*Trauma Theory*

*“Where trauma was, there narrative shall be”*

*--Peter Brooks 82*

**Lecture One:**

*Introduction:*

Literature/ Narrative: “psychoanalysis and literature are particularly privileged forms of writing that can attend to these perplexing problems of trauma.” (5 Roger Luckhurst, *The Trauma Question)*

History: “the entire twentieth century was marked under the sign of ‘historical trauma.”

Modernism: “Modernity [is] insistently haunted by what it ha[s] violently suppressed or forgotten.”

History/ Effect/ rupture: “the aporea of the wound.” Qtd in 6. The self’s repression of its own traumatic dislocations mirrors the repression of the same in collective histories: America’s blind spot toward racism, slavery, and the genocide of Native Americans; the reluctance of the Irish to contemplate the trauma of the “potato famine,” Germany’s want of self reflexivity re: the holocaust et al. That which is publically, socially repressed is given an eruptive force in private—ala the despair voiced in Hamlet’s soliloquies, the eruptive, nightmarish episodes of Jake’s well-lit insomnia.

History of Trauma Theory: Trauma theory is an offspring of the Yale School (Derrida, DeMan) of deconstruction theory in the “mid-70s.” 6. Language is always and already the site of representation and repression, of sign and silence—and may indeed be likened to an iceberg that rides unsteadily above and below the sea, as likely to expose all that lies beneath in a violent inversion of its volitional signs. Authorial intention is often subverted as a consequence of the gap between “representation” and repression.

Literature/ Narrative: “Literature in particular seemed to foreground the slippages inherent in the act of representation, and often came to be *about* the erring” 6—ala Eliot’s Four quartets, Proust’s A la recherché, and Plato’s Phaedrus, with their assumption of putative, if errant truths, recanted by subsequent truths, often recanted in turn by yet more stable truths. Error seems to be integral to the process of knowledge-making, which is viewed as always and already a work in progress, in the protean play between unstable and stable truths of a temporal nature—that change in Time, and as a result of cognition over time.

Intro/ Theory/ History: Carruth’s theory of “traumatic aporia was first formulated when at the Yale English department” 6, as she maps DeMan’s Unclaimed Experience to inform her theory of traumatic aporia.

Theory/ History: The classroom was the site for the “transformation of Yale deconstruction into trauma theory,” 8. Pedagogy, praxis, ala Plato’s analytic elenchus, was the medium for this transformation.

Theory: The effort to “witness trauma from afar” was facilitated, according to Carruth, by a “pedagogical encounter which created new ways of gaining access to an historical [or personal] catastrophe.” 8

Theory/ History: While the work of “Lyotard, Derrida, Felman and Carruth” (not to mention Deleuze, DeMan, Kristeva, and Brooks) suggest that Freud is the “unavoidable foundation for theories of trauma,” I would argue that for understanding the relation between trauma and art, as evidenced in the career of the artiste manqué (suffering artist) the theories of Freud’s subversive protégé Otto Rank are far more useful.

Freud/ History/Origin: Foremost among traumatic events for Freud was “the death of the father and repressed guilt . . . which ‘in the end . . . infallibly come to the field of sexual experience.’” 1896, 199, qtd in 8. Hemingway is an uncannily apt case study for studying the relation between trauma and sexual experience, from Freudian and Rankian perspectives.

Freud/ Retrospective: “theorizing the traumatic origins” of Hemingway’s art. 8 According to Freud, “infantile disturbances” resulted in latent “sexual neuroses and perversions.” 8. “early traumas in childhood would be forgotten . . . but re-emerge in adults.” The eternal return of the repressed, forgotten childhood trauma is “central to cultural trauma theory.” 8 This characteristic of “afterwardness” is associated with “an event not understood as traumatic until its return. Laplance, 1999.

History: A traumatized individual whose experience mirrored the collective trauma of the 20th century: WWI, WWII, The Holocaust, The Atomic Bomb. In which the collective response to trauma mirrors the individual’s reaction: resulting in a retrenched collective state of well armed, hyper vigilance, that privileges shows of brutality and demonstrations of force, as well as a willed amnesia of the traumatic past, with its tendency to repeat the trauma rather than to comprehend and transcend it.

Freud: “the violent disputes that erupted around Freud in the 1980s and 1990s, arguments that fundamentally reexamined the contribution of psychoanalysis and inevitably colored the reception of any theory of trauma tinged with Freudianism.” 10 tq Feminist critique of Freud’s suppression of the “traumatic truth” that “all of his female patients had been sexually abused by their fathers.” 11 tq, shifting the blame from the abusive behaviors of fathers to the “universal sexual *fantasies* of sons and daughters.” Oedipal complex.

Art/ Life/ Pattern/ Fight/ Flight: Thus the epic pattern of his life, lived out in confrontation and flight from trauma, embodied in the ambiguous nature of his art, which is simultaneously a means of confronting and escaping from trauma—played out in the epic pattern of movement in his life, in which the traumas of Michigan end in flights to Italy and Pairs, where they are compounded by fresh traumas, which in Paris are confronted in art (Up in Michigan, Sun), until a fresh trauma of love and loss triggers the flight to Key West, where it too is confronted in art (Arms, Death in Afternoon), where fame crowds the self and fresh traumatic ruptures of love prompt its flight to Cuba, where its traumas, old and new, are again confronted in art (Bell, GOE, Old Man—a drama of a self embattled by overwhelming forces)—until the political rupture of another revolution prompts his flight to the deep wildernesses of Montana and Idaho, remote redoubts of the self where it wages its desperate last stand against a Fate that is forever hounding its heels, tracking it down—with the same bloodlust with which he tracked the blood spoor of a trophy kudu or black-maned lion that had fled into the brush.

Rank’s: theory of trauma rooted in neurotic fear is more credible than freud’s rooted in sexuality.

Freud: “Diverse models of trauma developed by, and in the wake of, Freud.” 13tq.

Trauma and Modernism: “trauma is a concept that can only emerge within modernity, [within] the technological and statistical society that can generate, multiply, and quantify the ‘shocks’ of modern life” 19 tq. “trauma is typically held to be ‘responsive to and constitutive of “modernity”” (Micale and Learner, 2001, 10, qtd in 20. Tq. *“Modernity . . . has come to be understood under the sign of the wound.” ‘The modern subject has become inseparable from the categories of shock and trauma” (Seltezer, 1997, 18, qtd in 20 tq)*

Modernism/ History: “the intrinsic ambivalence of modernity—progress and ruin.” 20 tq Hem’s susceptibility to trauma conditioned by the 20th century, facilitated by the transformation of agrarian 19th into industrial 20th century. Technology viewed by Marx as the “’demonic’ force that reduces human beings to ‘the conscious limbs of the automaton,’” 1980, 14, qtd in 20 tq. Technology enacts a “violent assault on agency and self-determination,” which of all trauma’s effects, is perhaps the most egregious. A self determining individual is reduced to a captive, a prisoner of an event and its aftermath, that has shocked his agency and freedom into oblivion, reduced his will to a paralyzed captive of the shock—a will-to-be which the individual struggles mightily and long to resurrect and reactivate.

History: “the violent collision of technological modernity and human agency” 24 tq

Modernism/ Style: “Many of the formal innovations associated with aesthetic Modernism should be linked with the effects of the Great War” Subjective, confessional, trauma-oriented, split narrative pov,

Rank: Collective vs Indiv: Hemingway is unique in the literature of trauma survivorship insofar as his art objectifies both the collective trauma of war and the individual trauma of sexual abuse, evincing solidarity not only with the survivors of the Holocaust and Hiroshima, but of rape and incest.

Narr: “the narrative/anti-narrative tension at the core of trauma aesthetics” comprises a contradiction that invites the “play” of theory, interpretation. Derrida’s hermeneutic was founded on the “play” of contradictions in Plato. Literature and literary criticism accommodates and invites the play of meanings in a manner preempted by the “strict protocols of meaning” in other discourses—in which the putative meaning of words can be opened up to admit other possibilities, in playful, subversive counterpoint to the putative intention of the author.

Time/ Style: A trauma that ruptures temporal linearity, that privileges retrospective meaning, invites an aesthetics that does the same, ala Proust or Plato, in which a meaning is posited in Time only to be recanted retrospectively by other emergent meanings. This same explication of meaning in Time is ubiquitous in Hemingway, particularly in the posthumous works, where master tropes of masculinity, hunting, and writing itself are doubly explicated by a rhetoric of recantation.

Style: Hem’s narrative tactics and style comprise an aesthetics of trauma, replicating the disruptions and ruptures of trauma, the serial aporias that define his experience and his art. Aporia is a master trope in Hemingway, evidenced in the ruptures between male and female, self and other, persona and being—all conditioned by trauma.

Narr: Atrocity can be mediated by art, if only after the fact. I want to collapse the putative gap between “traumatic event and narrative possibility” theorized by Lyotard, Carruth, Lamb, Felman

Time: Want to explicate the paradoxical “strange temporality” of trauma 81tq

Time: *“the novel has acted for three centuries as ‘a prodigious workshop for experimentation in the . . . expression of time’” Ricouer 1985, 8 85tq.*

Trauma & Feminist Theory: “all feminist literature based on trauma? Kali Tal 72tq “Trauma has played a formative roles in the lives of many, if not most American women. Tal 1996, 155. Narrative in Hemingway, as in feminist discourse, is rooted in trauma. Fantasy of sexually submissive female a response to trauma, insofar as it is a play to regenerate amputated agency of the self, even as his violence toward the emasculating bitch is also a response to trauma, a displacement of his rage toward the mother. Criticism of feminism targets Hemingway’s reinforcement of negative stereotypes, yet misses the underlying traumatic origins of those representations.

Narr: The word mediates and mitigates the violence of trauma, displaces it from the self into the symbolic realm, where it can more effectively be assimilated by the self, at one remove as it were. To free itself from trauma, to recover its agency, the self must first leverage a dialectic space between itself and trauma—in language. This dilatory space provides the mechanism of its recovery: *a space in which the tyranny of trauma is subverted by the word. The subversive agency of art relative to trauma.*