


Trauma and Literature
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Lecture – 61
Carruth's Unclaimed Experience - Part 1


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*Though chilled with horror,
with a second blow
He struck it, and decided then to look.*

Torquato Tasso, *Jerusalem Liberated*

In the third chapter of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud describes a pattern of suffering that is inexplicably persistent in the lives of certain individuals. Perplexed by the terrifyingly literal nightmares of battlefield survivors and the repetitive reenactments of people who have experienced painful events, Freud wonders at the peculiar and sometimes uncanny way in which catastrophic events seem to repeat themselves for those who have passed through them. In some cases, Freud points out,



This NPTEL course is titled “Trauma and Literature”. We will begin with the final section of this course which is a theoretical section the philosophical section. We will be finishing this entire course looking at two works on trauma theory and trauma philosophy.

The first by Cathy Carruth called “Unclaimed Experience” and the final one by Anne Whitehead it is called trauma fiction. So, we will start with Carruth, a very heavily anthologized book called “Unclaimed Experience”. As the very titles suggest unclaimed experiences about those experiences which do not have a name which do not have a classification which are not claimed meaningfully or politically sometimes as well.

In a certain sense we find what Carruth is doing here theoretically drawing on the different models and trauma studies is something which we see at a more experiential level and Urvashi Butalia spoke “The Other Side of Silence” which we have already studied. We just begin with the beginning and Carruth's book and we are talking about the reputation or the repetitive quality and trauma something that she draws on Freud and rehearses it in a way which is original.

She is offering an original theory drawing on some of the classic Freudian models of repetition. The third chapter of “Beyond The Pleasure Principle” Freud describes a pattern of suffering that is inexplicably resistant in the lives of certain individuals.


Perplexed by the terrifyingly literal nightmares of battlefield survivors and the repetitive reenactments of people who have experienced painful events Freud wonders are the peculiar and sometimes uncanny ways in which catastrophic events seem to repeat themselves for those who have passed through them, this idea of repetition, we just finished Toni Morrison's “Beloved”.

We saw in that novel is such a magnificent novel how the repetition the spectral presence or the spectral repetition of the dead child Beloved informs the order of the uncanny in forms or shapes the uncanny in that kind of landscape which is a very political landscape as well. The landscape of slavery torture abuse racial discrimination etcetera.

When Carruth is doing by drawing on Freud, we see something like battlefield survivors people who are PTSD in a sufferer. We have already seen that in the case of someone like Septimus Smith and Mrs. Galloway. The whole point of having someone like Ruth or Anne Whitehead is to apply or map the theory into some of the texts that we have already dealt with.

The idea of the repetition of painful events the repetition of painful memory is something that Freud touches upon in the third chapter of his book “Beyond The Pleasure Principle”. But the uncanny way the strangeness of this is the repetitive quality the fact that these catastrophic events seem to repeat themselves for those who have passed through them.


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these repetitions are particularly striking because they seem not to be initiated by the individual's own acts but rather appear as the possession of some people by a sort of fate, a series of painful events to which they are subjected, and which seem to be entirely outside their wish or control. "The most moving poetic picture of a fate such as this," Freud writes, "can be found in the story told by Tasso in his romantic epic *Gerusalemme Liberata*":

Its hero, Tancred, unwittingly kills his beloved Clorinda in a duel while she is disguised in the armour of an enemy knight. After her burial he makes his way into a strange magic forest which strikes the Crusaders' army with terror. He slashes with his sword at a tall tree; but blood streams from the cut and the



In some cases Freud points out these repetitions are particularly striking because they seem not to be initiated by individuals own acts but rather appear as a possession of some people by a sort of fate series of painful events to which they are subjective and which seem to be entirely outside their wish or control. This means in a nutshell is the question of agency becomes quite complicated and problematic in the traumatic condition.

Because sometimes the repetitions are not voluntary repetitions even the traumatic repetitions it is not as if the subject wants to revisit the moment of trauma it is not the subject wants to revisit experience of trauma that is definitely not the case. But the willingness the agency of the subject seems to be secondary seems to be completely immaterial to a large extent when it comes to traumatic reputation.

We find it is very complex connection between agency trauma and reputation and the whole idea of trauma the whole ontology and experience of trauma seems to suggest some degree of agencylessness one loses control, the motor control, the cognitive control, the experiential control and it extends into social political other forms of control.


The whole idea of agencylessness. The absence of agency seems to be a very key quality in the traumatic reputation of Freud's studies. The most moving point of picture of a fate such as this Freud writes can be found in the story told by Tassu in its romantic epic "Gerusalemme Liberata". This is an epic that Freud talks about and of course we know from Freud's study those of us interested.

Freud drew extensively on architecture on epics all kinds of art forms in terms of understanding how the traumatic reputation was in a very much part of the key condition. Most of Freud's theories can be debated today some have been debunked as well. But the historical significance of Freud in trauma studies today is quite profound and it will be permanent in some sense.

Because he was one of the earliest psychologists he is one of the earliest theorists of the mind if you can describe him that way who actually looked at art and literature and fiction and stories in terms of having a more complex a fuller understanding of the mind as something more complex in the brain. So, that effort that intellectual effort the intellectual investment on the mind on the subconscious on dreams and stories or narratives that investment the intellectual investment is something that really warrants a permanent position for Freud a position of significance for Freud in terms of how we understand mind body dreams language today.

So, that is investigating the mind through stories through art through designs through shapes that was a very pioneering move at that point of time and that is something which is guaranteed for its lasting legacy.


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2 Introduction

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There is a reference to the story about Tasso and there is a figure called Tancred the hero in this particular epic "Gerusalemme Liberata". This little scene over here is a scene

enacted by the hero and how that manifests in some sense the traumatic condition and the repetitive quality of trauma. So, this is the court that Freud uses for the study.

In "Gerusalemme Liberata" the epic by Tasso its hero Tancred threat unwittingly kills his beloved Clorinda in a duel while she is disguised in the armor of an enemy knight. It is a violence out of perception. The beloved of the hero Clorinda she appears in the armor and the disguise of an enemy knight in the process as a duo the hero Tancred unwittingly invadedly kills the person he loves after her burial he makes his way into a strange magic forest which strikes the crusaders army with terror.

He slashes with the sword at a tall tree but blood streams from the cut and the voice of Clorinda whose soul is in prison in the tree is heard complaining that he has wounded his beloved once again. The most important bit in the whole episode over here is the Once Again Bit. So, the violence never goes away the trauma never goes away and that original moment of trauma is revisited again and again.

That revisiting or the reconnect to the traumatic moment is exactly what is being referred to by Freud as a traumatic repetition. It just takes one to the original experience of trauma the original moment of trauma and it is almost like a bodily experiential connect at that point where one touched the moment of trauma quite literally quite viscerally quite corporally and that corporeal connect is exactly what makes us repetitive in quality.

The voice has heard that he has wounded his beloved once again. The actions of Tancred wounding this beloved in a battle and then unknowingly seemingly by chance warning her again advocatively representing Freud's texts the way that experience of a trauma repeats itself exactly and unremittingly through the unknowing acts of the survivor and against his will.

So, again we come back to the same question the same issue that we started off with the idea of the absent will or the experience of the absent will the will being absent the agency being absent the absent agency. So, that that bit about the fact that the perpetrator of trauma the perpetrator of violence in some case, we will suffer the trauma or even the sufferer of violence will suffer the trauma against their will.

The will would be to move away from trauma but then there is a certain degree of fixation a certain degree of being imprisoned to the traumatic moment. We have seen this to a large extent in the character of Septimus Smith in Virginia Woolf versus Mrs. Dalloway the fact that settlements cannot move on literally metaphorically psychologically corporally cannot move on.

He seems to be stuck in some bubble of time where the traumatic moment keeps visiting him and all kinds of sights and sounds around them remind them again and again of the original traumatic encounter or the sight and movement of violence. As Woolf dramatizes it the reputation at the heart of catastrophe the experience the Freud will call traumatic neurosis emerges as the unwitting enactment of an event that one cannot simply leave behind.

This is the key thing away one cannot leave behind the traumatic moment and it is always with oneself. It is internalized in a way that almost becomes part of one's flesh and blood, a degree of corporealization. We sort of corporalize trauma and make that into part of one's body part of one's system. The idea of traumatic neurosis it can be described as an unwritten reenactment of an event that one cannot simply leave behind.

This is what it meant when we talked about Septimus's inability to move on. We cannot leave behind something one cannot move on from something and that inability that fixation that imprisonment that the fact that one is stuck in space and time in that traumatic moment and space makes the neurosis accentuated in quality that intensifies it to a large extent.

However, the literary resonance of Freud's example goes beyond this dramatic illustration of reputation compulsion and exceeds perhaps the limits of Freud's conceptual or conscious theory of trauma. Carruth is doing over here she is taking the leaf out of Freud but she is revising it and says it is actually more complex than that the reputation quality. It just goes beyond.

The simple understanding of compulsion and reputation becomes something more and that is something which Freud did not quite get to for what seems to me particularly striking an example of trauma it is not just the unconscious act of the infliction of the

injury and is individual unwished for reputation. But the moving and sorrowful voice that cries out a voice that is paradoxically released through the wound.

This moving on from Freud is ironically moving on from Freud but this departure from Freud is interesting because she is acknowledging the Freudian quality of reputation that traumatic recursive quality of trauma comes back again and again. But she so offers a model which is an extension of that.

It is also a revision to a certain extent and the moment that she talks about here is the same moment that Freud had alluded to in that epic by tussle where when the hero transferred attacks or brushes against the tree with a sword and then that that the voice of wound comes back again. And interestingly and paradoxically and ironically the voice can only emerge through the wound and that bit is heightily sized over here as you can see.



Through the wound is the wound becomes the only side through which the voice can be voiced in a certain sense voice can be articulated. In Toni Morrison's "Beloved", we talked about the large extent we talked about the idea and experience and the ontology of voicelessness. The only available agency the only available articulation is through the wound.

The wonder becomes interesting because if we just unpack even further the preposition true it means that the voice can only emerge through the wound it has to go through the wound it has to pass through the wound again it has to re-experience the wound again in order to be voiced in order to be articulated as a voice.

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addresses him and, in this address, bears witness to the past he has unwittingly repeated. Tancred's story thus represents traumatic experience not only as the enigma of a human agent's repeated and unknowing acts but also as the enigma of the otherness of a human voice that cries out from the wound, a voice that witnesses a truth that Tancred himself cannot fully know.

It is the moving quality of this literary story, I would suggest—its striking juxtaposition of the unknowing, injurious repetition and the witness of the crying voice—that best represents Freud's intuition of, and his passionate fascination with, traumatic experiences. If Freud turns to literature to describe traumatic experience, it is because literature, like psychoanalysis, is interested in the complex relation between knowing and not knowing. And it is, indeed at the specific point at which knowing and not knowing intersect that the language of litera-



Dan Thread does not only repeat this act but in repeating and he is for the first time hears a voice that cries out to him to see what he has done. The voice of his beloved addresses him and in this address bears witness to the past he has unwittingly repeated. We can see how these the small scene where a person has attacked someone and kills someone by an accident.

And how the voice of the sufferer the voice of the person who got killed comes back to him again in a different context one can see how this seemingly intimate personal scene of emotions and violence of grief of complaint etcetera can be very interestingly. And complexly mapped on the more macro settings, more historical political settings where the voice of the grieving community.

The voice of the suffering community can come back again and again through the wound the wound can be up on a partition the wound could be one of violence one could be any kind of one which is sort of collective in quality. The collective quality of wound is something that clearly will talk about in this book and that is the title that she has in mind when the title of the unclaimed experience comes in. Because the unclaimed experience can be personal can be individual can be existential but also it can be collective it can be something which is shared. It can identify or shape the identity of a certain community or a certain group or a certain ethnicity depending on the context. Tancred represents traumatic experience not only as the enema of a human agents repeated an unknowing acts.

But also as the enigma of the otherness of a human voice that cries out from the wound a voice that witnesses a truth that transferred himself cannot fully know. This is why it really becomes magnificently philosophical because the other quality of trauma comes in truth I know if you again go back to Urvashi Butalia book "The Other Side of Silence". We find that there is a degree of impossibility of knowing what really happened in trauma what really transpired in the trauma.

Because that transpiration, whatever transfer will never expire to a certain extent would always stay and that so, everlastingness of trauma that is almost belated quality about trauma is exactly what makes it so, enigmatic in quality. The idea of truth comes in very interesting and then in the end because the only person only subject who will actually know the truth about trauma is a suffering subject.

Sometimes, it is a dead subject and one can go back to the famous Plato, "Only the dead has known the end of war or seeing the end of what because the only way the walk can end is through death". It is the paradox and the ultimate knowledge of the ending of law can only come when this subject ends to a large extent that happens.

The idea of truth becomes interesting and because over here we have this idea of witnessing the truth and immediately we are in the domain of politics of collective identities of collective violence of in a reparation of forgiveness. All these things come into being but just to stay at the point in terms of what Carruth is saying.

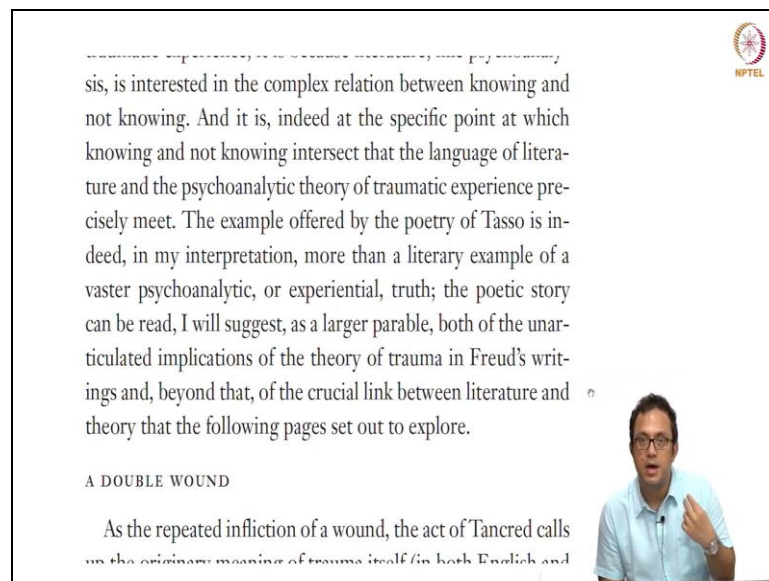
It is not just enough to understand trauma as a reputative mechanism. It is not just enough to talk about trauma as something which is recursive in quality something which cannot be abundant something which cannot be moved on from. But it is also the otherness of a human voice and it is a voice which comes from the other side. The other side can only be possessed can only be owned to a certain extent it can only be articulated by the suffering subject.

It will be impossible for the other subject who is not suffering to understand the truth. It will be impossible for the perpetrator of trauma for the author of trauma for the person who is the non-sufferer of trauma one can never really understand the real kernel of truth

that is characterized that characterizes the traumatic experience. So, witnessing the truth that tanzanite himself cannot fully know.

The grasp of truth can only be incomplete in quality can be inadequate in quality and Tancred who over here happens to be symbolically the perpetrator of trauma the perpetrator of violence will never quite know what really happened what really took place what really transpired.

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sis, is interested in the complex relation between knowing and not knowing. And it is, indeed at the specific point at which knowing and not knowing intersect that the language of literature and the psychoanalytic theory of traumatic experience precisely meet. The example offered by the poetry of Tasso is indeed, in my interpretation, more than a literary example of a vaster psychoanalytic, or experiential, truth; the poetic story can be read, I will suggest, as a larger parable, both of the unarticulated implications of the theory of trauma in Freud's writings and, beyond that, of the crucial link between literature and theory that the following pages set out to explore.

A DOUBLE WOUND

As the repeated infliction of a wound, the act of Tancred calls up the original meaning of trauma itself (in both English and

The bit which comes up now is exactly what we talked about a little earlier and despite the fact that Freud's series. They have been debunked medically, they do not really have much of a medical value today. But he continues to be a very inspiring and significant historical presence not least. Because as mentioned he was one of the first philosophers or the first students shall we say or scholars of the human mind who looked at literature.

He looked at literature the idea of fiction the figurative quality of literature in terms of understanding how that can represent the human mind in very complex ways. It is a moving quality of this literary story that would suggest it is striking juxtaposition of the unknowing injurious reputation and a witness of the crying voice that best represents Freud's intuition of and his passionate fascination with traumatic experiences.

We are talking about the passionate fascination that Freud has with the traumatic experience and the rule that Freud is taking away is literature fiction an epic. It turns in

literature to describe traumatic experience it is because literature like psychoanalysis is interested in a complex relation between knowing and not knowing.

This is the philosophical angle that Carruth is offering it is a brilliant original angle. So, as we can see literature like psychoanalysis is about the interplay but annoying and not knowing literature offers the known the half known the unknown and so, brings everything together through complex focal positions to give us multiple versions of truth multiple modalities of truth as it were.

It is indeed at a specific point at which knowing and not knowing intersect the language of literature and the psychoanalytic theory of traumatic experience precisely meet. This is almost historical in quality and less psychological and quality where Carruth talks about how literature and psychoanalysis can meet and that meeting point is exactly the intersection but in knowing and not knowing.

There is this unknown ability about the human mind. There is this mystery the enigma of the human mind and the enigmatic quality of the human mind is exactly something which is stopped by literature. So, literature becomes simply a complex representation of the mysterious mind it does not become a reflection a passive reflection of the human mind, it becomes a representation.

There is a difference between representation and reflection and literature is a creative representation of the human mind. The play between the interplay between knowing and not knowing between presence and absence. It becomes interesting and these become non-binary categories in literature but these become actually connected categories.

So, knowing and not knowing presence and absence they form they inform each other to shape each other in very complex ways. The example offered by the poetry of Tasso is indeed in the interpretation more than a literal example of a vast psychoanalytic or experiential truth. The poetic story can be read as a larger parable of what are the unarticulated implications of the theory of trauma and Freud's writings and beyond that of the crucial link between literature and theory that the following pages set out to explore.

It is such a brilliant beginning and those of us who write papers and books and articles, this is such an almost master class in terms of how to prepare pitch theory and then one moves on to the content that move on to the real text. But in terms of pitching the philosophical framework and this is such a perfect example of that. Carruth talks about how both literature and psychoanalysis are engaging with the interplay of knowing and not knowing between known and the unknown and in doing.

They are engaging with different orders of truth and different orders of experience. The exponentiality is just a very complex phenomenon. It lies the very interesting theory of trauma that Freud's writings offers and the connection that the same has with literature and literary theory. We have what is offering over here is something that we have seen to some extent and someone like Catherine Malabou.

It is trauma theory in Malabou and post-structuralism but in case of Kerth poem, there is a similar convergence with literature and trauma theory. Because at the end of the day both theories are about the human mind about cognition it is about reality and the recognition of reality. That process of recognition of reality is never complete, it is never a full flawless process.

It is designed to be non-flawless it is designed to be open-ended it is designed to be mutable and immutability of recognition is exactly what is the basic definition of human life. The human life is about mutable recognitions. The traumatic mind where this mutability becomes sometimes accentuated sometimes still sometimes suspended literature becomes perhaps the most important vehicle through which these engagements.

These recognitions of reality especially through the tragedy of trauma can be represented and not just reflected.