

Trauma and Literature
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Lecture – 65
Ann Whitehead's Trauma Fiction - Part 2

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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 inherently linked to the literary in ways that it has not always recognised. In reading literary texts alongside trauma theory, this volume does not simply attempt to 'apply' a psychological or psycho-analytic theory to the text. More profoundly, I seek to remark on a resonance between theory and literature in which each speaks to and addresses the other. The literary readings in each of the chapters add something, or speak something, that the theory cannot say. Rather than simply illustrating the theory, the readings are an extension of the theory's own silences. Theory and literature both speak to and

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This is an NPTEL course titled “Trauma and Literature” on Ann Whitehead’s book “Trauma Fiction”. We were looking at how Whitehead identifies the Vietnam War, the anti-war protests following that in terms of locating the emergence of trauma in the public space and the public discoveries.

It influences and informs the literature around that time as well the shaping of the literature the shaping of the narrative designs the play with space and time, the fragmented narratives experimental works etcetera. It is to locate the idea of trauma fiction or trauma theory which is also sometimes an offshoot from literary theory and that historicizes from a theory to a large extent.

It also helps us understand the constant convergence trauma and representations of trauma may have with the literary lens the literary domain which is exactly what Whitehead is offering here. The 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 theories category of Sushana Feldman and Jeffrey Hartman these are three very big names in the field. Whitehead is offering her some individual chapters on these theories. Each of these series emerged out of the Yale University where they worked alongside Paul de Man.

Each took a surprising journey from literary criticism to trauma studies. It is interesting to see how Paul de Man one of the first founding figures of American deconstruction, a very key figure very seminal presence shall we say in constructing or shaping trauma theory. Because if we look at these three people the three big names that Whitehead mentioned Crude Feldman and Hartman they all emerged from Yale University they were taught by Paul de Man.

They bring in as a training and deconstruction is a training and training related theory and how that can be sort of how they can lend itself to an understanding of trauma from a theoretical perspective from a cognitive perspective from a literary perspective from a narrative perspective. There is that convergence that historical convergence which is always already there now in reading.

“Whitehead is trying to do over here is interesting my choice of theories reveals a specific affinity of literary criticism or trauma theory and suggests that trauma theory is inherently linked to the literary in ways that it has not always been recognized.” So, in certain sense trauma theory has always been some kind of a kinship intellectual kinship cognitive kinship with literature literary theory.

All the literary techniques like deconstruction, vocalization, Chronotope and Focalization Metaphorization Sublimation Fragmentations which were used can really interestingly be connected to the experience of trauma in terms of being a psychological experience which requires a special form of representation literature offers a special form of representation.

So, in reading literary texts alongside trauma theory this volume does not simply attempt to apply a psychological or psychoanalytic theory to the text. It is not just a direct traffic between psychoanalysis and the text literary text it is more it is more complex than that. More profoundly it is to seek to remark on a resonance between theory and literature in

ways which each speaks to and addresses the others there is a dialogue a multi-directional process between literature and the theory trauma theory.

The literary readings in each of the chapters add something speak something that the theory cannot say rather than simply illustrating the theory the readings are an extension of the theory's own silences. We see how literature literacy literary readings can be very useful in terms of looking at silences and in terms of looking at calibrating silences.

We have had non-fictional books such as Urvashi Butalia's "The Other Side of Silence", we have had Toni Morrison's "Beloved", where silence again becomes almost a liminal category. We can see how the liminality in the literary medium can offer very interesting vantage points to which silences can be addressed and articulated and acknowledged.

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peared as a landmark publication in 1995. Caruth combined essays and interviews by literary theorists, film-makers, sociologists and psychiatrists in order to emphasise the trans-disciplinary nature of trauma theory. Introducing the volume, Caruth summarised the definition of trauma which emerged from the diagnostic category of PTSD:

The pathology consists [...] solely in the *structure of its experience* or reception: the event is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly, in its repeated *possession* of the one who experiences it. To be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or event. (1995: 4-5)

Caruth's interest lies in the collapse of understanding which is situated at the heart of trauma. Trauma emerges as that which, at the very moment of its reception, registers as a non-experience, causing conventional epistemologies to falter.

Caruth's conceptualisation of trauma profoundly problematises the relation between experience and event. Trauma carries the force of a literality which renders it resistant to narrative structures and linear temporalities. Insufficiently grasped at the time of its occurrence, trauma does not lie in the possession of the individual, to be recounted at will, but rather acts as a haunting or possessive influence which not only insistently and intrusively returns but is, moreover, experienced for the first time only in its belated repetition. Unsettling temporal structures and disturbing relations between the individual and the world, trauma represents for Caruth a profound crisis of history:

If PTSD must be understood as a pathological symptom, then it is not so much a symptom of the unconscious, as it is a symptom of history. The



Theory and literature both speak to and displays one another throughout the volume signaling to the reader the complex and supplementary relation between these two discourses. There is a supplementary, we say, between theory and literature, "Trauma Theory and Literature". Because literature is the very medium of literature and we have addressed this earlier as well but the very medium of literature is uniquely equipped to accommodate silences, accommodate half-truths, accommodate unknowability accommodate mystery, accommodate spectrality.

All these elements which are key components and experience of trauma can be brought up can be foregrounded can be represented through the literary medium and that makes

it, so, compelling as a medium especially today. Carruth's idea of trauma of course is one of the founding moments in trauma theory and that this book by Carruth, trauma explorations the memory is one of the really seminal texts along with unclaimed experience which you have read already.

We find that Whitehead is referent to the root and drawing on Carruth especially Carruth's understanding of PTSD and how that can be interestingly represented in literature. The medium of literature how that is uniquely equipped to represent post-traumatic stress disorder in terms of looking at disintegration displacement elimination the experience of being an exile and experientially and also copy really.

So, category rules edited volume trauma explorations memory appeared as a landmark publication 1995. Crews combined essays and interviews by literary theorists filmmakers sociologists and psychiatrists in order to emphasize the transdisciplinary nature of trauma theory. There is a transdisciplinary nature of trauma theory in a sense that you can bring in elements from psychology anthropology cultural studies urban geography philosophy of mind.

Literature and medical humanities as well as real medical science studies. So, we find how this transdisciplinary quality of trauma studies is very useful because what we are looking at it is not just the human brain it is not just an experience of trauma. But the very interesting organic relation between the mind the subject the selfhood and how it negotiates and navigates and responds to the external environment which is also mutable and becomes the trauma to a large extent.

It blurs the body lines from the inside and outside at a very fundamental cognitive level it. The feeding subject and the external object begin to blend into each other in very complex ways there analyze the urgent interdisciplinarity or transdisciplinarity of trauma studies. It is a requirement a fundamental requirement in this discipline now introducing a volume Carruth summarized the definition of trauma which emerged from the diagnostic category of PTSD.

This is from trauma explorations and memory. It is to question what is trauma, PTSD, the whole experience and symptom of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. This is Catholic

Root from the book trauma explorations memory page four and five the pathology consists solely in the structure of his experience or reception the event is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time but only belatedly.

We will come to the idea of Freud's idea of belatedness in a moment in his repeated possession of one who experiences it to be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or an event. The sense of possession, almost supernatural in quality. It means possession is the free idea of being possessed by something. It is the opposite of processing something when one is possessed with something we cannot process.

Possession and processing become ontological and experiential opposites. The idea of trauma is the very experience of drama relies on abruptness and also in the idea of being not been able to process it. There is a sense of being possessed by something because we cannot process it. It can only appear as a belated understanding we have seen this already in our reading of crude in "Unclaimed Experience".

The whole idea of unclaimed experience something which we cannot claim it is almost like a spatial time special temporal thing. Carruth's interest lies in the collapse of understanding which is situated at the heart of trauma. Trauma emerges as that which at the very moment of its reception registers as a non-experience causing conventional epistemologists to falter.

So, conventional knowledge systems epistemologies and knowledge systems, the conventional available knowledge systems will falter and that shattering system is one of the primary conditions of trauma one of the primary principles of trauma. It is abrupt and shatters conventional understanding of the subject of knowledge and the very moment of reception is also a moment of non-processing the moment of being possessed.

It registers as a non-experience because you can't understand it, it is only available for understanding and processing in a much related way and the belatedness is very important.

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temporally. Insufficiently grasped at the time of its occurrence, trauma does not lie in the possession of the individual, to be recounted at will, but rather acts as a haunting or possessive influence which not only insistently and intrusively returns but is, moreover, experienced for the first time only in its belated repetition. Unsettling temporal structures and disturbing relations between the individual and the world, trauma represents for Caruth a profound crisis of history:

If PTSD must be understood as a pathological symptom, then it is not so much a symptom of the unconscious, as it is a symptom of history. The traumatized, we might say, carry an impossible history within them, or they become themselves the symptom of a history that they cannot entirely possess. (1995: 5)

Caruth's articulation of a crisis of historical experience resonates powerfully with the broken narratives and disrupted lives which have emerged out of the debris of recent traumatic events. Focusing on the structure of trauma, Caruth knowingly risks the accusation of losing the specifics of an event in a generalisable condition, but far from seeking to minimise or downplay suffering, her work represents an important attempt to think through the hiatuses and dislocations which necessarily inhabit trauma.

Caruth's emphasis on trauma's disruption of time or history draws

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Carruth's idea of the temporal gap between the suffering subject and the the thing which suffers makes the subject suffer the experience of suffering. The ontology of the experience and the suffering subject sight of suffering and the content of suffering there is a gap there is a liminal temporal structural gap.

It means is trauma carries the force of a literality which renders it resistant to narrative structures and linear temporality. This is the original moment of contradictions if trauma definition of the shattering of subjectivity shattering knowledge systems how can that be a part of a narrative design. So, how can there be trauma fiction is not even ontologically possible to have trauma fiction.

The insufficiently grasp at the time of its occurrence trauma does not lie in the possession of the individual to be recounted at will but rather acts as a haunting or possessive influence which not only insistently. But intrusively returns but is moreover experienced for the first time only in this belated reputation. So, this is the interesting thing about trauma it can only be experienced for the first time and it is related reputation.

Reputation is the form of representation over here reputation is the first awareness of trauma because the moment of trauma does not allow one processing, and then knowledge does not allow one in experience. So, it is non-experiential in quality in a certain sense because one cannot cognize it. One can only recognize it. The reputation is

recognitions the trauma is something an experience which can only be recognized or re-hyphen cognized.

Therein lies the quality of related reputation now unsettling temporal structures and disturbing relations between the individual and the world trauma represents focus a profound crisis of history because if we talk about history as being an epistemological structure it is a trauma and undercuts the structure entirely because we can only refer to it belatedly.

We can only go back to it and understand it for the first time. So, that in a way is a crisis of history. So, if PTSD must be understood as a pathological symptom then it is not. So, much a symptom of the unconscious as a symptom of history the traumatized we might carry an impossible history within them or they become themselves a symptom of a history that it cannot entirely possess.

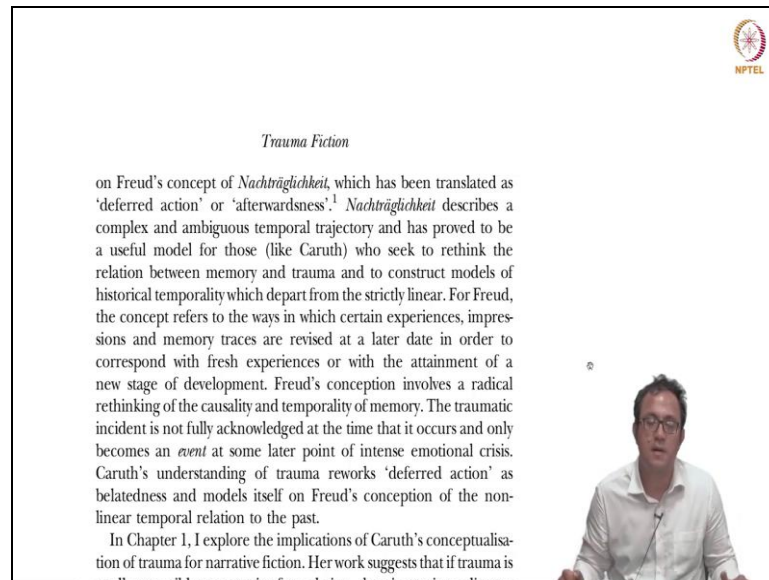
So, history or the knowledge system which the subject can possess is something which is entirely unavailable to the traumatized subject because they do not have the knowledge system. It is a symptom of history, it is some kind of an aporia in history, an interruption a historical process. It is not so much a system of the unconscious but it is a symptom of history and the failure the collapse of history.

We can see how this connects directly to the idea of brokenness in sentences the non-temporal quality of trauma fiction the play with space and time the non-synchronous non-compatible, non-linear quality of experience that trauma fiction constantly foregrounds. Because that is the unavailability of knowledge the unavailability of known understanding of processed understanding.

It is only a related effort to belatedly capture the experience. So, calibrate experience which is always slipping away which is always ephemeral to a large extent and the ephemerality of trauma. The evanescent quality of trauma the sort of slipping away of knowledge is something which is always there, some kind of a haunting quality it comes it keeps coming back but it is also slipping away all the time.

They realize that bi-directional quality of trauma almost centrifugal centripetal that play anyway it is comparable to the play between what is known and what is not known. Carruth had mentioned an unclaimed experience which connects trauma with literature in a very direct organic sort of narrative way ontological way.

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The slide features a video of a man in a white shirt speaking on the right side. On the left, there is a text box with the following content:

Trauma Fiction

on Freud's concept of *Nachträglichkeit*, which has been translated as 'deferred action' or 'afterwardsness'.¹ *Nachträglichkeit* describes a complex and ambiguous temporal trajectory and has proved to be a useful model for those (like Caruth) who seek to rethink the relation between memory and trauma and to construct models of historical temporality which depart from the strictly linear. For Freud, the concept refers to the ways in which certain experiences, impressions and memory traces are revised at a later date in order to correspond with fresh experiences or with the attainment of a new stage of development. Freud's conception involves a radical rethinking of the causality and temporality of memory. The traumatic incident is not fully acknowledged at the time that it occurs and only becomes an *event* at some later point of intense emotional crisis. Caruth's understanding of trauma reworks 'deferred action' as belatedness and models itself on Freud's conception of the non-linear temporal relation to the past.

In Chapter 1, I explore the implications of Caruth's conceptualisation of trauma for narrative fiction. Her work suggests that if trauma is

Carruth's emphasis on trauma's disruption of time or history draws on Freud's concept of *Nachträglichkeit* and this idea of the belatedness afterwardsness as a German word. The idea of belatedness or retroaction that Freud talks about largely unkindly.

So, something which is outside the home and it is outside of time to a certain extent. So, outside of him outside of space and outside of time. Freud's concept of deferred action or *Nachträglichkeit* or afterwardsness is some kind of a complex and ambiguous temporal trajectory and has proved to be a useful model for those like who seek to rethink the relation between memory and trauma and to construct models of historical temporality which depart from the strictly linear.

There is that quality about Freud's idea of afterwardsness and to wind up with this bit and the course using this last theoretical framework this nodal point to which we can revisit the text that we have examined so far. But let us spend some time talking about what Freud actually means by this concept of *Nachträglichkeit*.

It is to know how this afterwardsness of drama is useful category useful theoretical category understand trauma and how people like Carruth draw on this to devise their

own trauma theory. This departure from strictly linear history this departure from a linear understanding of space and time is a condition in trauma it is an interruption from linearities an interruption from linear forms of not just space and time.

But also embodiment because even embodiment is a spatial temporal category you are constantly engaging with space and time in order to keep reappearing as a as an involved itself and that interruption of embodiment is something which was exactly happening at least two texts we have studied. So, far directly which is Septimus Smith and “Mrs. Dalloway” by Virginia Woolf and also Tobe Tek Singh. Manto's eponymous text saying, where both characters show some kind of interruption or suspension in space and time and how that affects the embodiment very directly in the amount of stories more graphic.

We find how the subject's lags began to swell up and it is almost like an accumulation of space and time. Because it is not moving in space and time anymore it is stuck in space and time and space and time seems to seem to grow inside him in a very corporeal fleshy way. There is that quality of departure from liminality. For Freud, this concept refers to the ways in which certain experiences impressions and memory traces are revised at a later date in order to correspond with fresh experiences or with the attainment of a new stage of development Freud's conception involves the radical rethinking of the causality and temporality of memory.

We can see how Freud is important for us historically although psychologically and like we keep saying that a series may not be scientifically valid anymore. This idea of a departure from space and time, a departure from a linear way of thinking about space and time and it is non-linear temporal structure. And how it corresponds to the traumatized mind is something which flight systematically showed for the first time or at least engaged with from an intellectual point of view.

There it lies a radical re-definition of the traumatized mind. The traumatic incident is not fully acknowledged at the time that it occurs and only becomes an event at some later point and of intense emotional crisis. There is a relatedness that it is not acknowledged at that time because by very definition it is a step outside of space and time and only when we come back to space.

We acknowledge time later as some kind of event which is outside of the normative framework. It is acknowledged as an event with intense emotional crisis. So, Carruth's understanding of trauma reworks deferred action as belatedness and models itself and Freud's conception of the non-linear temporal relations to the past.

Whitehead's understanding of trauma and drawing on Carruth because and this is the concluding bit of the session and also for the entire course because what we can see here is the idea of play with time that we play with space is something which literature has always done since the very beginning. The very ontology of the novel is a play with space and time, it is offering us any novel will offer us an alternate universe an alternate space and time.

Every novel is by default some kind of science fiction because it is giving us an alternate reality in which we can imagine characters move fall in love die eat, do all kinds of things which we do in normal life. But it is happening in some of the space and times there is already a departure from space and time which we see in the novel, in the very medium of the novel. Literature in general is some kind of a production of an alternate reality in which characters come and depart and carry on the actions which we do in a normal life but in a different way in a more complex ways perhaps.

It becomes that idea of the alternate universe in which fictional characters are co-inhabiting space and time comes perhaps closest in terms of inventing a medium that can help us telescope our experiences in a different medium in a different world in a different world view in a different space and time. The very ontology of fiction, the ray ontology of the literature it allows belatedness, it allows retrospective narration, and it allows retrospective realization.

As it is producing an alternate universe very ontologically it produces that universe it produces a functional landscape where characters move around and there is a negative control there is a narrative quality which can interrupt linearity in space. Time which can interrupt embodiment which can produce belated understanding of truth and reality and event. There are novels where we have to go back to the beginning by the time and re-read it in order to understand what really took place because there are deceptive starts there are false starts there are uncertain unreliable narrators.

All these components can be sort of very conventionally used in literature and they have been used since almost the beginning of the literary device, the literary imagination, the literary novel of the poetry of John. One of the earliest novels being *Tristram Shandy* where the idea of unreliable narration the idea of interruptions in space and time, the idea of fragmented space and time have been foregrounded have been sort of almost naturalized in that novel.

It is not something new, it is not something that just happened after the Vietnam War although after the Vietnam War we can see how the public discourse on trauma the public discussions and debates and drama they all profoundly shaped the way novels were written and consumed and designed. There is that systematic quality which emerged after that moment but in general ontologically speaking novel or fictional literature it is always been about experimentation.

Space and time it is always been about belated understanding it is always been about revisiting the truth and re-realizing the truth. Literature is about recognition in a very literal sense recognition. That sense the idea of trauma, the idea of belatedness and trauma the idea of incomplete understanding the idea of play between what is known what is not known, there is always been there it is always been the business of literature to a large extent.

As a way of conclusion in a way of conclusion, a course like “Trauma and Literature”, it is very important for us to understand the different mediums that we're talking about the medium of trauma which does not allow linearity which does not allow complete understanding of the even because by definition it is an incomplete grasp of reality it is an incomplete engagement with reality and the medium of literature which in a way.

So, sort of is an industry of incompleteness in a way it promotes incomplete understanding because any novel will give us no matter how classical is it is any novel will give us open-endedness in various forms either overtly or covertly. This production of open-endedness this generation of open-endedness and literature is something which makes it very compatible, very organically and closely compatible with trauma the experience of trauma the modality of trauma.

We come to an end of this course I hope it has been a fruitful journey for all of you this course was recorded in very difficult circumstances where the height of corporate. This course has a very interestingly and ironically this is probably more relevant than ever before the idea of “Trauma and Literature”, the idea of trauma and imagination. How trauma affects us at a daily domestic level it is not just about a big event model of trauma and memory it is about the dailiness of trauma the ketone quality of trauma the evidence of drama which is something we've experienced profoundly and very disturbingly during the entire experience of this pandemic COVID 19.

So, far in NPTEL and after all of you it is perhaps the most experientially a relevant course for me as an instructor. I hope there will be takeaways for you as a learner as a student we all students together we are all learning together. But I think this I hope this will be rewarding for you as well as an experiential as well as at an academic intellectual level.