



# Trauma and the Unconscious Mind in Selected Modern English Fiction: A Psychoanalytical Study

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## Abstract

*The purpose of the paper is to argue about how the unconscious mind and the trauma representation are manifested in the chosen modern English fiction regarding the psychoanalytical approach. According to Beloved and Mrs Dalloway, the analysis assesses the development of the traumatic events, rendering them psychologically disturbing processes that cannot be easily articulated and narrated in a linear way. It is written on Freudian and post-Freudian perception of repression, memory and unconscious and how the trauma reappears in the form of broken memories, figurative figures, body exhibitions and disjointed time sequences. Nonlinear narration and stream-of-consciousness narration are employed in the novels as experimental narrative devices, mirroring the way the unconscious mind operates and highlighting the extent to which trauma has shaped identity and vision. The research also highlights the issues of social silence and institutional failure in exacerbating mental misery, as well as examines the least progress toward recovery in recognition and shared memory. As the comparison of the modernist narrative strategy and the postmodern narrative strategy in the context of the study has demonstrated, trauma is a personal aspect and a societal one, which has been defined by the violence and war in history. Finally, the paper will argue that modern English fiction offers a solid literary platform to convey subconscious pain and the discovery of the full grey and unresolved condition of trauma.*

**Keywords:** trauma, unconscious mind, psychoanalytical criticism, modern english fiction, memory and repression

## Introduction

Trauma is implicitly the study of the mind as unconscious instead of an event in contemporary English fiction. According to the psychoanalytical theory, i.e. Freudian and post-Freudian perspectives, the trauma is depicted as a repressed memory and is projected in fragmented memory through repetition, silence, imagery, and symbolism. Rather than occur directly, the traumatic experiences typically occur indirectly in dreams, hallucinations, interrupted time frames or compulsive behaviour, which is brought about by the fact that the mind is unable to assimilate torrents of occurrence (Hallahan, 8). The characters

of the modern English fiction writers have a present that is affected by the past that has not been overcome. Unconscious is an area of the story in which one harbours guilt, fear, and loss, and it will surface automatically.

It is possible to observe that there are also nonlinear plotting and non-trustworthy narration in this case, and it is a reflection of the divided mind of traumatised individuals. Identity is captured, Trauma thus, is that which kills identity, a demarcation between the past and the present, memory and imagination. In terms of psychoanalytical analysis, the works of literature may be interpreted as a field



of working-through in which the characters, as well as the reader, may confront their concealed pain (Lindgren, 9). By means of externalisation of internal conflicts, contemporary fiction subjugates the logical, consistent conceptualisation of the self and ends up revealing the impact of war, mistreatment, contagion and depersonalization of the self in a social environment in the long run. Ultimately, it is stated in these writings that the healing processes are never absolute, but they exist in the unconscious, and they tend to affect the human experience in the most insignificant yet gigantic terms.

### Materials and Methods

The selected study adopts a qualitative, interpretive viewpoint of research based on psychoanalytical literary critique to talk about the manifestations of trauma and the unconscious mind of the selected contemporary English fiction (Newsome, 5). The research approach is the thematic, textual approach, close reading, theoretical interpretation, and comparison.

### Primary Materials (Literary Texts)

The primary sources for this study are two canonical novels that offer rich psychological depth and innovative narrative structures:

**Beloved – Toni Morrison (1987):** Being one of the manifestations of the unconscious, *Beloved* (1987) is selected because it is rather explicit in addressing such issues as historical trauma, memory repression, and haunting (Morrison, 2). The illustration of the psychological trauma of the post-slavery era, as applied in the novel, is a comprehensive view as it presents a crucial analysis of the trauma on a collective level and an individual level.

**Mrs Dalloway – Virginia Woolf (1925):** *Mrs Dalloway* (1925) is chosen to be read because of its stream-of-consciousness style and the indirectness of discussing shell shock, repression, and interiority (Woolf, 3). Octavius Jefferson Smith is the clue to the exhibition of trauma in our thoughts.

Authoritative editions of these novels were accessed through university libraries and reputable academic publishers to ensure textual reliability.

### Secondary Materials (Theoretical and Critical Sources)

There is a framework of psychoanalytical approach; this study will be conducted with the help of the classical and modern theory of trauma and psychoanalysis (Aiello and Calkin, 6). Main theories are Freudian theories of repression, the unconscious and that of repetition compulsion and post Freudian and theorists of trauma who revamp psychoanalysis culturally and in literature.

Peer-reviewed academic journals accessed through databases such as JSTOR, Project MUSE, Taylor & Francis Online, and Google Scholar form a critical component of the research. Prominent journals consulted include:

- Journal of Trauma & Literature
- Modern Fiction Studies
- Psychoanalysis, Culture & Society
- Textual Practice
- Journal of Modern Literature

These sources provide critical debates on trauma narrative, memory studies, modernism, and postmodern literary responses to psychological distress.

### Methodological Approach

The technique employed in the study in arriving at recurring motifs is close textual analysis, which employs the fragmentation, silence, temporal disidentification and haunting. Then, it is these motifs that allow having a psychoanalytical sight to track the way the trauma operates in the unconscious and is indirectly expressed narratively. It is a comparative methodology which gives an aspect of similarities and differences both in the modernist and postmodern portrayals of trauma, particularly in relation to the narrative voice and time (Smith et al., 5). In addition, the contextual analysis positions the novels in historical backgrounds, post-World War I Britain and post slavery America to understand how social trauma intersects with the psychology of an individual.



### **Validity and Limitations**

The fact that the study has used already existing literature and scholarly works that have undergone peer review makes it credible in academia. However, being a qualitative interpretive analysis, the findings can be said to be theoretically generalisable, but not empirically (Călinescu, 152). The method is, however, very acceptable for the analysis of the fragile correlation of trauma, memory and unconscious in modern English fiction literature. Generally speaking, the introduced materials and methods provide a solid and theoretically-grounded paradigm to examine trauma as a language and narrative killer.

### **Findings and Results**

#### **Trauma as Repressed and Unassimilated Experience**

The trauma in both texts has been found to be one of the most significant outcomes, which could not be properly digested during its occurrence. Instead, it gets repressed to a subconscious state and is brought out in indirect, unpleasant forms. We also encounter traumatic residual of slavery in *Beloved* that is both represented in terrifying, haunting, intrusive memories as well as a literal representation of the past symbolised through *Beloved* the character (Jouhara, 148). This means that trauma transcends language and think-through and this is true of psychoanalysis, where the memory of traumas is stored in isolation and cannot be subjected to conscious control.

Similarly to the above, the shell shock, which happened to Septimus Warren Smith in *Mrs Dalloway*, proves that war trauma is accompanied by hallucinations, dulling of emotions and the inability to connect with the social world (Shaheen, Khan and Irshad, 190). The reason why he cannot even clearly say that he is in pain is evidence that language and medical rationality cannot have knowledge of unconscious pain. These findings indicate that trauma is not an event but a persistent psychic trauma.

### **Narrative Fragmentation as a Reflection of the Unconscious**

The other notable finding of the research is that the narrative form and psychological disturbance have a strong relationship. The two novels have a discontinuous nonlinear form, rendering them similar to the subconscious mind. The repetitive use of scenes with different perceptions and the disruption of time in *Beloved* express that the repressed memories continue to recur. The past continues to creep into the present, and it means that the trauma disintegrates the time boundaries. The stream-of-thought technique of the book *Mrs Dalloway* provides the reader with some first-hand experience of the world occupied by the characters (Rouabhia, 6). The circulation of the fluid between the thoughts, the simulation of the memory and sense processes in a state of unconsciousness, whereby time is not moving in a straight manner, and the associations are symbolic and not logical. These findings may prove that contemporary English fiction uses experimental narrative techniques not only as the properties of style, but also as a psychological representation of the trauma in the most authentic form.

### **The Body as a Site of Trauma**

The results of the study also indicate a possibility that trauma is most often carried out by using somatic and not verbal methods. Physical injuries, wear and tear on the mother and exhaustion of *Beloved* are literary works on psychological pain. The supposition of violence is implanted in Sethe even at the times when her mind attempts to brush it off. The issue of trauma is therefore shown as enshrined within the body just as it is within the psyche, affirming psychoanalytical concepts of bodily memory. On the one hand, in *Mrs Dalloway*, the physical reactions of Septimus are panic, shaking, and suicidal thoughts that are signs of distress on an unconscious level (Pain, 976). This is like his body reacts to traumatic events, and he is not even able to consciously interpret the events. The result of this is a common finding of both readings, namely, the disintegration of body and mind as a result of trauma that causes alienation from the self.



### **Isolation, Silence, and Social Misrecognition**

The other conclusion that is significant is the amplification of trauma through social structures. The two novels depict traumatised individuals as solitary persons whose sufferings are not empathised with or even overlooked by society. In *Beloved*, the episodes of silence concerning slavery are provided, and the fact that the community turns back on Sethe psychologically. The healing process does not yet begin until the cumulative recognition of the trauma has occurred, and this means that repressions occur both on a personal and social level (Schweiger, 3). The medical authority, as is manifested within the institutional manner of doing things within the context of trauma, is particularly portrayed as destructive in the context of the Mrs Dalloway case. Septimus has been forced to conform to the ordinary, and this serves only as a factor contributing to his alienation and even killing him. The paper concludes that the social trauma denial upholds the unconscious repression and avoids recovery.

### **Trauma, Identity, and the Fragmented Self**

Another finding that the paper makes is that trauma undermines the identity of an individual. Dissociated individuals struggle to have a sense of self, as the unconscious always penetrates the conscious life. In *Beloved*, the mother's identity is highly split by guilt and loss, as is also Beloved, the main character, who has an absolute identity that is shattered by historical violence. The trauma distorts the specific differentiation of self and other, the past and the present (Karbouniaris, 9). The identity lost in Septimus in *Mrs Dalloway* is complete, and even Clarissa Dalloway displays an indication of holding back and suppressing feelings. This makes the findings suggest that trauma is a continuum, and it does not refer to individuals who are clearly broken, but rather to those who appear socially normal.

### **Possibilities of Healing and "Working Through"**

Finally, the research shows the conflicting findings regarding the opportunity to heal. *Beloved* provides us with a conditional view regarding the restoration process through community narration, memory, and

communal awareness of oppression. Even though psychoanalysis can never lift the trauma off, the confrontation with the unconscious enables the integration and survival to some degree. Otherwise, it has an adverse prognosis in Mrs Dalloway (Henriksen and Gruber, 249). The trauma that had not been overcome in the non-listening society is what leads to the suicide of Septimus. However, his death is met by Clarissa with apprehensive signs of unconscious comprehension that leaves it open to empathy and consciousness to crack restricted domains of facing the trauma.

### **Interpretation and Discussion**

This paper addresses dynamics in such works as *Beloved* and *Mrs Dalloway* that introduce the dynamics of trauma as a personal and social psychological event. The psychoanalytical theory, which was the Freudian theory and subsequent theorists of trauma, says that traumatic experiences in the psyche are overwhelming and cannot be assimilated easily into the conscious mind. This makes them be pushed under the mind where they continue the practice via repetitions, dreams, hallucinations and compulsive behaviour. It is literature that is a particular space where these unconscious forces can be worked out, as even narrative form can have undergone the process of psychological disintegration. Morrison and Woolf both apply the adoption of new narrative techniques as the means of giving contentment to inner suffering, which cannot express itself (Baloch, 43). The historical violence of slavery in *Beloved* cannot be dissociated from trauma. It is revealed in the novel that harsh torture damages the memory and the identity, and the past cannot be carried onboard.

These traumatic events Sethe undergoes are not encrypted in the memory only; in fact, it is indeed manifested in the present by means of the character of haunting, intrusive thoughts, and human personification of *Beloved*. According to the psychoanalytic perspective, *Beloved* is the re-emergence of the repressed exterior manifestation of undeveloped guilt, grief and historical trauma. The fragmented narrative form, the shift of the



perspective and the fractured chronology applied by Morrison simulate the way the unconscious works, time collapse and memories are raised uncontrollably (Roy and Bisht, 8). This trauma in *Beloved* is thus conceived both as individual and as a communion and grounded on a history that the society has attempted to place a lid on. Similarly, the problem of trauma discussed in the same book, *Mrs Dalloway*, is viewed through the lens of the psychological effects of World War I, and in particular in the character of Septimus Warren Smith.

Septimus is also shell-shocked; he hallucinates and cannot express emotion, and shares a certain degree of alienation. His trauma cannot be explained or cured using the rationale of medicine, which demonstrates the difference between conscious knowledge and unconscious affliction. A close understanding of the inner world of the characters is provided due to the narration as stream-of-consciousness offered by Woolf, as the audience learns more about how the past trauma finds its way into the modern lives without any warning (Mahady, 5). Time is dynamic, and the banal experiences bring about forgotten memories, and such is how the unconscious will always find a way into the conscious reality.

Narrative fragmentation as a tool to perceive the psychological approach is one of the most prominent aspects in both of the novels. The linear form of storytelling is not adequate to make the trauma as the memory of trauma in and of itself, is incoherent and persistent. The repetition and the cyclic narration of *Beloved* imply the obsessiveness of the painful memories (Federici, 170). The fluid movement of the thought sequences of the characters is associated with the unconscious thought of *Mrs Dalloway*. This is reinforced by the approach in ways that the trauma process is not narrated in a logical way because it does not aim at closure and resolution. The other key aspect of trauma that has been portrayed in the two readings is that it is left inscribed on the body. Psychoanalysis admits that trauma is somatic, and this is reflected in the physical description of suffering in the form of illustrations in the novels.

The bodily trauma and fatigue of Sethe, the

states of panic and suicide ideation of Septimus, show that the body remains a place where stifled pain is contained and expressed. The traumas consequently disrupt the unity of the mind and the body, destroying the self. The social response to the trauma is also relevant in determining the impact. The two novels are interacting with communities that are not ready or do little to consider psychological sufferings (Sasa and Abu Jweid, 953). The silence around the subject of slavery is what has made the trauma of every person worse in *Beloved*, but it is only able to heal them when society recognises that slavery is real and tells its stories to one another. Institutional power, that sheds light on Septimus in *Mrs Dalloway*, is the power that isolates an individual and renders them hopeless and pathetic.

### Conclusion

This psychoanalytical text demonstrates that contemporary English fiction represents the constellation of the unconscious manifestation of the trauma rather than an event of the past, which has been overcome. The fragmented recollection, interrupted narrative form, and embodiment demonstration can be seen to be the ways through which trauma is presented indirectly in *Beloved*. It is through the two novels that the experiences which have not been assimilated characterise identity and perception and cannot be explained rationally. Finally, this paper concludes that literature is an imperative mode of undergoing the psychological torment, revealing how language and society cannot make sense of trauma, and unleashing the fine chances of recovery through admission and forgiveness.

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