

THE CONCEPT OF TRAUMA IN LITERATURE VIEWED FROM THE TRANSITIONING MODELS OF TRAUMA IN THE WEST

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Abstract: The article analyzes and highlights the change in the view of trauma in the trauma research trends in the United States and the West from the 90s of the 20th century to the present, specifically through the case of Cathy Caruth and the waves of post-Caruthic research. By referring to the trauma perspective of Cathy Caruth in classic work *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* and later studies, we show the shift from the traditional model (trauma as a structural concept) to a pluralistic theoretical model where trauma is seen as a discourse. The article aims to provide a complete, comprehensive conceptualization of trauma while also providing theoretical tools for reading the text.

Keywords: trauma theory, Cathy Caruth, structural model, pluralism theory, trauma discourse

1. Introduction

Since its inception, trauma theory has experienced a very dynamic and exciting development in the academic contexts of the United States and Europe. Originating from a term used in the medical field, identified by a range of physical and neurological symptoms, "trauma" has become a prominent concept in the humanities. The original concept of trauma is associated with the name of the psychoanalyst Freud, so trauma theory is at its first stage in the branch of psychoanalysis. Freud's conception of trauma and his discoveries of the compulsive repetition of traumatic experiences/events, the breakdown, and fragmentation of the traumatic self,

contributed to the birth development of this branch of research, especially in the 90s of the twentieth century. Inheriting the spirit of Freud, Cathy Caruth and representatives of the American Yale school created the first wave in the construction of trauma theory in the humanities. In particular, the treatise *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* published in 1996 has gained great popularity. Since then, trauma theory begins to establish its connotation in the field of research. Cathy Caruth raised the concept of trauma in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* - a collection of trauma studies analyzed from many perspectives and contexts; however, only *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, Cathy Caruth gave a full definition of trauma, carried out trauma analysis on

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literary and cinematic texts. Cathy Caruth's work plays a very important role in the dynamic context of trauma criticism, especially since it has a role in the origin of modern trauma theory. However, more than two decades later, trauma research has gradually taken a new turn. Following on from the inspiration that Cathy Caruth had initiated, later trauma theory, on the other hand, sought many new directions of expression. The model of trauma research has also gradually changed, moving from Cathy Caruth's classical model to a model of pluralism theory. Michelle Balaev, in the "Trauma Studies" chapter in the anthology *A companion to Literary Theory* confirmed the role of pluralism theory in the study of trauma literature. It is also the view that Roger Luckhurst once emphasized in "Mixing memory and desire psychoanalysis, psychology, and trauma theory", in *Literary Theory and Criticism* that trauma is essentially multidisciplinary, and if anyone wants to promote trauma to a high level, it is necessary to replace the old model, joining in forming new characteristics of the culture. Thus, the focus of post-Caruthian trauma criticism is to form a diversified view in identifying the origins of trauma, from which to see new aspects of this concept. From the perspective of trauma as a discourse, trauma criticism at this stage delves into trauma discourses, interprets and analyzes painful narrative questions on issues of ethnicity, gender and sexual trauma, such as *Reading Rape stories: Material Rhetoric and The Trauma of Representation* by Wendy S. Hesford, or the guilt of Jewish identity, is expressed in Amos Gordberg's *Trauma, Narrative and Two Forms of Death*. From the reference of the main points of Cathy's work to other branches of post-Caruthian studies, especially from a discursive perspective, we will show the shift in the concept of trauma, thereby discovering theoretical tools to approach and interpret literary texts.

2. Aim and Scope

The purpose of this article is to survey and analyze to see the shift and change in the concept of trauma in the discussion amongst modern Western critics about trauma. From which, the article proposes a relatively complete definition of trauma. Two important questions discussed: How is the concept of trauma understood? How will the shift of trauma theory models lead to a change in the understanding of trauma? By answering these questions, the paper attempts to construct a theoretical framework of trauma in the literature. From the theoretical framework outlined, we want to experiment with a traumatic reading on the literary text – a reading based on the terms and analysis suggested by the theorists of this movement.

We selected the classic text of trauma criticism, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* by Cathy Caruth – the most widely cited author in trauma research in the US and Europe. In addition, we also examine the perspective of trauma in critical texts by Michelle Balaev, Roger Luckhurst, Amos Gorbberg to see the changing perspective on trauma of post-Caruthian research trends. In addition, to clarify theoretical issues, we use some typical corpus of trauma literature, including poetry, fiction and non-fiction prose.

3. Methods

As can be seen, Cathy Caruth's trauma monograph is heavily influenced by Freud's psychoanalytic theory, as Cathy Caruth's rereading of Freud's psychoanalytic texts shows ideological continuity. Therefore, approaching Caruth's trauma theory from psychoanalytic terms is appropriate because her trauma model remains within the boundaries of neurological trauma.

By the 1990s, the human experience

of trauma was no longer the exclusive subject of humanistic studies. Despite being in the background of post-structuralism, trauma theory rectified a point of theory in the pre-1990s, when theorists focused only on the realm of text and forgot about the fact that literature was ultimately responsible, linked to historical realities or had the potential to provoke political breakdown. That is why trauma theory is also associated with subjects of being suppressed in life. For example, it has been intertwined with theories of gender, race, and environment. Therefore, interdisciplinary, systematic and comparative methods need to be used when implementing the research objectives set out in the article.

Our goal, as stated above, is defining a complete conception of trauma to experiment with reading trauma in the literary text. Thus the method of text analysis (deep reading/perusing) is a method used in this article.

4. Results

4.1. Cathy Caruth and the Traditional Model

Cathy Caruth describes trauma as a structural phenomenon. According to her, trauma is understood in its most general sense as "describing an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena" (Caruth, 1996, p. 11). Earlier, in the introduction of *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, Caruth also defined trauma as "the structure of its experience": "event that is not identified or experienced in the past in a manner fullness, which is subsequently re-occupied again in the person experiencing it" (Caruth, 1995, p. 4). As such, the core of the trauma remains a **shocking event**. However, the event is not immediately perceived and experienced by

the subject. Its brutality is not fully experienced at the moment of occurrence but anchors in the unconscious, returns to haunt, to torment people through fragments of memories, nightmares, vague fears repeatedly. The concept of Cathy Caruth derives from Freud's psychoanalytic term *Nächtraglichkeit* - understood as the belated experience of trauma - "the concept developed in his studies on hysteria and one that refers to a non-chronological movement of remembering involving a link between two events; at a critical time of psychological distress previously forgotten memory traces return and are reworked or re-interpreted to match subsequent events, desires, and psychic developments" (Freud, 2004, as cited in Rodi-Risberg, 2010, p. 13). So, going back to Freud's *Moses and Monotheism*, Cathy Caruth noticed that Moses was disguised as the legend of the origins of the Jewish people. It is because from the outset, the traumatic event is not recognized, not known, "the traumatic experience is an experience that is not fully assimilated as it occurs" (Caruth, 1996, p. 5) that the mechanism of pain is maintained. Cathy Caruth calls that insidious development the incubation period is the late arrival (Latency). Trauma, in its most essential sense, always accompanies the unremembered, the unknown, the unexpressed.

Cathy Caruth's conception of trauma is drawn from Freud's psychoanalytic ideas, but her argumentation reveals points far beyond its original core. In his psychoanalytic work, Freud emphasized "recurrence, the return of memory (*repetition compulsion*). Freud suggested that there is a mechanism that causes the traumatic event to return, recur, and transform through dreams. He calls it a way to "master arousal recovery by developing anxiety that the neglected/missed is the cause of the nerve injury" (as cited in Balaev, 2018, p. 362). When recalled, the traumatic

event is anchored in the person's unconscious, thereby creating a sense of fracture, the disintegration of the ego. It is the fragmentation of the ontological self, between the present "ego" on the one hand and the past "ego" on the other hand. Even so, sometimes remembering is just the tip of the iceberg, and unremembering is really the most important aspect of trauma. That view is further developed in the theoretical aspects that Caruth addresses in his treatises. She argues 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 – the way it was precisely not known in the first instance – returns to haunt the survivor later on*" (Caruth, 1996, p. 4). The unknown (*Knowing and Not Knowing*) or the gaps of memory is how memory operates an internal defense mechanism - a "*protective filter*" (Roger Luckhurst) to keep people out of injury. Exploring the psychoanalytic aspect of trauma, Cathy Caruth places trauma at the heart of important historical questions: Which mechanisms, in addition to neurological and psychological effects, cause people to fail to remember? Or, put it like Roger Luckhurst, "Was the record of the traumatic event lodged in the unconscious, waiting for recall, or was it the very product of that recall? Can we separate from what we desire to remember?" (Luckhurst, 2006, p. 501). These questions became a key aspect of Cathy Caruth's defense of the irrepresentability of trauma; and especially, when viewing trauma as a cultural construct, later branches of research have questioned to the very end the mechanism by which people are remembered and not remembered, thereby tracing the way trauma occurs in personal life.

Precisely because trauma is unrecognizable at the outset, traumatic experience challenges not only conventional experiences but also reveals inherent contradictions in language. Trauma

completely resists verbal representation, which means that we always recall that knowledge but never identify it. Traumatic experience goes beyond ordinary expression. This is Cathy Caruth's advanced point and is also the core idea of her theoretical system. In the chapter "The wound and the voice", she argues that trauma always tries to avoid language through camouflage mechanisms. When the direct reference to the traumatic experience slips (similar to how Tancred is unaware that she unintentionally killed her lover - Clorinda, during a duel in which she was disguised under the armor of the rival knight), its return via a nagging voice (as Tancred thrust his sword into a tree, blood gushed from the stab wound and a voice of Clorinda lamented) gave a message about a belated experience of trauma. Thus trauma always creates double paradoxes in consciousness and language. We want to know the meaning of the past, but we cannot understand it. On the one hand, we want to tell the story about our own trauma, but on the other hand, we are constrained by linguistic expressions. The human experience of trauma seems impossible to organize at the linguistic level. Because trauma refuses to assimilate into memory in the first place, it challenges the ability to represent it in language. This idea of Caruth is very close to the postmodern spirit. Originally a social institution recognized in the community's experience and traditions, invisible language has become a kind of strict censorship mechanism, a kind of "dominating pressure on the entire spiritual life." the spirit of the community, dominating the personal discourse," causing many things to settle into the unconscious, or "repressed, inhibited, fell into a state of loss of voice" (Tran, 2014, pp. 174-175). The concept of the "social unconscious" - proposed by E. Fromm - describes the repression of powerful discourses in society over discourses that are perceived as

"peripheral," or unorthodox. "Each society allows only certain emotional thoughts to reach the conscious level, while others only exist in the unconscious state" (as cited in Tran, 2014, pp. 174-175). After all, language is but a sclerotic expression to experienced life", thus, traumatizing and challenging the direct linguistic representation.

Traumatic literature, from that point of view, always requires the writer to break the usual expressive structure of language. Even because pain itself is elusive, sometimes it can only be perceived through things that are evoked, especially in the suggestive language (the language of dreams, the language of the subconscious), or it will speak by the superposition of symbols. The following excerpt from Svetlana Alexievich's *Last Witnesses: An Oral History of the Children of World War II* is a prime example of how language, in many cases, is powerless to write about the pain of a child witnessing things beyond its perceived threshold:

Mama took off her kerchief and covered my eyes with it... So we reached our house, the place where our house had stood several days ago. The house wasn't there. We were met by our miraculously spared cat. She pressed herself to me- that was all. No one could speak...even the cat didn't meow. She was silent for several days. Everybody became mute. (Alexievich, 2019, p. 17)

The impression of little Katya's silence most profoundly expresses the traumatic state of man: the state of being speechless. The terrible obsession with the war in the eyes of a seven-year-old child can only be expressed indirectly through the image of a cat losing its squeal, through the suffocating silence that enveloped the space

of childhood. In the preface from the original Vietnamese translation of the novel *The Tin Drum* by writer Gunter Grass, poet Duong Tuong once quoted philosopher Theodor W. Adorno: "Writing a poem after Auschwitz¹ is a barbaric act and so, nowadays, writing poetry has become impossible" (as cited in Grass, 2002, p. 5). In the above context, it is clear that nothing is more capable of revealing trauma than the inability of words.

Or in *Hunger Camp at Jaslo*, Wislawa Szymborska (n.d.) shows how trauma can reveal language disturbances. Here language slips away, and is elusive. Whatever is eluded is not recorded in the history. So "write it" but what to write when trauma is something beyond common sense and human perception. The poem's grasp of trauma is thus almost a chase through its cues.

Write it, write.

In ordinary ink

on ordinary paper:

they were given no food

they all died of hunger.

"All. How many?

It's a big meadow.

How much grass

for each one?"

Write: I don't know.

History counts its skeletons in round numbers.

A thousand and one remains a thousand,

as though the one had never existed:

an imaginary embryo,

an empty cradle,

an ABC never read,

air that laughs, cries, grows,

¹ A network of concentration camps built by the Nazis in Poland during World War II.

emptiness running down steps
toward the garden,

nobody's place in the line
(Szyborska, n.d.)

Memory dissociation - the direct cause of trauma - a perspective that helps shape the concept of trauma across history is also a factor in making it possible for individual and collective traumatic experiences to reconnect and to be together. This argument proves that Cathy Caruth went further than Freud when she saw the link between individual trauma and collective trauma. That is also why she began to build her theoretical system through rereading *Moses and Monotheism* in Freud's psychoanalytic text.

Centering his story in the nature of the leaving, and returning, constituted by trauma, Freud resituates the very possibility of history in the nature of a traumatic departure. We might say, then, that the central question, by which Freud finally inquires into the relation between history and its political outcome, is: What does it mean, precisely, for history to be the history of a trauma? (Caruth, 1996, p. 15).

Caruth re-analyzed Freud's speculative process to see how he viewed history itself as a trauma, an encapsulation of forms of violence by connecting Nazi persecution of the Jews with historical roots of his people. Like the formula "Moses created the Jews," she argues, it is Freud's way of deconsecrating the myth² of Moses³ that reveals the meaningful nature of history:

it is something that can easily bury the traumas of the community and personal. Turning over a biblical myth, Freud performed an act that Caruth calls "questioning of history", "a tacit denial of history":

By replacing factual history with the curious dynamics of trauma, Freud would seem to have doubly denied the possibility of historical reference: first by himself actually replacing historical fact with his own speculations, and second, by suggesting that historical memory, or Jewish historical memory at least, is always a matter of distortion, a filtering of original event through the fictions of traumatic repression, which makes the event available at best indirectly" (Caruth, 1996, p. 16).

Traumatic experience is a latent state, people cannot be fully aware of it. Cathy Caruth calls the spiritual history of the community a sort of "filtering" because history is full of traumas that are "faded," buried, even disguised with another myth. Thus, like personal trauma, historical trauma can also be identified only through "the inaccessibility of trauma as it occurs" (Caruth).

Because trauma is not only related to individual memories, but it is also linked to collective memories, the shocks and crises of the community can be passed on from one generation to the next in a very special way. The spread of that sense of trauma can be imagined as a disease that has metastasized in the body: insidious, latent, and

² The most important moment in Jewish history, according to Freud, was not the literal return to freedom but the repression, the burial of a murder and its consequences, so all The barbaric violence in the Jewish history is forced to repress as a kind of Oedipal mechanism. The Jewish community killed Moses to create their own god.

³ "In the biblical account, Moses was one of the captive Hebrews, who eventually arose as their leader and led them out of Egypt back to Canaan" (Caruth, 1996, p. 13).

spontaneous. What is remarkable about this is that, while the narrator/storytellers may not have to directly endure the horrific events of the trauma, the obsession and torment of other people's memories are *symbiotically persistent* in the soul. World literature records many cases; the trauma of the community puts a code in personal experience in which the author/narrator establishes the pain and shame of the ancestors, the community, of humanity as a kind of self-identity. Natascha Wodin's *She Came from Mariupol*, WG Sebald's *The Emigrants* are such cases. In particular, Natascha Wodin's *She Came from Mariupol* is a synthesis of many emotions: the sense of alienation of an exile, vague impressions about the origin of parents, loneliness, and guilt under the influence of community's contempt. Whenever "I" think about her origin, it is always painful: "who am I". What's left is just two blurred black and white photos of the mother, the marriage certificate, and the employment card. "I" delved into her past, traced back to my own values, and rediscovered the life story of my parents – Eastern European forced laborers after World War II. The journey back to her roots is also the journey of Natascha Wodin being caught up in the history of her compatriots and her people in a dark and forgotten period.

I was lost in the deep forest of world history, deeper and deeper into the terrible disasters of the 20th century. Reports on forced labor during the Third Reich are full of holes, containing countless absurdities and contradictions. The topic I want to choose is slipping out of my hands, it is becoming out of control that I cannot handle. And, what can I say no? Isn't it too late, I wonder if we still have enough energy to handle this massive pile of stuff? And in this world, are there enough words for all

of that - words dedicated to the life of my mother, the mother who disappeared somewhere in the middle of nowhere, no name, no age, a person who represents millions of other people? (Wodin, 2020, pp. 36-37).

Thus, Cathy Caruth's definition of trauma delves deeply into issues suggested by Freud and Paul de Man's perspectives, such as the late experience of trauma, personal and historical trauma, slippage in the meaning of trauma expressive language. The process of "reading" and reinterpreting literary, philosophical, or cinematic texts in the light of trauma theory, on the one hand, shows the operation of the "traditional model" (used by Michelle Balaev) in many contexts, on the other hand, provides important hints about the intrinsic relationship of individual experience and culture, or warns of a potential return to violence in the community.

4.2. Perspectives on Trauma From a Discourse Perspective

Obviously, no theory is universal. Cathy Caruth's theory itself is not without limitations. After all, Cathy Caruth's trauma theory was born on the basis of poststructuralism, so it still sees trauma as the source of the structure of its experience. As a follower of Freud, she looked more deeply into the symptoms, suggesting that the inseparability of trauma is tied to neurological function. That is why later branches of research countered Caruth's classical trauma model by "moving away from a position that centralizes pathological fragmentation..." to "uncovers new relationships between experience, language, and knowledge that detail the social significance of trauma" (Balaev, 2018, p. 366). Indeed, Cathy Caruth's profound implications for trauma literature are reminiscent of the role of literary discourse in revealing the *sound of wounds* of the past.

In asserting that literature is a form of discourse in which *knowing and not knowing* intersect, her book "has become an important reference point in the development of the cultural trauma theory (Luckhurst, 2006, p. 502). Because the mechanism that allows people to remember and can't remember is always associated with cultural construction. Scholars of the era, before realizing the origins of 19th-century railroad-related injuries, connected trauma with cultural and historical contexts. Considered a powerful symbol of science, material civilization, and railway, the railway trauma has created a violent tremor in human reason, sowing insecurity and breaking trust in the mechanical age. From here, mental illness began to be recognized. Essentially, "mental trauma not merely as a by-product of the industrial era", but is also "as a constitutive phenomenon that has shaped the structure of its cultural discourse" (Ataria et al., 2016, p. 16). From a cultural construct, post-Caruthian trauma criticism studies trauma as a discourse: **what is remembered and what is not; what is acceptable and what is excluded.** Foucault's discourse theory has mentioned *power and knowledge* and the organic relationship of these two concepts. "The Western philosophical tradition primarily sees power in the role of repression. When writing *Discipline and Punish* - 1975 and especially in *The History of Sexuality*, Volume 1 (1976) Foucault develops a new perspective, emphasizing the positive aspect: power as a constructive mechanism is productive rather than prohibitive in the activity of knowledge creation" (Tran, 2015). Looking at trauma theory, here comes a problem: clearly, not in every context, human trauma is recognized. It is the turning point in the discourse that forces people to raise questions: **Under what conditions is human experience considered traumatic? When can people cry for their own pain? When will loss, pain be named, be present,**

and be acknowledged? There are traumatic events that are, in fact, only recognized in certain scenes as social events. For example, there was a time when issues like sexual assault (rape of women) were not considered crimes. Judith Butler - philosopher, feminist expert, in an interview, *When Killing Women isn't a Crime* once said:

In so many places, the violence done to women, including murder, are not even conceptualized as crimes. They are "the way of the world" or "acts of passion" and these phrases disclose deep-seated attitudes that have naturalized violence against women, that is, made it seem as if this violence is a natural or normal part of ordinary life... (The New York Times, 2019).

It is the social norms that tolerate gender-based violence. It is the principle of the community that becomes a mechanism of trauma. Therefore, in addition to the structure of the traumatic experience, trauma criticism must also pay attention to the "petit narrative" voice, listening to the "wailing sounds" of small people who have never counted in history. Michelle Balaev has clearly contributed a way of understanding, arguing that the concept of trauma is in itself critical. It criticizes community norms that cause suffering to women, slavery, people of LGBT. For example, *Reading Rape stories: Material Rhetoric and The Trauma of Representation* by Wendy S. Hesford is a powerful social critic. In that article, Hesford, through analyzing an autobiographical documentary by Margie Strosser - an American filmmaker and rape survivor, has demonstrated how powerful feminist voices are when a woman confronts and recreates pain. *Rape stories* is a special case study because it tells an imaginary revenge story. The film traces ten years of Margie Strosser's grappling with the traumatic experience of being raped,

including nightmares, phobias, avoidance of men, and agoraphobia, etc., all the syndromes of rape trauma - and ends with a vengeful fantasy in which Strosser portrays the rapist as the victim and herself as the victor. According to Wendy S. Hesford, "This fantasy is a vivid example of how survivors translate private pain into public memory through the appropriation and reversal of culturally dominant rape scripts that presume women's passivity and helplessness and that women want to be raped" (Hesford, 1999, pp. 192-193). Truly reflects the title of the article, *Rhetorical Material and the Trauma of Expression*, Wendy S. Hesford has clarified two issues. First, Strosser's documentary's message is powerful and challenging, offering a completely different perspective about the victims, as well as the aftershocks they've been through. Apparently, there were once dominant ideas that women wanted to be raped or that victims were seen as powerless agents of aggression and anger. Gender inequality leads scholars (academic perspectives) to resist the pain of women and their stories. So Margie Strosser's visual story is a rhetorical strategy as she uses her own memories and body to recount the traumatic experience, as well as the painful consequences it brings. Margie Strosser's story may "participate in the feminist proclamation of survivor discourse as a political act against violence - a conception of the personal prevalent in early feminist literature on violence and consciousness-raising groups wherein women's autobiographical stories were positioned as authenticating truths" (Hesford, 1999, p. 195). Second, through *Rape Stories*, Wendy S. Hesford shows how to overthrow the dominant culture with strong patriarchal accents. She shows a kind of power discourse that exists as a pop-culture

backdrop, in which rape is rationalized, how rapists exercise "body power." Since then, Wendy's article also suggests larger issues, such as cultural stories about gender, race, class, sexuality... that can be linked through historical analyzes of rape trauma and its expression.

Looking deeply into trauma discourse, one can clearly see traces of marginalization of non-centered values that are subject to violent repression. Trauma criticism is concerned with philosophical perspectives on violence. However, besides the visible violence that provokes historical storms, distorts the lives of each individual, there is also an invisible brutality that is more subtle, more delicate, but equally inimical. It is violence that is tacitly acknowledged, legitimized by social norms, disguised by stereotypes and ideals. Not only in times of war, or in the tumult of history, but even in everyday life, humans have become negligible, vulnerable to the mechanisms that cause pain. What lies default and acceptable in social life⁴ turns out to contain a multitude of traumatic factors that are very subtly pernicious. The abuse of power by the totalitarian model in strict contexts, gender inequality and the authority of patriarchy, the potency of crowds and mechanisms, etc., have engendered all kinds of pressures to push children, people in miserable and tormented situations. In recent decades, literature has come increasingly closer to micro-narratives, marginalities, individuals different from the crowd, and society.

Han Kang's *The Vegetarian* - the 2016 Man Booker Prize-winning novel - is a work that penetrates deep into the tragedy of everyday life, the mishap of people who are considered "outcast". It is also a text that makes readers realize that there are

⁴ Interestingly enough, the word "normal" is derived from the word "norm" which means rule. As a rule, it is always repressive.

mechanisms in life that, once people are put into a traumatic situation, they will suffer from persistent traumatic experiences. The *Vegetarian* consists of 3 independent stories (*Vegetarian*, *Mongolian mark*, *Flaming Trees*), but intersects - connects each other from an unusual event: suddenly one day, Yeong Hye - an ordinary woman often leads a normal, even somewhat boring life, waking up from a dream and determined never to eat meat again. Her decision to be considered "unusual" has disturbed family life and affected the lives of her loved ones.

The in-depth analysis of the feelings and reactions of people around to Yeong Hye's behaviour, Han Kang reveals that there is non-verbal violence, prejudices, and insensitive attitudes towards feelings of others has formed a series of mechanisms that push people into a state of loss for words, becoming depressed and lonely. Those mechanisms can be disguised under the "normal, boring" relationships of married life (the husband), the care and concern of the mother and sister under the shadow of authority of a father in the society still heavily pervaded by patriarchy. The husband's initial confusion, both surprise and awe, towards his wife, which he considers "neither freshness nor charm or anything especially refined", even "that kind of wife, and that kind of lifestyle, did mean that I was unlikely to find my days particularly stimulating" has made Yeong Hye to become a "spectre" in her house. In his eyes, the wife gradually became a monstrous figure, gradually, the feeling of doubt formed "an intense feeling of disgust" (Kang, 2015, p. 34). Even when he saw his wife having hard sleeps, suffering from tormented corporal pain after every dream, he still only saw the desiccated body of a silly woman with the dark abyss in her head. The emotional and lifestyle disparity, the husband's indifference, even the desperate unanswered verbal signals (Yeong Hye repeated the sentence "I had a dream" over

and over again) have pushed Yeong Hye into a state of almost losing her voice, being helpless and bewildered before the nightmares that lasted forever.

From the initial confusion, to shock, anger, Yeong Hye became a grotesque and monstrous image in the perception of those around her. For family members, Yeong Hye's act of completely refusing to eat meat is almost an absurdity. The state of extreme tension that took place during the family meal and the actions of loved ones have directly poured on Yeong Hye a cruel pressure. Parents, older sister, and brother were only interested in putting a piece of meat into her mouth, finding all kinds of methods, from coaxing advice to using violence to control, pushed Yeong Hye to the path of destruction of her own existence. In the end, in the fierce resistance, Yeong Hye refused food, stopped communicating, thinking, and dried herself in the sun hoping to become a tree, because to her, all the trees in this world are all brothers and sisters. Of course, Yeong Hye cannot turn into a tree, but her monstrously desiccated body shrank to be a completely alone figure, absence from any connection to the social life.

To say that traumatic experience is the psychological dimension associated with suffering also somewhat holds true in the case of the character Yeong Hye, but that is not all. Han Kang's novels show one thing: a violent event can manifest itself as something that is completely unknown to us. For Yeong Hye, violence is initially unknown, unrecognizable, but it is the mechanism of action that causes forms of trauma to be present. There are things that, in essence, have caused a long-lasting trauma in childhood, such as: the brutal beatings of the father, the witness of the father brutally killing the dog that once bit him, etc., in the perception of a nine-year-old child, they are not yet significant events. Even in her memory, Yeong Hye was completely a carefree child, "the smell of

burnt flesh, which the perilla seeds couldn't wholly mask, pricked my nose. I remember the two eyes that had watched me, while the dog was made to run on, while he vomited blood mixed with froth, and how later they had seemed to appear flickering, on the surface of the soup. But I don't care. I really didn't care" (Kang, 2015, p. 33). However, once the memory returned through the nightly, tormenting dreams that left her dull and exhausted, then the trauma emerged. The dreams were always permeated with blood, scarlet one, locking her in a "shuddering, sordid, gruesome, brutal feeling" (Kang, 2015, p. 23). It was the moment that Yeong Hye realized that all the states she endured turned out to be horribly traumatic. From dreams full of violence and murder that reveal childhood memories, to a state of faltering, voiceless, broken existence, completely solitary and failed to capture the present moment, everything is related. In *The Vegetarian*, Yeong Hye is almost a traumatized image.

Han Kang's *The Vegetarian* is a text that we chose to analyze to clarify a specific traumatic state that comes from people's existential situations in life, thereby to show that: very subtle networks of power structures that can push people into a state of misery, pain, and especially, not all human pain can be named and seen. In Yeong Hye, there are many factors that make her easy to become a victim of many oppressive mechanisms in life: being a woman, having a history of abuse, being a very ordinary woman with a boring married life. Yeong Hye symbolizes the type of person who is easily forgotten in this life, as well as easily became a subject of ignorance in the eyes of others. Therefore, Yeong Hye's cries and protests against eating meat are inevitably considered irrational by her relatives and the community; her painful dreams meant nothing in her husband's eyes. So, in the absence of inhuman actions or bloody violence, people can still experience trauma

in the most ordinary life.

Approaching trauma from a discursive perspective not only widens the boundaries of a structural problem, but it also opens up possibilities for strong connections with contemporary theory. If we look more deeply at the human aspect that trauma theory brings, in particular, focus on the psychological problems of traumatized subjects evoked by critical trauma discourse, we realize that Trauma theory is likely connected with one of the most prominent theoretical today, that is the theory of emotions (Affect Theory). In fact, modern trauma criticism focuses its attention on the persistent effects suffered by the traumatic subject and rather than the initial traumatic event. Insecurity, anxiety, guilt about race, skin color, gender, etc., are the factors that destroy ego values and are the factors causing the most trenchant wound. For example, Amos Gordberg in *Trauma, Narrative and Two forms of Death* describes this situation, and it shows the inhumanity of the development of Nazism in allowing racial guilt to slowly destroy Jewish hope. Amos Gordberg pointed out that when the Nazis marked each Jew with a body badge or had a number tattooed on his arm, the victim was approaching his first Death. He called it "The Death Caused by the Annihilator's Signifier" or "symbolic death". He wrote:

What I am proposing is that the Nazi practices of signification endeavored to literally close the gap between the signifier, the signified, and the real referent: a Jew as a signifier is a Jew as a concept is a Jew as a real material body. Within the framework of such a practice, there are no gaps between the subject and the signifier and between one signifier and another since the Jew has only one signifier. Total identity is reached" (Gordberg, 2006, p. 132).

The Jew no longer exists in his being as a self but is "dissolved" in his community, a community marked, despised, murdered. In Amos Goldberg's article, there is an idea that is very close to Freud's point, which is: from the beginning, the event is not entirely traumatic. In other words, the classification of the Nazis was done in many ways: a badge attached to a person, a "J" stamped on a passport, a number tattooed on the skin of Jews... From eyewitness recollections, it was indeed a horribly traumatic experience.

Let us take, for example, Victor Klemperer's testimony as he wrote it in Dresden immediately after the war (Klemperer survived the war in Dresden and was not deported to the "East"): "I ask myself today what I had been asking myself and many different others already hundreds of times: what was the most difficult day for the Jews in the twelve years of hell. Never did I receive from myself or from others, any other answer but that: September the 19th 1941. The day when we were forced to wear the Jewish star (Goldberg, 2006, p. 127).

The word "Jewish" is attached to individuals, becoming a kind of shackles, depriving them of their freedom, making them lose their voice, their sense of self-existence, and being tortured, completely destroyed. Indeed, in studies of emotion theory, we can find many intersections with trauma criticism, and in critical trauma writing it is not difficult to see traces of gender discourses, race. In that tangled web, at the heart of it, all remains a trauma that describes human suffering and how people respond to that situation.

5. Conclusion

As we have shown above, Cathy Caruth's trauma theory derived from

poststructuralism, so her definition provided a classical model of trauma. The later development direction of trauma criticism, when it transcends the structure of experience and memory towards a pluralistic model, actually develops in the direction of contemporary theory: engagement, taking responsibility for life. It focuses on human existential issues, delves into the mechanisms that cause trauma in social life, questions and critiques social norms. The change of trauma model, from our perspective, is completely consistent with the trend of the theory's transformation. Trauma criticism gradually moved away from its central domain of Western sensibilities and identity, and more closely to many peripheral cultures, which contributed to expanding the database of case studies, where trauma theory was placed in the extremely vivid and rich literary life.

By adopting Cathy Caruth's conceptions of trauma combined with the discourse of contemporary trauma criticism, we believe that trauma first and foremost, in the most general sense, is mental distress, and pain - the inner experiences of people in the face of sudden, terrible events, whereby the transcendent nature of the event pushes people into a state of unawareness of the nature of trauma at the very first moment. Therefore, trauma is only recognized in the process of recall, in the chain of memories anchored in the depths of the human unconscious. Second, the core of trauma is still the events. However, the boundary of traumatic events' significance should be widened. If only narrowing the understanding in a single sense, thinking that traumatic events are debacles that occur in human life (war, disaster), inadvertently, a part of literature written about violence in everyday life will be excluded from the flow of trauma literature. Traumatic events can also cover diverse manifestations of repressive mechanisms in everyday life, making trauma more recognizable through

the aftershocks of the crisis of the self. Finally, trauma works by mechanisms of the unconscious. The initial pain, obsession, and overwhelm is not really trauma until, at a very distant point in time, unconsciously activates the pain mechanism, disturbing the psychological life, bursting into inner crises, causing severe mental sequelae. Trauma, thereby creating dissociation, fracture in consciousness, even pushing people to the limit of endurance: loss of voice, madness, silence, sleepwalking, etc.

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KHÁI NIỆM CHẤN THƯƠNG TRONG VĂN HỌC NHÌN TỪ SỰ CHUYỂN DỊCH CÁC MÔ HÌNH CHẤN THƯƠNG Ở PHƯƠNG TÂY

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Tóm tắt: Bài viết đi vào phân tích làm nổi bật sự thay đổi trong cách nhìn về chấn thương của các khuynh hướng nghiên cứu chấn thương ở Hoa Kỳ và phương Tây giai đoạn những năm 90 của thế kỉ XX cho đến nay, cụ thể qua trường hợp Cathy Caruth và những lần sống nghiên cứu hậu Caruth. Qua việc tham chiếu quan điểm về chấn thương trong công trình kinh điển của Cathy Caruth *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* và các công trình nghiên cứu sau này, chúng tôi chỉ rõ sự chuyển dịch từ mô hình truyền thống (chấn thương được nhìn như một khái niệm mang tính cấu trúc) sang mô hình lí thuyết đa nguyên, nơi chấn thương được nhìn như một diễn ngôn. Những nghiên cứu này của bài viết có ý nghĩa cung cấp một cách đầy đủ khái niệm về chấn thương, đồng thời cung cấp những công cụ lí thuyết để đọc văn bản văn học.

Từ khóa: lí thuyết chấn thương, Cathy Caruth, mô hình cấu trúc, lí thuyết đa nguyên, diễn ngôn chấn thương