

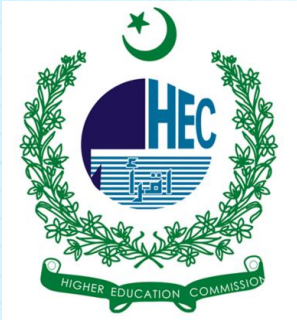
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**Exploring Impact of Unresolved Childhood Trauma and
Fragmented Memories on Identity and Behaviour: A Caruthian
Study of Liz Moore's *The God of the Woods***



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Abstract

This study investigates the symbolic, narrative and psychological aspects of childhood trauma and incomplete memory in the novel *The God of the Woods* by Liz Moore. Based on the trauma theory the paper utilizes the contribution of Cathy Caruth, Sigmund Freud, Shoshana Felman, Dori Laub, Judith Herman and Michael Marder as it explores the trauma influence on identity, behavior and story-telling. The research acquires a qualitative, theory-based approach to textual analysis and studies the ways in which trauma is rendered not only in the struggles of the characters but also in the narrative disjunction, silence, and spatial symbolism as well as the intergenerational transmission. The research also identifies the gendering of emotional suppression in female characters where the experience seems to be silenced as the result of being internalized by the characters. The evidence provided indicates that literature as a work of formal choices can serve as an instrument of ethical bearing witness. This study underlines the identity of the reader as the witness of the trauma, and the necessity of being a sensitive reader who is paying close attention to the text with empathy. This research provides a response to general discussions about trauma, feminist literary studies, and cultural memory by introducing trauma as an emotive force and narrative because it is this influence that causes the more comprehensive effects of unresolved grief and silence, both socially and psychologically.

Keywords: Cathy Caruth, intergenerational, The God of the Woods, Liz Moore,

1. Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

The psychological and literary definitions of trauma are similar to the definitions of conditions that are considered to be beyond the capacity of humans to cope with because they inhibit the correct processing of emotions. Trauma is a condition that is established by psychology and psychiatry as being experienced via intense emotional states that are caused by mind-altering experiences that violate personal safety and rational memory function (Hogg et. al. 2023). Identification fragmentation and memory dislocation are frequently shown in literature through the use of statistical data on recovery (Farzand, 2024).

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Online ISSN: 3006-5895

Using literary analysis researchers can understand how people utilize narrative processing both as individuals and as collective entities to deal with their distress through trauma theory (Shakir, 2025). Within psychoanalysis trauma theory enables researchers to analyze victims' behavioral responses when lifestyle collapses into extreme chaos following problematic circumstances that simultaneously hurt both their thinking and mental state (Clayton, 2024). Analysis of writers with traumatic content deploys research methods to detect their uncommon narrative patterns which develop in absent text spaces and mental collapse points (Asati & Tiwari). The human mind represents a major obstacle since people find it difficult to discuss things they consider unexamined and unacceptable for public exposure according to Trauma theory (Abbas, Abbas & Zhang, 2024).

An investigation of the roots of trauma theory logically necessitates an examination into how an idea derived from surgical intervention has evolved to signify an emotional condition of unprecedented magnitude (Billington, 2025). Throughout her work, *Trauma: A Genealogy*, Ruth Leys merely examines this subject additionally endeavors to provide an explanation (Göschl). She accomplishes this by outlining an intellectual background for the notion of "trauma," spanning through the initial descriptions of "horrific disorders" to a succinct evaluation of Cathy Caruth's significant contributions to the study of traumatized recall (Lawlor, 2024). The ongoing multidisciplinary discussions in trauma theory will be influenced by the dual implication of the word "trauma," encompassing both mental and physical dimensions (Ali et. al. 2023). Ruth Leys persuasively advocates for this perspective regarding the topic under discussion.

The development of scientific engagement with trauma is notably marked by repression, absence, as well as reemergence—terms typically used to describe the several stages of distressing remembrance (Lerner, 2022). The repression of trauma involvement transpired shortly following its identification with John Erichsen, who attended to survivors of railroad disasters afflicted by profound anxiety (Göschl). The expression "traumatic neurosis," initially coined by German neurological specialist Paul Oppenheim, garnered significant attention among physicians in the last quarter of the 19th century (Schmiedebach, 2022). Nevertheless, these practitioners failed to establish a correlation among physical surprise and the psychological distress

experienced by those they treated, leading to the attribution of trauma to tangible yet unidentifiable intellectual changes.

Other thinkers, in addition to Freud, contributed to the expansion of early understanding on trauma throughout that time period (Leenaerts, 2025). Pierre Janet, Jean-Martin Charcot, and Hermann Oppenheim all conducted their own study independently, and as a result, they came up with their own original hypotheses on the ways in which traumatic experiences might create psychological fragmentation (Sanfelippo, 2023). By placing an emphasis on the harm that trauma inflicts on mental awareness and memory retention as well as personal identity, these researches laid the groundwork for future trauma investigations that would make use of both psychoanalysis and psychiatry.

Over the course of the second half of the twentieth century, a group of academics, which included Cathy Caruth, Shoshana Felman, and Geoffrey Hartman, outlined the path that trauma theory took from scientific study to literary studies (Hemanth). With regard to literary trauma studies, Cathy Caruth continues to be the most significant contribution during the many stages of its growth (Coban, 2023). According to Caruth's assertions in *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (1996), trauma cannot be simply represented because it appears via narrative defects and repetitive formulations that postpone direct release (Wright, 2021). This is the reason why trauma cannot be easily represented. According to Caruth, trauma is defined by its latency (Oanh, 2021). This is due to the fact that trauma is not fully realized at the moment it occurs, but it continues to resurface in the form of memories and acts that one cannot control in the person who has experienced it. According to her point of view, the primary way in which trauma manifests itself is through its recurrent manifestations, which continue to haunt until other means of storytelling are required to address them.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The monitoring of one's mental health should be given the same amount of attention as one's physical health. Psychological trauma is one type of issue that can occur with a person's mental health as a result of a stressful event or series of events in their life. The effects of traumatic event depends on the individual's level of sensitivity. A person's likelihood of developing post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) depends on a

number of internal and environmental factors including hopelessness, fear, guilt and the significance of friends and family in their lives. Post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms might range from a very mild emotional disturbance to a higher risk of suicide. The present research study has indented to explore the impact of psychological trauma in the complex narration of the novel *The God of the Woods* and how its devastating effects have make characters suffer in their everyday life.

1.3 Research Objectives

The objectives of the present study are:

1. To explore childhood traumatic experiences that shape the personality, behaviour and identity of the characters in the novel *The God of the Woods* (2024)
2. To highlight the devastation that can result from unacknowledged and unresolved trauma depicted in the novel *The God of the Woods* (2024)
3. To address the issues regarding the generational transmission of trauma and the function of community in promoting resilience or sustaining painful cycles through these characters in the novel *The God of the Woods* (2024).

1.4 Research Questions

This study discusses the following research questions:

1. What are the childhood traumatic experiences that shape the personality, behaviour and identity of the characters in novel *The God of the Woods* (2024)?
2. How does unacknowledged and unresolved trauma can bring devastation and psychological sufferings in the lives of the characters, in the novel *The God of the Woods* (2024)?
3. What issues regarding the generational transmission of trauma and the function of community in promoting resilience or sustaining painful cycles are depicted in the novel *The God of the Woods* (2024)?

1.5 Significance of the Study

The research has a wide range of potential applications, which make it fundamental. This research has highlighted the psychological complexities of human mind and the impact of unresolved traumatic experiences on human psychology and behaviour. Firstly, the study has contributed to the improvement of literary research by providing a detailed analysis of a genre that has struggled with themes of trauma, fragmented memory, identity transformation, depression, abuse, grief, sexual violence,

environmental ruin, and economic instability. Secondly, this study has contributed to the ongoing discourse within trauma studies by demonstrating the complex internal familial relationships. The proposed study has practical implications for readers, scholars, and educators who have been interested in the convergence of literature, trauma and identity crisis. It has prompted a critical evaluation of how literature has served as a mirror to societal transformation, offering readers a deep understanding of the human experience in the face of trauma and identity crisis. Additionally, this work has been beneficial for future scholars of literature and especially for isolated people. This research has focused on individual experiences and psychological dimensions of people.

1.6 Delimitation of the Study

The delimitations of this study have established the boundaries and scope of the research, focusing on Liz Moore's *The God of the Woods* through the lens of Cathy Caruth's trauma theory. The study has centred on the novel's exploration of trauma, particularly how it has manifested in the characters' psychological and childhood experiences, as well as its impact on fragmented memory, identity, and relationships. The analysis has prioritized the experiences of characters who have exhibited symptoms of trauma, such as dissociation, repetition, and belated understanding, as theorized by Caruth. Themes of loss, survival and the unspeakable nature of trauma have been examined, while other themes, such as class conflict or environmentalism, have not been explored unless they have directly intersected with the trauma narrative. The study has focused on the novel's narrative structure, including its use of fragmented timelines and shifting perspectives, as they have reflected the disjointed and repetitive nature of traumatic memory. However, it has not extended to a border analysis of narrative techniques unrelated to trauma. The research has not incorporated other literary theories, such as feminist or Marxist criticism, unless they have complemented the trauma theory framework. Additionally, the study has not delved deeply into the historical or cultural context of the 1970s and 1990s unless it has directly informed the understanding of trauma in the novel. By setting these boundaries, the study has aimed to provide a focused and in-depth analysis of *The God of the Woods* through the specific lens of Cathy Caruth's trauma theory.

2. Literature Review

A significant amount of research has been produced in the time that has passed between the publication of the selected book and the availability of the current theoretical framework for the study of literature. This chapter discusses a number of the most recent findings that are pertinent to the study that is currently being conducted. Trauma theory is extensively utilized as a crucial paradigm for examining the ways in which pain is understood, recalled, and exhibited in literature and cultural studies (Alexander, 2013). A significant number of people use this concept. According to Caruth (1996), this research investigates how going through intense emotional experiences that are difficult to control might leave memories that are either preserved in fragments or only emerge to the surface at a later time. A person's style of describing and portraying real-life events is altered as a result of a traumatic incident, according to research conducted by Felman and Laub (1992) and Whitehead (2004). A traumatic event is not only a mental anguish.

With nonlinearity, silence, repetition, and fragmentation, literature can describe traumatic events in a way that is both explicit and hidden at the same time (Vickroy, 2002). Trauma theory pays attention to ethical questions such as what it is acceptable to observe and recall. This approach makes it possible to identify the effects of trauma on personal and culture life and on the books preserving its memory. Developing an ability to manage events with ease is a key part of the emotional growth process. Teenagers develop a personal perspective that helps them at organize and make sense of life events (Stein, Trabasso & Albro, 2001). Literature that focuses on trauma has been shown by experts in the field of education to help young people develop strong resilience and greater empathy. Many trauma authors have shown that retelling experiences gives individuals a sense of power over them. How does reading about misfortunes influences a person's personal development? Exploring trauma literature may contribute to an individual's emotional development. Rajan-Rankin (2014) suggest that the development of narrative and a sense of identity play a crucial role in helping young people build resilience in the face of trauma. You could interpret it to mean that to form a keen sense of self, people need to make sense of their experiences by weaving personal narratives around both the positive and difficult events they have encountered. By giving people an indirect but powerful way to

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confront and make sense of profound pain, literature allows readers to explore profound emotions in a contained and manageable setting (Hogan, 2011). It has been found that engaging in self-reflection can lead to improved empathy and resilience in people.

According to Gibbons (2019), telling painful memories can bring about a feeling of emotional equilibrium and give a means to reclaim it. Exploring one's feelings through the medium of literature frequently adds to the development of one's personality. A person is said to have experienced trauma when they were involved in a potentially harmful incident, such as an accident, a sexual assault, or a natural disaster. A significant number of people, after experiencing a traumatic event, go through phases of denial and shock following the event. In the months and years that follow a traumatic incident, a person may face decreased levels of communication, more negative thinking, stressful relationships, worsening health issues, difficulties with employment or academics, and a decrease in confidence in their own talents. Leaving a traumatic experience unresolved can have a variety of negative repercussions on an individual (Van der Kolk, 2003). An investigation recommended for the construction of counseling facilities in each and every school, as well as the promotion of public awareness through initiatives that were initiated by the Ministry of Information. The beginning of a traumatic experience can cause major mental and emotional disturbances, and it is frequently followed by persons refusing to accept what took happened. It has the potential to cause emotional turmoil, difficulties in relationships, and a worsening of pre-existing health problems over the course of time. When it comes to dealing with traumatic experiences that were not completely addressed in the past, therapeutic interventions are very necessary.

The question of whether or not emotional trauma may alter the way memories are preserved and whether or not such memories are regarded trustworthy by subsequent recollection has been debated for a considerable amount of time within the expert community. In the area, there is a significant challenge since there are no reliable rules for determining which emotions are associated with trauma (Weathers & Keane, 2007). When the volunteers were evaluated, researchers could not find any evidence of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) even after they had viewed upsetting film such as that from public executions of large groups of people. As a

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consequence of this, there are significant concerns regarding the dependability and application of the findings from trauma research. There is a lack of consensus among specialists over whether or not the effects of genuine traumatic experiences can be entirely replicated by being exposed to recorded trauma in a laboratory setting. The feelings that you experience after seeing a video of an automobile accident are incomparable to those that you would feel if you were actually there, particularly if a loved one was involved in the accident. The way that we are affected by traumatic events in real life is incomparable to the way that we are affected by what we see in movies or what we may feel when we are engaged in simulated settings. The workplace is another setting where this is beneficial.

Although there is a large amount of research on trauma theory since the 1990s and its importance for both psychoanalysis and literature, its application to contemporary fiction seems overlooked. Historical events, for example the Holocaust, slavery, colonialism and war, have usually been the main subject of trauma studies because the representation of the trauma is often straightforward and based in real history. Authors like Toni Morrison, Art Spiegelman, Pat Barker and their peers have helped trauma scholars a lot, mainly because of the work done by Sigmund Freud and Cathy Caruth. Most of these works highlight Caruth's main ideas: the idea that trauma occurs after the initial incident, is hard to fully grasp and can be understood best if we hear the other talk about it (Caruth, 1996). Yet, by paying so much attention to war-related trauma, literary study has overlooked subtler trauma found in recent fictions, often based in places like small-town America where deeper family issues and avoidance give rise to it.

This book, *The God of the Woods* (2024), by Liz Moore, is a prime example of this group of novels. Even though the novel is well-known, it still has not been examined through the lens of trauma studies. Moore writes about loss, quiet secrets, broken memories and the silence passed from one generation to another, topics important in Caruth's theory, while also placing the story in a unique setting that, unlike many others, is not historically centered. Additionally, the setting of Moore's novel allows us to try out Caruth's theories in a different way, focusing on close and intense experiences at home rather than intense outward conflict. The story is told in a repetitive and interrupted manner just like trauma which helps Caruth's (1996) and

Freud's (1920) ideas about deferred action, find a place in the novel. Also like Marder (2006), Moore points out that trauma often brings about trouble in families and leads to common tactics such as silence and festivity related.

3. Research Methods and Theoretical Framework

3.1. Methodology

The research methodology for present study is qualitative in nature and descriptive in design, based on textual analysis. The primary sources for the data collection is text of the novel, whereas Cathy Caruth's Trauma Theory and its featuring components served as theoretical lenses. This research also take other supportive sources of data collection such as different, research article, journals and newspapers and various books relevant to both chosen novel and theory. Researcher has taken psychoanalytical theory, particularly trauma theory and its components for present research.

3.2. Theoretical Framework

Trauma theory is now a dominant paradigm of literary criticism, especially after the 1990s, when critics started to address how literature bears witness to traumatic events, how it represents and processes trauma. The field emerged out of psychoanalysis and more particularly out of the works of Sigmund Freud (Ffytche, 2016), and has been developed by the works of recent theorists including Cathy Caruth, Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub. In literary usage, the notion of trauma is thus related not only to the mental impress of adverse experiences (Hartman, 2003), but to the linguistic expression of those experiences - which is frequently indirect, in the form of omissions, silences, non-sequential narration or retarded recognition. The trauma theory therefore addresses the content and the form of literature and how the narratives themselves can be seen as the rupture of the psyche.

Applied to Liz Moore's *The God of the Woods*, the trauma theory gives readers an opportunity to explore how the unresolved childhood trauma, repressions, and fragmented memories affect the identity and behavior of the characters. The usefulness of this theoretic framework is specifically linked to the fact that the structure of the novel, as of nonlinear plot development, alternating points of view, and psychological complexity, reflects the inner disarray of trauma survivors. Application of Cathy Caruth's theory of trauma that emphasizes on belatedness,

deferred knowledge and crisis of representation is particularly suitable in examining how memory, identity and language interact in the novel.

4. Data Analysis

The section offers a literary analysis of *The God of the Woods* by Liz Moore highlighting the issue of trauma with focus on psychological level, narrative level, and symbolic level of unresolved childhood trauma and fragmented recollection. The review is rooted in the theoretical framework developed and is based on the approach to the theory of trauma put forward by Cathy Caruth, psychoanalytic model developed by Sigmund Freud, the ethics of testimony outlined by Felman and Laub, and the trauma as fixed in the environment and cultural memory developed by Michael Marder.

4.1. Unresolved Childhood Trauma: Psychological Disruption and the Haunting Past

In this section, the issue of how *The God of the Woods* depicts childhood trauma as a phenomenon that can significantly influence psychological maturation and behavioral norms of the main characters without making a loud voice is depicted. Trauma in this case is not explained in terms of explicit violence and flashback intensive narrative styles. Instead, it is covertly embedded in affectional detachment, multiple personalities, and the impossibility of communicating (or even having a conscious memory) of important events of the past.

Cathy Caruth (1996), of course, explained that trauma does not always appear in all its fullness at a particular time when it happened. Rather, it flows back to the scene some time later and sometimes in repetition or emotional diversion. Trauma cannot be integrated into the logic of memory as an ordered construct, but is likely to slip out in what is not said as silence, denial, displacement. Here we can also see the concept of Freud, called *Nachtraglichkeit* (deferred action), that is, trauma is not re-experienced until the retrospective when the psyche can be, or is compelled to deal with the former repressed suffering. It is under these notion that we interpret this emotional numbing and the psychological strain of the central family in the novel especially following the disappearance of Barbara. The unexplainable disappearance of Barbara at the summer camp comes to be the unspoken epicenter of emotional disturbance as the novel is concerned. The traumatic experience is not displayed as a

Liberal Journal of Language & Literature Review

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mourning symbol, but as the stillness that encircles his entire being and quiet unrest that accompanies him throughout his adult life. In one almost suggestive line Moore says:

He didn't remember the last time he had spoken her name out loud. Maybe not since that summer. It felt like saying it would summon something he wasn't ready to face. (Moore, 2024, p. 87)

This quote touches on repression that is at the core of traumatic experience. The character refuses to name Barbara since the process of naming means recalling, and recalling spells a catastrophe in encroachment of the well-crafted emotional fortification. The silence is not a forgetfulness, it is an avoidance which is protective.

Their mother in the same way closes down emotionally and keeps her head held high and never really tells much. Her experiences make her develop a barrier in her relationship with the world, which takes the form of trauma. To Freud, such withdrawal would be seen as part of psychic defense mechanism-the trauma that is too painful to be absorbed is forced into unconsciousness hence it replicates itself in alternate forms. The novel tells her behavior as:

She moved like someone who had learned to conserve energy, to avoid disturbance. Nothing could rattle her anymore, not because she was strong, but because she was not really present. (Moore, 2024, p. 103)

Here, Moore provides the nature of dissociation which is a clinical trauma symptom. The mother manipulations lack vigor but are empty. She has left her own life emotionally empty as she tried not to face the unresolved grief and guilt over Barbara. This motif rears itself in the personality of Barbara herself, particularly in the broken fragments of people remembering her. Only incomplete images of her lingers, as smart yet aloof, affectionate yet hot-tempered. It is not her personality proper which we are recollected, but fragments of it, like her very personality itself since the end has been prophecy than continuity is her absence. This trauma is reaffirmed by the formal structure of the novel: in the very first scene, Barbara is not presented as a living person, but rather as the gap that other characters are orbiting around. Moore even uses figurative language to stress on the lifelong impact of childhood trauma. The relationship between the trauma as a psychological experience and the image making on an environmental level is specifically immensely expressed:

Liberal Journal of Language & Literature Review

Print ISSN: 3006-5887

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It was like a fog had settled in his brain that summer and never quite lifted. Even years later, he would sometimes find himself wandering mentally, trying to return to a place that no longer existed. (Moore, 2024, p. 145)

This symbolism is consistent with how Caruth insists on the post-modern notion of trauma as the confrontation with an event that we have not yet known. The symbol of the thing in form of a fog is the symbolic image of the broken memory, and a feeling of the place that ceased to exist represents that a trauma deludes not only past but self as well.

There is also its presence in the unresolved trauma producing undesirable social behaviors of the character. Hypervigilance, mistrustfulness and obsessive routines come into play as a coping mechanism. This is indirectly referred to by Moore when he says that the camp director responded to any slight commotion:

“He had developed the habit of standing very still when hearing a scream—just for a second, just long enough to judge whether it was joy or pain.”
(Moore, 2024, p. 112)

The hyper-awareness is also a survival trait noted in people who have experienced trauma. The character automatically looks out for danger even in the ordinary sounds such as laughter voice of children. This experience in the past loss trauma trains him to view the world through the prism of fear and readiness. All in all, the results indicate that in *The God of the Woods*, childhood trauma, and respectively, spared childhood trauma redesigns identity, memory, and behavior that endures well into adulthood. The characters do not tell their pain with words, instead, through its opposite - silence, repetition, alienation, repression especially shown through the theory of Freud and the model of delayed trauma proposed by Caruth.

4.3. Fragmented Memory and Nonlinear Narrative Structure

This part of analysis investigates how *The God of the Woods* is a reflection of broke-up remembrance of traumatic events in sense of its non-linear voice. The time disorder, the change in the narrative focus do not simply make it more suspenseful, they are the sign of the psychological reality of people who cannot process and tell the story about their past in a coherent way. In trauma fiction, form is content: the disjointed narration is itself symptomatic of trauma.

Cathy Caruth (1996) is of the opinion that trauma is not to be found in the simple

violent or the original event in the history of an affected person rather it is in the very fact that the event could not be absorbed in a manner which affects a person in a later period. As is proven by her statement in the book which tells says that trauma is, “*not locatable in the simple violent or original event in an individual’s past, but rather in the way that its very unassimilated nature returns to haunt the survivor later on*” (p. 4). The comprehensible moment of the traumatic experience is not captured; the traumatic experience is presented in shreds, in flashback or in disturbances that destabilize the identity and the time line. The late appearance of that which was repressed leads to the narrative disjunction, which becomes typical of trauma literature.

This is further backed by the concept that was developed by Freud referred to as the *Nachträglichkeit* (deferred action). She mentions that it is only afterward that events turn out to be traumatic, and are re-saved based on the subsequent experiences. This is the reason why the trauma tales tend to utilize non-chronological narratives and fragmented memory, which is the incapability of the mind to make the trauma a form of organized past. Moore in *The God of the Woods* builds a timeline that does not run linear at all. The novel switches between different years (the 1970s and the 1990s), altering the point of view of different characters, and disclosing the truth about Barbara being gone slowly. This disjunction of narration is not an act of style but is closely connected with the functioning of trauma in the world of the novel.

Early in the text, the narrator reflects:

“There were whole summers she couldn’t remember, but that one—the one when Barbara vanished—returned to her in flashes, vivid and unexplained.”

(Moore, 2024, p. 19)

The relationship between memory and trauma finds its main point of origin in this sentence. Summers run into one another, except the traumatic one, which is replayed in the forms of flashes. The vivid and unexplained mirror of the traumatic reality represents the paradox of trauma—one is something that can never be forgotten but one cannot comprehend. Such style of memory is illogical; this is emotional, splintered, and involuntary.

The same phenomenon is reflected in the structure of the novel. The use of time changes abruptly in chapters. The same events are perceived in different ways. Small

Liberal Journal of Language & Literature Review

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details are remembered with frightening accuracy by some characters; they are repressed or falsely recalled by others. This quilt of views and memories creates the feel of reading, where one has to go through the trauma of discovery; the experience is sluggish, uncertain, full of emotion.

A spectacular demonstration of this arrives in the course of the narration where the father of Barbara, Arthur, recalls a comment he has denied all his adult life:

“He hadn’t thought of that day in years, maybe not since it happened. But now it rose up in his mind—not the whole day, just a sliver of it, like the edge of something sharp.” (Moore, 2024, p. 202)

The metaphor of the deeply felt trauma is displayed through the imagination of the painful intrusion of the traumatic memory, i.e. the metaphor of the sliver represents the painful interruption with the traumatic memory. It is not a complete remembrance but a flash, a segment of the past which bursts in on awareness. The same can be said about such slivers that cannot be considered wholes since they are wounding instead of explanation. The sensory image used by Moore (sharp), also points to the affective, physical character of trauma memory that is diverted to the rational processing. Information is also withheld in the structure of the novel written by Moore. The reader is induced to make some assumptions, which are then undermined by subsequent discoveries. This is a reflective evidence of unreliable processing of events by the traumatic mind. As Caruth (1996) notes, trauma is *“a breach in the mind’s experience of time”* (p. 61). This is not incidental violation portrayed in the tale, but the tale itself.

In another excerpt, one of the camp counselor’s comments towards the way that the disappearance messed with her sense of time:

“The days afterward unfolded in a strange loop. She kept thinking she had said something, done something, only to realize it hadn’t happened yet. Or that it had already happened, but she had forgotten.” (Moore, 2024, p. 138)

This text can be described as the confusion which is characteristic of post-traumatic time. There is distortion of events. Memory fails to be reliable. The reader, like the character, cannot make out what and when and how it happened and that is also echoed in the very way that Moore has told the story himself. Besides, the novel does not include traditional closure. Even at the very end answers are incomplete, vague.

The characters are able to resume fragments of truth only and are never reconciled with the past. Such narrative incompleteness is not a weakness, however, it is a symbol of the trauma experience. Caruth underlines the incapability to know the event in its entirety as the characteristic feature of trauma. The refusal of the novel to provide a satisfactory solution to the reader is, therefore, an acknowledgment of that unknowability.

The integration of fragmented memory of characters and non-linearity make the readers take the role of trauma witnesses instilled by Moore. We need to engage in reconstruction of events and we need to tolerate gaps and be in uncertainty, like the characters need to be to heal us. The shape is not only a stylism choice but also an ethical choice.

4.4. Generational Trauma and Emotional Legacy

In this section, the authors examine how traumas are passed across generations in *The God of the Woods*. The book demonstrates how unhealed trauma is not the only loss of the original victim but also spreads in the waves, determining the life patterns of children, parents, and even communities. The whole keeping quiet of the traumatic incidents notably Barbara's disappearance is turned into the inheritance of the family in the legacy of the withdrawal of feelings, overprotecting and the ascribed guilt.

According to the psychoanalytic theory of Freud, especially *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), traumatic experience can recur at later in subsequent behavior or can be displaced unconsciously in others. Making a continuation on this, the trauma theorists like Marianne Hirsch (2008) and Michael Marder focus on topics like post memory and cultural trauma where the pain can be indirectly inherited not only via stories but via atmosphere, gesture, and silence as well.

This dislocation between generations is exacerbated by the thought of trauma as described by Cathy Caruth, that, trauma is inexorably experienced, too late (1996). Things that one generation is unable to confront very frequently become emotionally, at least, transmitted to another generation, who is unable to conceptually handle it. Trauma, established in *The God of the Woods* in unspoken interrelations within the family, turns out to be the air of emotions inhaled by characters, which is harmful exactly in its unnamings. The dynamics of the family of Barbara is an entire exposition of intergenerational trauma barring none provided by Moore. It is the failure of her

Liberal Journal of Language & Literature Review

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parents to cope with the grief and guilt of her disappearance that affects how they relate with their other children who are still alive. Her father Arther is hardened, cold, and emotionally detached and becomes a psychotic fixated on order. Her mother, Rosemary, becomes closed and unsociable, she appears to be weak and inaccessible. Both do not talk freely about Barbara when she disappears leaving a vacuum of emotion.

The most disengaging part includes one of Barbara family members discussing and speaking about their experiences and feelings:

“They never told him not to ask about her. But after a while, he understood he shouldn’t. The silence was thick, like a rule without words.” (Moore, 2024, p. 78)

This phrase is a way to describe the dynamics of inheritance of emotions. The traumatic experience is not being talked about but this is what is being said through silence. This is the same message that the child internalizes and changes his behavior to hide his confusion and misery. The trauma shifts into the background-- a family law, instead of a one-time experience. This acquired silence results in his emotional habits that accompany him to adulthood. He stops having any emotional attachment, is afraid to open up or show weakness. His relationships are affected negatively. He does not trust closeness. To Freud, this would be the repetition compulsion- the unconscious re-playing of uncompleted traumatic experience. That which is not cured is experienced again, and usually in self-destructive forms.

Moore recreates this ripple effect and symbolic gestures are represented. As an illustration, even within decades, the family continues to reserve an additional seat at the dinner-table on holidays in memory of Barbara. The narrator says:

“They didn’t say it was for her, but everyone knew. It was the chair that hurt the most.” (Moore, 2024, p. 154)

This quotation is very metaphorical. The chair is a symbol of the family which tried not only to remember but also to forget: the family tries to respect the absence of Barbara and to refuse to look at its emotional burden. It turns into a practice of denial. According to Michael Marder (2012), it would be called a material trace of trauma, a thing that remembers, even though there is no voice.

The impact of this trauma is also transmissible to the interaction of the family

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Online ISSN: 3006-5895

members with the younger children in the subsequent generations. Overprotectiveness, suspicion and fear of losing the sight of children is characteristic. A mother in the camp explains her parenting idea:

“I don't care if I'm smothering them. Better that than not knowing where they are.” (Moore, 2024, p. 187)

This is an extreme measure of an overcompensation caused by a communal trauma and the inability of the community to psychologically process it, i.e. the disappearance of Barbara. The character does not talk about the past directly but her parenting behaviour is influenced through it. This is reminiscent of what Hirsch (2008) describes as post memory, the second hand trauma of the events that had occurred and which the person never experienced as they still live with them. The routine of the camp even indicates a traumatic community. There is a fixation on count of heads, drills and early curfews. As much as it can be explained by more practical problems these are also rituals of anxiety, a response to a loss in the past, which was never resolved. The camp operates as a reflection of the generation-level trauma- its policies are predetermined by the fear that history can repeat itself. Interestingly, Moore compares these characters and people who, even clumsily, want to fight the past. Commenting on this, a counselor says:

“Maybe if we'd just talked about it. Maybe if someone had said her name now and then.” (Moore, 2024, p. 211)

This realization at the late stage is an indicator of the intergenerational dialogue failure. Protective silence has yet served to perpetuate emotion dysfunction. This would be the missed opportunity of witnessing according to Felman and Laub (1992): the moral practice of listening and witnessing in a manner that enables healing to occur through listening and reporting about trauma. Without this bearing witness, the trauma persists, and travels through time and generation rather than disappearing.

Overall, it can be said that the results hint at *The God of the Woods* unearthing trauma as a system rather than an event. By means of silence, symbols, and echoing the behavior, the characters transfer their suffering to their successors. Moore explains that healing does not only involve accepting the extent of the trauma and its occurrence, but it needs to be brought out of the silence in which it is surrounded.

4.6. Silences, Secrets, and Speech: Testimony and the Ethics of Witnessing

Here we will look deeper into how *The God of the Woods* portrays silence not only as a lack of things but as a form of profound trauma. As the novel illustrates, traumatic experience that is too painful to verbalize normally takes a nonverbal form and is communicated via emotional detachment, reticence and evasion. In the story by Moore, silence ends up as a form of survival, in addition to promoting non-healing. This puts into doubt the ethical aspect of testimony and the purpose of listening and witnessing, both, in the novel, and as a reader.

In Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History (1992), Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub claim that the trauma is not completely owned by the survivor until and unless it is spoken: but that speaking can also be violent, disruptive, or unfeasible. Witness never speaks fully, and is visited by what it cannot say. They claim that their job is not simply to tell a story as the process of bearing witness, but to create a situation in which the trauma can be received ethically. According to Felman, trauma speaks by silence and in literature it is common to find this burden of being represented since it is impossible to express otherwise. The reader or the listener is now a “witness to witnessing” someone, a person in the ethical process of overcoming repression by the society or the make self. *The God of the Woods* by Moore is a story full of secrets that characters want to keep but should not have, silent families that should have spoken to each other and a community that is built out of the silence they all live in.

Moore does not get her characters to testify in any direct manner. No confessions in the court room, no monologues of the truth. Rather, the novel is characterized by a protracted, gradual process of people creeping towards their memories and fears. It is like a language in a way, pain is not words spoken or even made clear but in silence, in uneasiness and words not working. One of the strongest examples is witnessed when an old counselor who had once been at the camp goes back after several years later and tries to discuss the disappearance of Barbara:

“I’ve rehearsed it so many times in my head. But now that I’m here, I can’t say it. The words just feel... wrong. Not because they’re untrue, but because they don’t fit.” (Moore, 2024, p. 239)

This is how Felman and Laub have their idea that speech alone can be a failure of

Liberal Journal of Language & Literature Review

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trauma. The event is so much steeped in emotion and bewilderment that words fail. The speaker is acquainted with realities who is unable to put them into meaningful shapes. Inability to talk does not mean denial instead it manifests the trauma. The strategic silence also turns out to be a coping mechanism, which is reflected by characters. Barbara disappearance is hardly or never discussed by parents, even among themselves. Here the narrator notes:

“There were things they stopped saying, and then stopped thinking. It was easier, in a way, to pretend that silence was peace.” (Moore, 2024, p. 91)

In this case, a lapse in words is just a pretence an anesthetic in the heart. According to Felman and Laub, it is not healing, but it is avoidance. When there is no testimony, when it is impossible to name the trauma and share, it goes nowhere, defining the family atmosphere with its lingering impact that cannot be seen but still exists. Branding the effects of breaching that silence is also brought out by Moore. In one scene, a character once tries to explain a child about Barbara. The scene is very emotional:

“She asked why no one had ever told her. I didn’t have an answer that wouldn’t make everything worse. So I just said: We didn’t know how.” (Moore, 2024, p. 260)

This scene is used to characterize the desire to testify, as well as the inability to do it. The trauma involves the inability to explain. Trauma is not, as Felman says, a wound alone; it is a crisis of address; a failure of communication across the abyss of pain. The moral part of this story belongs with the reader. The novel by Moore does not give the final witness, the truth that is stated. Rather it requests the reader to be a witness to what the characters do not know how to say in full. The silences that can be found in the novel are intentional. They will make the reader empathetically feel, make them read between the lines, and make them realize that trauma most of the time eloquently speaks not using words. It is especially so in the scenes, where there are no talk except the reminiscent gestures or things depicted. A hand holding a photo. One of the doors opened. An unoccupied chair. Those are the non-verbal testimonies, actions that can never be devoid of meaning where there is an inability to speak. These are moments exactly as legitimate, as crucial as the other, as Felman and Laub have it, in the process of bearing witness.

Liberal Journal of Language & Literature Review

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Online ISSN: 3006-5895

Lastly, this moral theory is consistent with the fragmented narration by Moore. Moore stresses that trauma could not be confined to a single story by not letting one of the characters of the story overshadow the others and by maintaining a fractured chronology. There is no unbiased witness, an unbiased recollection, an alternative silence. The very novel itself turns into some sort of composite testimony, sewn together out of as much that people have a chance to say or feel.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The main argument of this research was to discuss how deep-rooted unresolved childhood trauma and broken memories influence identity and behavior and theoretically review a literary case study of the novel by Liz Moore, *The God of the Woods*. This study was based on the trauma theory and mainly benefited the work of Cathy Caruth, Sigmund Freud, Shoshana Felman, Dori Laub, Judith Herman, and Michael Marder. The qualitative and theoretically informed textual study explored how trauma does not only penetrate the internal world of women but also constructs narrative forms, family, and spatial perception, as well as societal conduct.

This research has assumed form early in the paper suggesting that traumatic experiences are not linear and presenting easily narrated story. In place of that, it is typified by disjunction, lateness, silence, and repetition. The fragmented chronology, distant relation of the characters to one another, and the presenting of tensions that are never resolved in the text makes the novel written by Moore a clear argument that it is not merely a subject or a theme of literature; trauma is also a principle of form something that powers the ability to craft and construe narratives.

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