*Trauma Theory*

**Lecture 3**

**Effects/ Symptoms**

**The Idee Fixee:**

**Case Studies:** Hamlet, Hemingway’s Jake Barnes in *SAR*, Nick in “BTHR,” “Now I Lay Me,” and “A Way You’ll Never Be,” and Santiago in *Old Man,* Dostoievski’s protagonist in *Crime & Punishment*, and Joyce’s Stephen Dedalus in *Portrait.*

Definition: A form of *retrenchment* that prompts *madness* and/or *dissociation*

Effect/ Idee Fixee/ Spread/ Displacement: The traumatic shock uses “the initial physical wound” as a point of entry into the whole being “to travel through the nervous system and to develop diffuse and varied organic manifestations” Chjarcot 1991 289, qtd in 35 tq. Resulting in the “’psychical paralyses’” associated with the idée fixee, and mental retrenchment.

Effect/ Madness/ Beast/ Will: “Mental illness was a failure of the will to command,” the usurping of the self’s will by traumatic shock, which left it helplessly enslaved to the violent effects of trauma. Passive, if not paralyzed—capable only of enduring where it was incapable of escaping the effects of traumatic shock. It endures via mechanisms of escape that are only fleeting, temporary: writing, reading, drinking, travel, blood sport.

Beast/ Idee Fixee: In the end, it is always returned to its secret servitude to the invincible Beast within—objectified in the beasts it repeatedly slays in reality, as surrogate victims of its desire for a lost supremacy, agency, and freedom relative to the Beast: the rank bull, the black-maned lion, the “grander” marlin, the trophy kudu, the massive water buffalo, the charging grizzly: all are stand-ins for the invincible Beast he serves, for whom each slaughtered trophy kill is a wish-fulfilling surrogate—a sacrificial victim to his traumatized servitude. The agency the hunter enjoys in the field, for which the agency of the matador/boxer in the ring is a surrogate, is the reverse of the tormented paralysis of a mind enslaved by an idée fixee. *The bloody mobility of the body tropes on the haunted fixation of the mind. The movable feast of the hunter contrasts with the repetitious fare slipped under the door of the psychic prisoner, in a “psychophysical parallelism between body and mind.’ 36 tq*

Idee Fixee/ retrenchment: In response to trauma, the “mind narrowed itself around a particular idea, and this idea fixee became a *dam (my emphasis),* behind which pooled a host of associated ideas that developed into unhealthy clusters that might then be converted into neurotic symptoms.” The image of a “dam” is significant for it underscores the severity of the blockage—in this case of thought, whose free-flow is concretized, immobilized in the tyranny of a single idea, fear—around which other fears cluster, resulting in a nexus of fears that dominates the mind, crowding out all other ideas, thoughts, memories, reflections, as oppressive as the cyclopean glare of a sun, by which the onlooker’s gaze is blinded. The fixation, repetitions, and psychic retrenchment of the idée fixee are then displaced, objectified in Heminway’s aesthetic ideology—where they reappear in the guise of repeated syntax, in the recurring theme of violence, in his radically pared down prose, reprising in the rigid control of the prose process the idée fixee’s control of the mental process.

Idee Fixee: The idée fixee induces the same effects in the mind as hypnosis: “the same narrowed attention,” which is precisely why hypnosis and its power of suggestion has been effective in treating the effects of trauma, “unblocking idée fixee and allowing psychic energy to flow once more”

Idee Fixee/ Trauma: “the distressing event whose psychic imprint fixes itself in the mind in an unassimilated way, become[s] the locus of a host of disorders.” 39tq Reactivation of the will, whether though therapeutic analysis, a talking cure, or hypnosis is essential for remedying its traumatic paralysis—enabling the victim to fight fire with fire, reactivating the will to negate its paralysis. The reassertion of the will against the paralyzing effects of trauma is the path to a healthful movement beyond trauma. With each assertion of will against its paralysis, it grows stronger, freer—like an broken limb recuperating its free range of movement, moving beyond the stage of mere accommodation, in which its agency is still compromised, to a stage that more nearly resembles the original, pre-trauma agency it enjoyed—which if never achieved absolutely, yet constitutes the means for a healthful engagement with life.

Idee Fixee: Traumatic memories “are registered with an affective intensity that does not fade: an idée fixee” 46tq. This explains the centrality of violence to Hemingway’s art—it too is an effect of trauma. Art is the most effective response for mitigating the violence trauma does to the self. In other words, the violence of trauma is mitigated by objectifying it in art. As this violence “does not fade with time,” it comprises an endless well-spring for Hemingway’s art: one so deep and enduring, he will die without having exhausted it. It is a dark inkwell that never goes dry, the black lead that keeps his pencil moving across the page, the evil genius that informs his prose.

Idee Fixee/ Blockage/ Flow/ Symbolism/ Sun/ Feast: Why the Seine in Feast, the Irati in Sun, and the BTHR are such a comforting, consoling presence,for they tropes on the natural flow, on “life’s continuity” that has been so violently disrupted by trauma, blocked and damned.

Sun/ Idee fixee/ Blockage: For Hemingway, writer’s block is the most feared symptom of trauma: a blockage that denies entrance into the illusory realm, and so denies him his most effect means of coping with trauma. He goes to great lengths to outwit it, develops cunning stratagems.

Effect/ Blocking/ Def/Desc: “aporia as a blocking of passage, a stalling or hesitation, a foot hovering on the threshold caught between advancing and falling back. . . “ Derrida, 1993, 15, qtd in 6.

Remedy = return to flow of life. Gulf Stream = trope for this restored and restorative flow. Why it meant so much, was so beloved by Hemingway, a physical symbol of the restoration of the “flow,” of “life continuity,” of the current that mitigates the “blockages” of trauma. A natural, indomitable force which acts as the counterweight, if not counterpart to the invincible blocking force of trauma, one of whose displaced effects is writer’s block.

Effect: Splitting/ Dissociation

Effect/ Splitting: Trauma leads to the disintegration of the self which is partially re-integrated through art, and augmented with freshly invented selves (personas, including the persona of the author/writer)

Splitting/ Art/ Personas: Treatment of the fragmenting effects of trauma is “directed at reunifying and bolstering the patient’s will” (Rank’s will therapy). Hemingway, like doctors in generals “resisted engaging with the precipitating traumatic causes” 37tq, combating its effects instead with “prospective duties and wholesome pursuits,” with faithful pastimes, preoccupations, and distractions: writing, reading, drinking, travel, and blood sports. “[N]eglect of [the patient’s] nervous troubles is the most effective means of getting rid of them”—as evidenced by Jake’s repeated efforts in Sun to not think or talk about his psychical/physical malaise. Oppenheim 1911, 1179.

Split/ Double: some victims of traumatic shock develop a “distinct, double state where their personality [is] transformed,” and in which one may become “more dominant” (ala The Old Brute and Katherine. 39tq. Yet this “secondary” personality “might be more sensitive and intelligent than normal consciousness,” ala Hemingway’s androgynous Summer Girl.

Idee Fixee/ Split: An “art of self modification.” Thus the tyranny of the idée fixee triggers the mobility of the self, as it invents various personalities/ personas as refuges from the “abject terror” of its traumatic fixation, the realms of illusion providing a safe haven from its reality shock. Multiple Personality Disorder as a survival response to trauma, in which the shattered self replicates itself, or the fragments of the self become the raw material for reinvented selves. Often the process is triggered by an initial fright, so acute the self fears of its life, feels acutely imperiled, or the threat of morbid injury.

Effect/ Split: “Contemporary theories of MPD centre specifically on the inaugural trauma, and overwhelmingly (in 97 percent of cases) identify that trauma as child sexual abuse.Abnuse acts as the shattering event that lies buried and forgotten, yet pristinely preserved, somewhere in a fragmentary “alter” personality [Katherine/Summer Girl]. For Hemingway, art took the place of analysis in “teasi[ng] out” the traumatic event, as if surgically nudging a piece of shrapnel to a less threatening position in the psyche’s deep tissue. 40 tq

Split/ Multiple Personality Disorder (MPD: “presents a politics of the [androgynous] secret.” 40 tq. The dyad of patient and doctor is replaced by the partnership of the self and the artist within the self , in a “mutual act of invention” that fosters a “dilatory space” of agency and survival between the material and symbolic realms, which by transferring the violent effects of trauma from the self to the symbol mitigates those effects, enough to enable to survival of the self. Though the process does not effect a cure, it does result in a durable accommodation, which gives the artist a strategic advantage over other victims of trauma.

Effect/ Split: “the mechanism of psychic defense . . . that creates the ‘splitting’ of personality, is dissociation.” 41tq “’an adaptive process that protects the individual and allows him to continue to function though often in an automaton state’” Putnam 1999, 116, qtd in 42tq. As evidenced by Hemingway’s automaton like routine in Paris—repairing to the same flat at the same hour every day to write, then going for same walk to same café (Lilas), the same bookstore Shakespeare & Co), the same salon (Stein).

Split/ Double/ MPD: “a particularly shocking moment or event . . . produce[s] a defensive response . . . a narrowing of the field of consciousness [psychic retrenchment]). This would become an idée fixee” [fear of madness, death, or impotency], around which develops “’a personality independent of the first’ (Janet 1901, 492, qtd 42tq. Paranoid, defensive, secretive, and androgynous, who then develops a twin personality, the macho brute as an artful cover. “It was this act of splitting that created a double self . . . something that coalesced around the . . . fixed idea”” Control over the mind and its processes is lost, is yet another effect, casualty of the traumatic shock. To defend itself, the mind splits into separate, multiple personalities—literally and figuratively discovering the wisdom of the old adage that ‘two heads are better than one.” It divides, not in order to conquer, but to cope. Splitting of its personality is perhaps the lone defense available to the enfeebled “subject,” which is no longer the master of its own mind—who must share its head with this Other, dark, dangerous, despotic. The muse is yet another personality it evolves to insure its traumatized survival. Thanks to the absorbent resiliency of the muse, the traumatized subject’s capacity for madness is substantial—so that both twins of its divided personality thrive, side by side in destructive-constructive symbiosis. The dark brute is as invincible as the sensitive muse is inviolate. In subjects like Hemingway’s, the trauma can never be overthrown or outgrown, even as it stands impotent before the realms of the creative, which the self erects as a durable firewall against the disintegrating and totalizing tendencies of trauma. In fact, this subject’s tendency toward totalizing experiences, its susceptibility to experience things absolutely, leaves it predisposed to trauma—which of all life’s totalizing experiences (love, art, friendship, work, sport, a professional calling, addiction) is perhaps the most destructive. It is not just “the nature of the trauma, but the subject’s “predisposition” to it that accounts for its violence effects. 43tq

Idee Fixee: “’Fixed ideas must be destroyed by means of dissociation or transformation’” Ellenberger 1994, 373, 44tq. Off all the means of dissociation, art is the most efficacious in mitigating the effects of trauma—dissociating the self from its near-fatal wound, awakening a host of positive and pleasant effects, as might indeed be associated with the blessings a mother feels upon giving birth—acting as a timely antidote and counterweight to the cruel, self-negating effects of trauma. That which is created in the illusory realms compensates the self for what has been traumatically amputated in the life. The self, as it were, grows a new limb, regenerates itself through art--not as a free-standing, self-determining, pre-traumatic self, but as a symbiotic sibling to its dark twin, whose defenses confer a kind of immunity to the trauma that has aggressively colonized the rest of the self: physically, nervously, emotionally, and mentally.

Art is Hemingway’s bullring, command post, partisan cave, forest campsite, shark-encircled skiff, well-lit café, and last-stand, hilltop stronghold—his symbolic Finca Vigia (hilltop lookout). It is the means by which the traumatic idée fixee is combated, checked, coped with, if never destroyed. Art is what gains for the self its stale-mated truce with trauma, is the impregnable stronghold from which the self flies its impudent, if torn flag of independence in the face of an enemy that would otherwise overwhelm this last redoubt of its agency. In art, the self gains a precious foothold against trauma—finds a lone, impregnable refuge against trauma, which enable it to mount liberatory, life-giving sortees into the world beyond its stronghold, even adopting art as a mobile command post that enable its movement in a world that is ever threatening its eclipse, its death: hunting, fishing, travelling . . . all of which become surrogate refuges from trauma, satellites of its one, true and life-sustaining sanctuary: art.

Splitting: Dissociation . . . “where the self floats away from coherence into separate islands of consciousness” 48tq

Effect/ Splitting/ Personas: His “social subject . . . came into being through an inherently traumatic development.” 49tq The persona of The Old Brute, Hemingstein, even the flirtatious nature of the Katherine within, are social personas, awakened in the presence of rivals, idealized, and sexualized Others. Social acceptance mitigates the effects of traumatic alienation, provides a cover for the Beast within, the wounded bear that crossed the Atlantic with him. He is a Jeckyl and Hyde, whose tweed suit, and beret hide the evil twin within.

GOE/ Persona/ Split: He “enters” the bisexual persona, as both “agent and victim,” female and male, Katherine and David Bourne, “in an attempt to master personal pain through the figurations” (not of the Holocaust, ala Plath in her poem “Daddy”) but of androgynous sexuality. The self that is fractured into male and female identities by trauma is objectified in art, the separate personalities that are repressed in life finding their own voice and behaviors on the plane of illusion.

Effect/ Split/ Identity politics/ Messiash: The survivor as “prophet or visionary because they have touched death, ‘crossed over to the other side and returned’ and can now claim an exclusive knowledge of all matters related to death” Lifton, 1973, 314, 64 tq. Hemingway’s close encounter with death in war is his magna cum laude in trauma, conferring on him the social status of exemplar in pain. The wound is embraced as mark of distinction that sets the survivor apart from and above the non-combatant, hence the hierarchy that sets Jake and his maimed brotherhood above the likes of Cohn. War trauma surviviorship establishes a hierarchy between same and other.

Effect/ Messiah: “traumatic experience gifts the patient heightened, even supernatural powers,” producing a kind of existential exceptionalism, “a ‘limit situation,’ where only extremity truly confirmed being-in-the-world.” 64tq. This sense of traumatic exceptionalism is heightened in the artist who, unlike the ordinary trauma victim, is able to “break through this numbed [post-traumatic] state,” by objectifying it in art. 64tq. This further signifies the traumatized artist as exceptional, exemplary, conferring on him or her the status of “prophet or visionary,” by virtue of their wound-into-wisdom transformation—by virtue of their coming-into-voice regarding trauma, their ability to speak of that which leaves others mute—whether to a crowded café table or an empty page.

Effect/ Messiah:/ Identity Politics: “The survivor alone can reconvene the shattered fragments . . . the passage through a trauma giving the sanction of privileged perspective . . . a trauma-defined identity . . . . the survivor subject position developing a kind of glamour” 64tq. Thus, Hemingway’s effort to articulate that which was traumatic (Solider Home, BTHR, Sun, Arms, Bell, GOE) evidences the extent to which his art is bound up in his own “identity politics,” as a trauma survivor, a wounded warrior.

Effect/ Messiah/ The Survivor as hero: “As soon as the survivor becomes heroic, touched with the shamanistic powers of cheating death . . . the figure becomes a locus for a host of identifications.” 69 tq

Split/ Identity Politics: Hemingway trapped between the two constructs of his split, post-traumatic identity: the Old Brute and Katherine, in a bisexual limbo, torn between the identify politics of both genders, each demanding an absolute fidelity he is unable to give, giving rise to a conflicted pain as acute as that of the bicultural individual torn between the imperatives of an ancestral and an assimilating culture. These conflicts are harmonized, if only temporarily, on the plane of illusion, in art.

Social identity Politics and Trauma: Construction of persona an effect of social identity politics. A social construction, national manhood, collective ideology.

Persona/ Social/ Origin of Papa, Old Brute, Hemingstein: ‘’traumatic reality . . . requires a social context that affirms and protects the victim,’” Herman 1992, 9, qtd in 62 tq. The constructed persona recruits others to subscribe to the myth of its reality, to suspend their disbelief regarding its illusory nature, collapsing the difference between the act and the actor. Social reality becomes the theatre for the performance of manhood, reinforcing the construct of “national manhood.” 62 tq. Social performance of masculinity