

Some Things Remain Forever Unsaid. Others, However, Just Stay Untitled. *An Autotheoretical Approach to Trauma and Love.*

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“Perhaps the most striking feature of traumatic recollection is the fact that it is not a simple memory” (Caruth 151). Trauma in itself is never simple. A simple trauma would be a paradox in itself. *Understanding* trauma is easy. *Experiencing* it, however, recollecting it, trying to grasp and hold on to traumatic memories seems nearly impossible. What kinds of memories are these? Memories of hot weather, of everyone around you looking like you, of being happy, of having a *healthy* family?

Running. Horror. Existential Dread. People in the streets. Parents grabbing their playing children, abandoned toys and vehicles – the *kiramam* turns into a ghost town within seconds. “*Amma*, I’m scared!” *Go hide in the bunker. Quick, grab your passport, else you’re never getting out of here.* Screaming everywhere. Under the ground, in the bunker, four girls huddled together, staring at the suitcase they have always packed in case the house burns down. Each of them wondering to themselves if they packed their most treasured item. The answer is probably no. You can’t lock your life away because it could end every other second – or can you?

“[T]rauma is the confrontation with [...] a history, that literally *has no place*, neither in the past, in which it was not fully experienced, nor in the present, in which its precise images and enactments are not fully understood” (Caruth 153).

How do you understand a history you don’t possess? A history you can neither place, nor grasp, nor experience – that actually isn’t really there? But ...

If it isn’t there ...

How can it reoccur like a haunting?

How can it haunt you when you are watching a movie, when you are lying in bed, when a plane flies by, when you’re standing still even though the world keeps spinning and the people around you keep moving while you’ve come to a screeching halt?

“Where’s *Amma*?!” “Getting *Ammama*.” “And *Appa*?” “He didn’t make it home in time, pray he found shelter somewhere.”

You are all praying. For *Amma* and *Appa*, for your friends and family, for yourselves. One is thinking about her husband in France, who is waiting for her to follow. The other is silently mourning the education she never got; it was simply too dangerous with all those soldiers in the streets. What will your life be like in 10, 20, 40 years?

boom.

All thoughts are gone. The snakes between your feet, on the walls, on the ceilings, don't matter. Nothing matters. The threatening sound of the planes hovers above and around you. It seems to absorb you.

boom.

Another deafening explosion. You and your sisters cover your ears to soften the unbearable sound.

boom.

Another. More screams. People are crying. Suddenly it is not the bombs anymore, but the sound of gunshots. Where are they coming from? You saw what those bullets can do on your cousin's body. And what their batons can do, when you found him on the floor, mouth full of blood and no more teeth. It doesn't matter, don't cry, we can get you new ones. It's not your fault you were born a minority. The Gods had their reasons.

What am I doing here? Composing a narrative. How can something academic be a narrative? *I don't know*. What even defines what "something academic" means? *I don't know*. I just try to "narrate the unnarratable" (Whitehead 4). By claiming stories that aren't mine, yet these stories compose my entire being – are they mine to claim, then? Or am I appropriating a trauma that was never mine to take?

You are too scared to go out. You would rather stay with the snakes, and spiders, and scorpions. What is waiting on the outside? More blood? More fire? More bodies to bury?

Another crash. You are at a friend's home. Days are blurring and melting into each other, every day is just the same. "QUICK! Get under the bed with me. Didn't your *Appa* teach you to hide under the bed when planes are coming?" But you haven't seen *Appa* in so long, that's not fair. He is away in Saudi, trying to make more money. Having four girls in this time is rough. It's scary to be alone like that, vulnerable, left behind. Dependent on relatives' good graces. Yes, you know it's out of love for you. And yes, you know you're from a well-respected caste but does it matter if no one can pay the dowry for your marriage? Who will pay the dowry if not your parents? The man who hid *Appa's* letters from *Amma* and made you all believe he had died for several months? The relatives who are facing similar troubles with their daughters? The people fleeing west in hope of a better life? *West*. You want to go west, too.

"Trauma carries the force of a literality which renders it resistant to narrative structures and linear temporalities" (Whitehead 5). Breaks and edges and a narrative that doesn't make sense. Why does something I cannot see keep me from being coherent? Is it keeping me from being coherent? Or is this just the way this needs to be? How do narratives and traumas and the "non-experience[s]" (5) of a girl come together in another's mind where they struggle to create professional and coherent writing? Where does love and affection and an all-consuming need to protect the ones you would live and die and hurt for, over and over again without realizing what and who you're destroying in your wake, come into play?

West. You are in Germany now. No bombs. No bunkers. No snakes. You still flinch when you hear planes go by. *Didn't you come here in a plane? What an irrational fear.* Suddenly no one looks like you. No one understands you. You don't have the other three girls anymore, you don't have *Amma* or *Appa*, they all left, too. You only have this little boy of yours and your husband – a husband you married for love. A husband you suffered for. Longed for. Cried for when he was dragged away to prison the day you got married. A love that led you to sell your *thali* so you could go *west*. A love you will grow to loathe, that will spark a fire in your mind, an ever-growing feeling of ire and hatred that will plant its seed so deep within you that it will leave you as an empty shell. A love you will grow to regret. You wish you had a little girl of your own. Maybe she could be a doctor, or an engineer. Have an education, make you proud, show the others how far *you* have come. Maybe, just maybe, you will forget that you are in a different country. That your little girl will build her own mind and her own hopes, wishes, and dreams.

You don't understand. *You refuse to see.*
She does not understand. *She refuses to give in.*
They will never understand.

But now, I don't understand either.

Doctor? No, no biology. Rather something creative. Or languages. I like languages. Love languages? Something that helps me express myself. Something that I *love*. That I need and crave and long for. Something that might bring me joy? All those words and thoughts and unnamed phantoms floating through my mind need an outlet.

Trauma, theory, film – no not film, I don't like film. Or do I? Books, race, gender, class, Foucault, Bourdieu – Bourdieu? I have heard of him before. Discourse theory, I very much dislike discourse theory (*that's a trauma from my first term that will most certainly haunt me forever*). Autotheory... something that mixes theory, memory, and autobiography all together and forms something new. A new paper? *Another paper?* Haven't I written enough papers for a lifetime now? What even is a paper? All I do is write and think and write down what I think just so I get to write one more paper and then another paper and then one final paper but actually there are five more papers waiting around the corner. *But I love it so much.* What are papers even made of? What constitutes materiality? Does it really matter?

How and why do you analyze fiction that was written 223 years ago? How do you argue that the girl in the novel had mental issues because of a trauma that occurred before she was born, a trauma she never fully experienced, a trauma that consumed all of her family and left her on the brink of death again and again until there is nothing else to die for, it is all fiction (*but is it?*), it is all in the past (*but is it?*), how does it all matter (*how can it not?*)?

Why do you care about the past, about what is written, about what is *not* written, about what people refuse to tell you, and why are you understanding of people's actions when all it causes you is pain, why do you keep going back even though all you want to do is cease to exist when you hear their screams again?

Well.

Why not? Why would it not matter, why would the war and the trauma and the girl not matter, why would that *ugly, painful, all-consuming love* not matter, why is it that "why?" is always a legitimate

question and “because I want to,” “because I need to,” and “*just because*” never an appropriate answer?

Writing is hard. Never easy. But still, I get lost in it. Lost – like I get in my mind, in my thoughts, in the endless loops of my brain. Lost to an extent that I think “I completely forgot what this was actually all about, does any of this even matter?” Lost in the sources I read, in the films I watch because somehow there is a category of film that, apparently, I do like, lost in my tasks and losing track of time once again – “Weren’t you going to hand that in on Tuesday?”

Yes. I was. And I can’t make my own personal deadline. Once again. But that is okay. Because amidst all the crashes, and explosions, and losses, and tears, and traumas, it is okay that writing is hard. And that it takes longer. And that *I cannot stop loving it*. And that it looks and feels incoherent more often than I would like to admit. Because some things cannot stay untitled. They need names, and structures, and outlines, coherences, and, most importantly – as one might argue (*I am one*) – they cannot show the lack of simplicity your trauma likes to show off.

They are the things that do not go unsaid.

Not forever.

Just –

for a little while ...

... longer.

Works Cited

- Caruth, Cathy. “Introduction.” *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, edited by Cathy Caruth, Johns Hopkins UP, 1995, pp. 3-12.
- Whitehead, Anne. *Trauma Fiction*. Edinburgh UP, 2004.