



Silenced Wounds: Trauma, Justice, and Ethical Representation of Sexual Coercion of Men in *The Bluest Eye* and *The Kite Runner*

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Abstract— Sexual violence is one of the most pervasive and devastating human rights violations, leaving deep psychological, emotional, and social scars on survivors. Rape narratives have long served as powerful tools to expose this violence, challenge societal denial, and give voice to those whose suffering is often hidden behind shame and fear. Rape has historically been shaped by narrow assumptions about gender, frequently portraying women as the sole victims and men solely as perpetrators. By examining rape narratives with particular attention to male victimization, it becomes possible to challenge these deeply rooted stereotypes and broaden our understanding of sexual violence. Male sexual trauma remains one of the most silenced subjects in literary representation due to entrenched norms of masculinity and institutional denial. This paper offers such a comparative analysis of two male victims: Cholly Breedlove in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* and Hassan in Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*, examining how trauma, justice, recovery, and ethics are constructed in narratives of male rape. Through a trauma-theoretical and socio-ethical lens, the paper aims to bicker that both novels depict male rape as a socially produced violation rooted in racial and ethnic power structures. While Hassan's trauma manifests as silence and moral endurance throughout the novel, Cholly's trauma emerges as rage, destructive and self-destructive masculinity. The comparison reveals the absence of justice and recognition forecloses recovery and raises urgent ethical questions about witnessing, narrative authority, and responsibility in representing male survivor experiences.



Keywords— trauma studies, rape narratives, male rape, sexual coercion, masculinity, silence, ethics, Morrison, Hosseini

Introduction

Male rape has historically been excluded from dominant literary and legal discourses, rendered unthinkable by cultural constructions of masculinity that equate manhood with invulnerability. When male sexual violation does appear in literature, it is often displaced, silenced, or narratively mediated. Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* (1970) and Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* (2003) offer two of the most significant English-language representations of male rape, articulated through the characters of Cholly Breedlove and Hassan. Although situated in distinct cultural contexts—racialized America

and ethnically stratified Afghanistan—both novels depict male rape as an act of domination, sexual coercion that produces enduring trauma while being denied justice and voice. Through personal testimonies and literary representations, these narratives confront the realities of trauma while demanding recognition, justice, and empathy. However, a discussion of this limited framework has contributed to the widespread neglect of male rape, rendering male survivors invisible within both social discourse and institutional responses. Cultural expectations of masculinity, stigma, and disbelief often silence men

who experience sexual violence, discouraging them from reporting abuse or sharing their stories.

This paper compares Cholly and Hassan to argue that male sexual trauma in these texts is not an individual pathology but a socially structured wound. By examining trauma, justice, recovery, and narrative ethics, the study demonstrates how both novels expose the cultural mechanisms that silence male survivors and perpetuate cycles of violence. Acknowledging male rape does not diminish the suffering of female survivors; rather, it expands the conversation to include all victims who have been marginalized. Recognizing and analyzing these overlooked narratives is essential for fostering inclusivity, dismantling harmful myths, and creating a more comprehensive and compassionate approach to addressing gender bias, sexual violence and sex education.

Trauma and the Fragmentation of Self

Trauma theory emphasizes that extreme violence resists direct representation and often returns in fragmented or belated forms (Caruth 4). Trauma and fragmentation of the self is obvious in both Hassan and Cholly's experience of sexual violation during adolescence, a formative period that overwhelmingly shapes their identities. In *The Kite Runner*, Hassan's rape by Assef and his friends, is an indirect narration through Amir's perspective, emphasizing the social erasure of the victim's voice. Hassan never names the violation, embodying what Judith Herman identifies as the "unspeakability of trauma" under conditions of shame and powerlessness (Herman 1). Hassan's trauma manifests as silence and submission, an invisible psychological collapse. His continued loyalty to Amir after the assault illustrates how trauma becomes internalized within existing hierarchies of servitude and ethnic oppression. His quiet endurance reflects the Hazara subject's limited access to speech and justice within Pashtun-dominated Afghan society.

Morrison offers a psychologically intimate yet structurally grounded account of Cholly Breedlove's adolescent rape, in contrast. Cholly is forced by white men to perform sexual acts while being watched, an experience Morrison frames as a fusion of sexual humiliation and racial terror. The narrator observes that Cholly feels "a total absence of human dignity," a moment that fractures his emotional capacity for intimacy. Trauma here does not disappear into silence but reemerges as psychic disintegration, aligning with Herman's assertion that unacknowledged trauma often produces rage rather than healing.

Justice and Institutional Failure

Justice is conspicuously absent in both narratives, reinforcing the ethical critique of institutional power. Hassan's rape occurs in a society that neither recognizes

male rape nor values Hazara lives. There is no legal mechanism through which Hassan could seek justice, and Amir's silence further compounds this erasure. Justice in *The Kite Runner* is displaced into moral reckoning, as Amir later seeks personal redemption rather than institutional accountability.

In *The Bluest Eye*, Cholly's rape occurs within a racist legal and social system that protects white perpetrators and criminalizes Black bodies. Morrison situates Cholly's violation within a historical continuum of racial violence, where the law functions as an instrument of domination rather than protection. Saidiya Hartman argues that such scenes reveal how Black suffering is rendered "legible only as spectacle or pathology" (Hartman 21), a condition that forecloses justice entirely.

Both novels thus depict justice as structurally impossible rather than individually denied, revealing the systems of power in point of fact normalize male sexual violence by refusing to name it as such.

Recovery and the Ethics of Non-Redemption

Neither Hassan nor Cholly experiences full recovery, challenging dominant narratives of trauma as something that can be overcome through resilience alone. Hassan's life offers no space for healing; his trauma is absorbed into a life of servitude and ultimately sealed by his death. His moral purity, often idealized by critics, underscores the tragic cost of endurance without recognition.

Cholly's trajectory illustrates a different but equally devastating outcome. Unable to process his trauma, he turns to alcohol and violence, ultimately ending up in a broken, distorted, and toxic relationship with his wife Pauline and raping his daughter, Pecola confusing her and her signs to be Pauline. Morrison's ethical stance is crucial here: the novel contextualizes Cholly's actions without excusing them. Trauma explains but does not absolve. This refusal of redemptive closure aligns with Morrison's broader project of exposing how systemic violence reproduces itself across generations.

Masculinity and the Politics of Silence

Both characters expose the fragility of hegemonic masculinity. Hassan's rape destabilizes ideals of strength and honor, yet his response: loyalty, physical endurance, and silence, functions as a compensatory masculinity within Afghan patriarchal codes. His victimhood must remain invisible to preserve social order.

Cholly's masculinity, by contrast, is violently distorted by racial humiliation. His rape renders him sexually powerless, and his later aggression represents an attempt to reclaim authority through domination. R.W. Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity helps illuminate how

both characters are excluded from legitimate manhood, though in culturally specific ways (Connell 77).

Narrative Ethics and Witnessing

Ethically, the novels differ in narrative strategy but converge in purpose. Hassan's trauma is mediated through Amir's guilt, raising questions about narrative authority and secondary witnessing. The reader encounters Hassan's pain indirectly, mirroring his social invisibility. Morrison, however, foregrounds structural causality by embedding Cholly's trauma within historical and racial contexts, refusing voyeuristic detail while demanding ethical engagement.

Both authors position the reader as a witness rather than a consumer of suffering. As Dominick LaCapra argues, ethical trauma narratives resist closure and instead require sustained responsibility from the reader (LaCapra 41).

CONCLUSION

Literature like *The Bluest Eye* and *The Kite Runner* and the comparative analysis of Cholly Breedlove and Hassan demonstrates male sexual victimization has often been silenced, leaving survivors to carry trauma alone, revealing deep emotional impact of these experiences. While Hassan's silence and Cholly's rage represent divergent responses, both reveal the devastating consequences of denied justice and unacknowledged suffering. These novels challenge dominant gender norms, expose the social production of silence, and demand an ethical mode of reading that recognizes male survivors without reducing their trauma to spectacle or moral simplification. Talking about male rape is crucial as it validates survivors, challenges harmful gender norms, and prevents further harm. Today, help lines, counseling, and sex education, right from school and adolescence age exist as a result of demanded recognition from the victims and survivors. Acknowledging their silenced wounds and trauma transform support and suffering into healing.

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