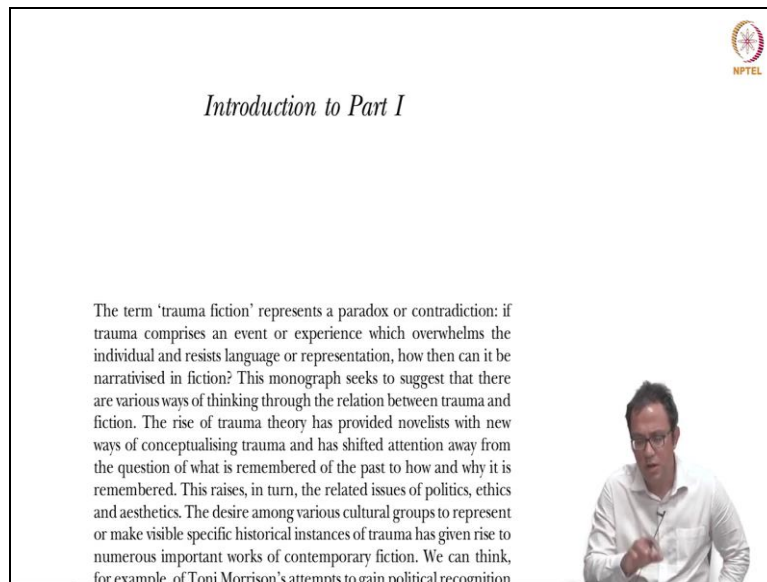



**Trauma and Literature**  
**Prof. Avishek Parui**  
**Department of Humanities and Social Sciences**  
**Indian Institute of Technology - Madras**

**Lecture – 64**  
**Ann Whitehead's Trauma Fiction - Part 1**

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*Introduction to Part I*

The term 'trauma fiction' represents a paradox or contradiction: if trauma comprises an event or experience which overwhelms the individual and resists language or representation, how then can it be narrativised in fiction? This monograph seeks to suggest that there are various ways of thinking through the relation between trauma and fiction. The rise of trauma theory has provided novelists with new ways of conceptualising trauma and has shifted attention away from the question of what is remembered of the past to how and why it is remembered. This raises, in turn, the related issues of politics, ethics and aesthetics. The desire among various cultural groups to represent or make visible specific historical instances of trauma has given rise to numerous important works of contemporary fiction. We can think, for example, of Toni Morrison's attempts to gain political recognition



This course titled “Trauma and Literature”. We will start with the final text for this course which is trauma fiction by Ann Whitehead. It is in terms of looking at how trauma theory and literary fiction can come together which is the whole philosophy the fundamental philosophy behind the course “Trauma and Literature”. It is only appropriate and fitting that we finish with the final reiteration of this framework of trauma and fiction together.

We just finished before this series of texts, novels, fiction, theoretical books categories “Unclaimed Experience” was the text before this and in a way it prepares us for the final bit with which we will end. It just reiterates the theoretical and philosophical points and the urgent reminders as well as the historical significance of trauma theory and in terms of how that shapes and is shaped by the evolving fiction the novels different kinds of literary genres around this issue this topic. It does touch upon “Beloved”, it does touch upon Toni Morrison it does touch upon several themes.

If we look at the opening of this introduction the very first sentence it talks about the paradox or the contradiction about the very term trauma fictions, how can for instance

we define trauma affection because trauma is an experiential event. It is an emotional even, a neural psychological even corporeal event and the very ontology of trauma is something that defies a definition, narratives, the shape given by words.

It is to know how they have a fiction on trauma because the very idea of fiction is to give a narrative shape on an experience or an idea. Trauma fiction seems to be or appears to be a sort of a contradiction in terms which is exactly what Ann Whitehead starts off with and then of course she goes onto write an entire book talking about how this contradiction is actually a convergence in many ways.

Fiction may just be the most potent media and the best vantage point in terms of talking about trauma in terms of telling trauma in terms of representing trauma. The idea that vantage point of fiction is something which is flagged up quite substantially by Whitehead here. The term “Trauma Fiction” represents a paradox or contradiction if trauma comprises an event or experience which overwhelms the individual and resists language or representation how then can be narrativized in fiction.

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The term 'trauma fiction' represents a paradox or contradiction: if trauma comprises an event or experience which overwhelms the individual and resists language or representation, how then can it be narrativised in fiction? This monograph seeks to suggest that there are various ways of thinking through the relation between trauma and fiction. The rise of trauma theory has provided novelists with new ways of conceptualising trauma and has shifted attention away from the question of what is remembered of the past to how and why it is remembered. This raises, in turn, the related issues of politics, ethics and aesthetics. The desire among various cultural groups to represent or make visible specific historical instances of trauma has given rise to numerous important works of contemporary fiction. We can think, for example, of Toni Morrison's attempts to gain political recognition for the suffering of African Americans during and after slavery in novels such as *Beloved* (1987) and *Jazz* (1992). It is also clear that fiction itself has been marked or changed by its encounter with trauma. Novelists have frequently found that the impact of trauma can only adequately be represented by mimicking its forms and symptoms, so that temporality and chronology collapse, and narratives are characterised by repetition and indirection. Trauma fiction overlaps with and borrows from both postmodern and postcolonial fiction in its self-conscious deployment of stylistic devices as modes of reflection or critique. My aim in what follows is to consider trauma fiction first by addressing the impact of trauma theory on the way in

It is to question how do we give a narrative shape to something which is ontologically something which breaks shape, something just beyond or outside the shape the shapelessness of trauma something which destroys the shape shatters the subject how can we narrativize it, how can we devise a fictional method of telling that storytelling experience.

She talks about how the riser trauma theory has influenced profoundly influenced the narrative designs generative experiments in fiction since the 1980s which is the time when trauma theory began to become a very big thing in academia. It was supplemented to a large extent or informed a large extent influence to a large extent by the medical discourses around trauma.

It was around that time after the Vietnam War where the idea of trauma began to become a very big thing in a public space. It was a discourse, a debate. It was in the news, by the public discourse after the war not just limited to medical science not as limited to the military hospitals, to the domestic spaces but very much a topic for debate in the public space and the institutions in the public space.

In a way, that can be seen as a birth of trauma as a public debate as a public narrative as the public discourse 1980s, which is unsurprisingly also a time in which the kind of fiction written about trauma began to come into being in a very heavy way. The rise of trauma theory has provided novelists with new ways of conceptualizing trauma and has shifted attention away from the question of what is remembered of the past to how and why it is remembered.

This is something which we have discussed quite extensively that a large part of trauma is not just about what is remembered the thinness of trauma becomes secondary sometimes but the modality of remembering is interesting to compare trauma studies with memory studies because even memory studies today and some of this is member of the center in Madras.

So, in that kind of a discipline that kind of a discourse what we are more interested in is to look at the manner of memory. The way in which memory is represented the way the way in which remembering happens in a form of representation and also more importantly what gets left behind what is not remembered. The forgetting component of memory; the thing that is not remembered the even the experience the component that is not remembered becomes very important perhaps sometimes more important than the ontology of memory.

So, how and why it is remembered these become more important questions than what is remembered. The whole novel “Mrs. Dalloway” is exactly about that we don't quite know what Septimus is trying to remember, it is just some vague idea about Ivan, the soldier that he loved presumably but then we do not quite have anything beyond a nebulous idea spectral idea of that but what we get increasingly and recursively throughout the novel is the manner in which Septimus is trying to remember events trying to stitch together memory in a very textual way.

Therein lies here the textuality of memory and how trauma theory can underline or foreground this textuality in very complex ways. So, how and why memory becomes more important than what of memory when it comes to trauma. This raises in turn the related issues of politics ethics and aesthetics. These three becomes very important points in politics ethics and aesthetics.

The politics are memory. The political shape, the political momentum, the political narrative which informs the traumatic events which shapes the evil and in some sense the ethics of remembering what should be remembered what should not be forgotten and lastly the aesthetics of membrane, how it is that memory is functioning how is it a trauma is represented.

It is the aesthetic bit about traumatic memory automatic fiction. Politics, ethics, anesthetic, these are three very important components of trauma fiction especially at a time when trauma becomes as mentioned very much part of the public debate of public discoveries around the 80s.

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The ontology of fiction the very narrative design of fiction the form of fiction to a large extent has been shaped by trauma.

The public debates about trauma the discourses about trauma and public vocabulary in public intellectual debates and as mentioned 1980s were that time where it trauma got very much part of the public event in terms of how it becomes very visible it became something of a newspaper topic it became very much a journalistic thing.

It was not really a medical military thing anymore it very much became part of the vocabulary which was used and appropriated and investigated almost on a daily basis. So, in that vocabulary of that interest in public imagination has very much influenced the kind of literature which is written around that time not just at the level of content but also level of form in terms of how those novels got written the anachronistic manner of the sort of non-temporal manner.

They play with space and time the different focal points all these experiments and narrative began to happen around that time as well. So, not only has trauma influenced the content of fiction but also the style and form of fiction that is something which it is quite clear historically evident and something handwritten is also foregrounding.

Novelists have frequently found that the impact of trauma can only adequately be represented in by mimicking its forms and symptoms. So, that temporality and chronology collapse and relatives are characterized by reputation and indirection. We've seen this over and over reputation and indirection and if we remember the category she talks about how this is why Carruth finds Freudian's psychoanalysis.

So, important historically speaking medically maybe Freud theory may have been debunked to a large extent but the historical significance of Freud the social significance of flight is profound as lasting significance it will always be that is permanent because at that point of psychoanalysis where the interplay between what is known or what is not known the interplay about the subconscious and knowledge about narratives.

That convergence was first systematizing psychoanalysis looking at stories looking at dreams as stories looking at dreams as narrative designs. So, that emphasis on narrativity

on storytelling on subconscious always become very important. The influences that emerge out of psychoanalysis. We see as a result of that consequently is the kind of fiction written as mentioned where it becomes non-linear it becomes non-causal it becomes temporal in a very complex way the different kinds of chronotopes.

Chronotopes is a term used by Mikhail Bakhtin, as mentioned this earlier but that idea of space and time put together chronotopes is a device the literary device originally through which space and time are capsuled together clubbed together compounded together. We get a very experimental user space and time which is non-linear non-chronological and non-seamless in quality as well.

So space and time they emerge more as psychological experiential categories rather than chronological categories rather than an ontological category. The exponentiality of space and time the effective understanding of space and time becomes more important with the idea of the chronotope than let us say a calendar sense of time or a seamless quantifiable sense of space.

That entanglement or space and time in a very experiential experimental way is something which we find a lot recursively and trauma fiction around that time. There is an element of mimicking the form and symptoms of trauma. So, anyway what the novelists are trying to do people are Toni Morrison, Carruth, they are trying to represent the inside of the traumatized subject.

They are trying to represent the subjectivity the shattered subjectivity of the human the human self and that process the narrative that emerges out of that self is essentially shattered essentially fractured essentially fragile. So, this fragility of the narrative the fracturedness of the narrative is something which we find over and over again in trauma fiction.

Whitehead is trying to do in a very intellectual way. It is trying to look at the way in which this convergence between the fictional trauma and the experience of trauma have sort of come together and in the process it has contributed significantly to the form and style and content and graphics with which the experience of trauma can be told and

retold through the fictional voice now let's just spend a minute here and talk about why fiction.

So, why is that this sudden industry of trauma fiction there is a certain emergence of trauma fiction around that time because as mentioned the Vietnam War is a key historical point and Whitehead will talk about that in a bit but it is important for us to understand this publicization or trauma the fact that it becomes very much a part of public space is exactly what informs literature.

So, no longer is trauma some kind of an isolated eliminated voice trauma is everywhere everyone's suffering from trauma. Trauma is very visible, it is very cultural. This shift from the medical to the cultural becomes the that historical point in which trauma fiction begins to emerge in a big way and there are medical case studies available there are cultures that is available for almost everyone interested in that and that is very much part of public discourse.

It is possible for the writers to mimic the symptoms of trauma through the narrative shapes through the relative devices. That is why Whitehead talks about the politics ethics and aesthetics. These three pillars these three categories become very complex and very. So, important in terms of negotiating with trauma and the frictionality about trauma the negative shape of trauma so to speak.

So, unsurprisingly trauma fiction overlaps with and borrows from both postmodern and postcolonial fiction in its self-conscious deployment of stylistic devices as merits of reflection or critique. These two terms both modern and post-colonial are very important for our purpose because in both categories of literature we find there's a lot of self-reflectivity there is a lot of deconstructive method which I used in postcolonial as well as post-modern.

We have seen how this deconstructive method of storytelling this play with space and time play with experience play with identities as all these have come together and coalesced in a massive way in terms of looking at trauma. It is to question how trauma fiction draws heavily on these two pillars of friction. Writing post-criminal and the post-



modern pillars and in certain senses a lot of convergence between these two pillars as well.

Because if we take a look at the some of the recursive styles in post-modern fiction as well as in post-criminal fiction both are designed to question the grand narratives both are designed to question authority both are designed to question the uncritical understanding of identity and in the process they are very self-referential they keep drawing attention to themselves as a medium and sometimes they're very meta fictional as well.

They are very aware of their fictionality which is not just revealed but also celebrated the fact that they are fiction the fact that they are drawing attention their own artificiality is something which we see as a very common feature and postmodern as well as postgraduate fiction the artificiality of the storytelling voice it tells the reader that it is a story it tells readers an artificial device it doesn't even aspire to be a seamless realist narrative.


The lack of the non-realism in other words of both postmodern and post-colonial writing is something which directly informs the idea of trauma fiction it is very non-realist. Because it is a deliberate disjunction it is a very deliberate interruption of space time and identity and the way that we commonly consume it. So, that common consumption of space time and identity is interrupted through this deliberate deconstruction of the narrative voice narrative design.

The postmodern and the post-colonial elements and trauma fiction are very heavily then in terms of the self-conscious self-referential meta-fictional quality in which these narratives are shaped and designed now.

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literary studies. The origin of contemporary trauma studies can usefully be dated to 1980, when post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) was first included in the diagnostic canon of the medical and psychiatric professions. The formal recognition of PTSD was the result of sustained political campaigning by Vietnam veterans, who organised agitation groups against the continuation of the war. These groups rapidly spread throughout America and served a dual purpose: to raise public awareness about the effects of the war and to offer support and counselling to returning soldiers. The veterans also commissioned research into the impact of wartime experiences on combatants. This resulted in a five-volume study on the psychological legacies of Vietnam, which clearly delineated the syndrome of PTSD and demonstrated its direct relationship to combat exposure. In formally recognising this condition as a new diagnostic category, the American Psychiatric Association acknowledged for the first time that a psychiatric disorder could be wholly environmentally determined and that a traumatic event occurring in adulthood could have lasting psychological consequences.

Trauma theory emerged in the United States in the early 1990s and sought to elaborate on the cultural and ethical implications of trauma. The first three chapters of this volume explore the work of trauma theorists Cathy Caruth, Shoshana Felman and Geoffrey Hartman. Each of these theorists emerged out of Yale University, where they worked alongside or were taught by Paul de Man, and each took a surprising journey from literary criticism to trauma studies. My choice of theorists reveals a specific affinity of literary criticism with trauma theory and suggests that trauma theory is



Whitehead talks about the idea of literary devices which emerge under trauma fiction. But also this is the point where she talks about what we just said the emergence of trauma as public discourse is a public vehicle of debate and that idea of trauma comes only after the Vietnam War in the western world.

The idea of the experience of the emergence of PTSD, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder because if we remember a novel like “Mrs. Dalloway” which is the first world war novel the term which is used around that time was shell-shock which was very insufficient to a large extent. Because Septimus Smith suffers from shell-shock but no one quite knows what shell-shock is it is just some kind of an ad hoc dumb use some ad hoc classification invented in medical discourses around that time.

Charles Mayers is someone who sort of invented the term the British neurologist but then we saw how very quickly it was discovered that real shell may have absolutely no rule at all and experienced a shell-shock is just a psychological emotional state of disconnectedness of interruption of shatteredness. It was only after several decades in the 1980s that American psychiatric manual came up with a more robust classification a more holistic more rounded classification of PTSD, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

It was this moment where trauma becomes an acceptable category for debate and representation. Ann Whitehead is trying to get that historical moment when that debate opens up and public vocabulary public discourses and just lends itself to the literary representation as well almost immediately.

Trauma fiction also signals a recent journey of the concept of trauma from medical and scientific discourse to the field of literary studies. The origin of contemporary trauma studies can usefully be dated to 1980s a very convenient date very convenient classification that trauma studies begin systematically speaking it begins in 1980s although there are numerous examples of literature which talk about trauma even before that since the beginning of literature as a beginning of novel in a certain sense could be about trauma.

We can think of something like crime and punishment and one of the greatest novels the 19th century tradition is about trauma Robinson Crusoe by Daniel Defoe. It has entire episodes a very deep trauma when Crusoe is maroon on the island he's just shipwrecked and he is completely isolated and eliminated. The trauma that emerges from the other nation is very much them and that is one of the earliest novels written in English literature.

Whitehead is saying the trauma begins in 1980s that is not the claim over here. The claim here is that as a systematic study of trauma as the recursive consistent study of trauma literature that is a point which begins to happen in 1980s. Because there is also a point where we just mentioned how Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder or the emergence the visibility of the traumatic subject begins to become quite rampant of the Vietnam War.

It was Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder PTSD was first included in the diagnostic cannon on the medical and psychiatric professions. The formal recognition of PTSD was a result of sustained political campaigning of Vietnam veterans who organized agitation groups against the continuation of the war. That agitation against the war the resentment against the war that in a popular anger against the war all that came together.

We can see how the politics become very important in terms of shaping the trauma in terms of shaping the traumatic subject. And how it is represented in literature and also elsewhere we can think of many examples in cinema about PTSD. Numerous examples really from the bad films like Rambo to the more complex films like Taxi Driver, Scarcity, Apocalypse, Born on the Fourth of July, there are many examples that we can

think of where PTSD appears is featured in Hollywood cinema which is again the American representation of trauma following the Vietnam war.

These groups rapidly spread throughout America and served a dual purpose to raise public awareness about the effects of the war and offer support and counseling to returning soldiers. There was this idea of raising awareness about the war and in a way this was a moment where again this anti-war protests became quite rampant. Because what it also did was take away the glory the idea of glorious masculinity which was associated with the war and instead it tried to reveal to people to civilians there is nothing glorious about the one.

Everyone is inglorious everywhere is violence everyone is a defeat to everyone who is engaged in the war. So, it just becomes some kind of a de-glorification program and these are real veterans who fought now they came back and they talked about the ethics of violence the guilt of violence and of course the inglorious quality of violence which war creates.

The public awareness was very much there as part of the campaign but what was also them equally is to take care of the veterans who came back from the war and support them medically financially emotionally and every which way. The veterans also commissioned research into the impact of wartime experiences on combatants. This resulted in a five-volume study on the psychological legacies of Vietnam which clearly delineated the syndrome of PTSD and demonstrate them as direct relationship to combat exposure.

The exposure here is the operative word about getting physically violated but it is about the exposure to violence exposure to the sound of violence the sight of violence and what it does to the human mind, the guilt the trauma, the depression the grotesqueness of the violence and that knowledge of violence and how that impacts the human mind at a very permanent level. It is not about getting physically assaulted.

So, that kind of study that kind of research was beginning to happen around that time. So, it was a five-volume study on the psychological legacies of Vietnam the effects of Vietnam and in terms of how the human mind reacted to exposure combat exposure. So,

informally recognizing this condition as a new diagnostic category the American psychiatric association acknowledged for the first time that a psychiatric disorder could be wholly environmentally determined.

A traumatic event occurring in adulthood could have lasting psychological consequences. We find interestingly how the trauma is seen as something which comes from the outside, this is a very good case in point where trauma can be environmentally engineered. When the environment around us can contribute to trauma and that is something which we see for the first time.

It is classified acknowledged by the American psychiatric association that disorders mental disorders can be determined can be engineered it can be controlled environmentally. The traumatic event occurring in adulthood it is not just about something which happened as a child it is not just about abuse and violence suffered by a child which is deeply disturbing and tragic and grotesque.

But also how perfectly healthy adults quote unquote healthy adults they can suffer trauma just by being environmentally exposed under certain combat conditions certain conditions of violence and and vulnerability. This two-fold quality of violence and vulnerability is something which this is a moment where this is almost systematized and theorized.

Violence and vulnerability are connected categories of exposure to violence or creates vulnerability which then in turn produces fragility the subject. The production the fragile subject is directly a result of the traumatic experience the psychological disorders which emerge out of the experience.