and Cultural Criticism*", London: Routledge.

3. Cvetkovich, Ann. (2003), *“An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures”*, Durham: Duke University Press.
4. Forter, Greg. (2014), *“Colonial Trauma, Utopian Carnality, Modernist Form: Toni Morrison’s Beloved and Arundhati Roy’s The God of Small Things.”* Contemporary Approaches to Literary Trauma Theory, ed. Michelle Balaev, New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
5. Felman, Shoshana and DoriLaub. (1992), *“Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History”*, New York: Routledge.
6. Hartman, Geoffrey H. (1995), *“On Traumatic Knowledge and Literary Studies”* New Literary History 26: 537–63. Henke, Suzette. 1998. *Shattered Subjects: Trauma and Testimony in Women’s Life-Writing*. New York: St. Martin’s Press.
7. Horvitz, Deborah. (2000), *“Literary Trauma: Sadism, Memory, and Sexual Violence in American Women’s Fiction”*, Albany: Suny Press.
8. Kaplan, E. Ann. (2005). *“Trauma Culture: The Politics of Terror and Loss in Media and Literature”*, New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.
9. Kirmayer, Laurence. (1996). *“Landscapes of Memory: Trauma, Narrative, and Dissociation.”* In *Tense Past: Cultural Essays in Trauma and Memory*, ed. Paul Antze and Michael Lambek, 173–98. New York: Routledge.
10. Visser, Irene. (2011). *“Trauma Theory and Postcolonial Literary Studies.”* Journal of Postcolonial Writing 47 (3): 270–82.
11. www.literariness.org/2018/12/19/trauma-studies/
12. www.academia.edu/65672104/Cognitive_Approaches_to_Literature_and_Culture