



# Unfinished Words and Silent Endings: Anne Frank's Diary Through the Lens of Cathy Caruth's Trauma Theory

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**Abstract**— The research explores *The Diary of a Young Girl* written by Anne Frank through the lens of Cathy Caruth's trauma theory, as presented in *Unclaimed Experiences: Trauma, Narrative and History*. Anne Frank, a Holocaust victim known for her posthumously published diary that documents her life in hiding during the World War II. The diary reflects her confinement, emotional turmoil, and psychological evolution under traumatic circumstances. Her writing reveals the difficulty in articulating her traumatic experience, it builds her identity and writing becomes a tool for her to survive. However, the diary ends abruptly with her arrest by the Nazi force, an interruption that mirrors Cathy Caruth's notion of trauma that states, trauma is neither fully experienced nor resolved in the moment. The study views Anne Frank's experiences through the lens of Cathy Caruth's Trauma Theory and analyses how Anne processes her trauma through writing and how her condition represents the trauma of other victims.



**Keywords**— Holocaust Literature, Formation and Narrative Disruption, Identity, Trauma theory and Unprocessed Experience

## I. INTRODUCTION

The study intends to present how trauma works in *Diary of a Young Girl* written by Anne Frank as per the framework of Cathy Caruth's *Unclaimed Experiences: Trauma, Narrative and History*. The word 'trauma' is a Greek word which means 'wound'- the physical injuries. Trauma is a part of human history since our earliest ancestors. The impact of the physical injuries on psyche cannot be assessed, there are archaeological findings that show how the Neanderthals survived multiple healed injuries including withered arm, degeneration spinal injuries, and cranial damage and they received care from their community during recovery.

External events, health and social structures like natural calamities, famines, oppression, slavery, poverty, social neglect, physical and mental abuse, epidemics and pandemics, death and war have transformed the meaning

of trauma from physical injury to the internal wound of the psyche. (Dunham, 2024).

During the World War I (1914 – 1918), trauma was concerned only with the shell-shocked soldiers. In the research article, *The Neurological Manifestations of Trauma: Lessons from World War I*, author Stefanie C Linden observes that war experiences were a major trigger for functional disorders in German soldiers. The soldiers were traumatised by sudden shock waves from explosions which affected the manpower in the military authorities and thus trauma became a crucial topic (Linden et al, p. 12). During the World War II (1939 – 1945), trauma was considered as the response of the victims, survivors, prisoners and also the soldiers. Witnessing mass death, fear, loss, emptiness and displacement were also considered traumatic. Sigmund Freud in his book *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) laid the foundation of trauma theory and proposed the concept of repression and

belatedness. According to his theory, the mind represses the painful experiences that are unable to process when they occur. Thus, the repressed feelings get into the unconscious realm of mind and later comes out in the form of dreams. Belatedness happens when mind cannot register the painful experiences when they occur, but they recollect it later in disruptive ways through dreams, flashbacks or compulsive repetition of actions. The aftermath of World Wars significantly expanded the field of trauma studies giving rise to Holocaust studies, memory studies and postmodern theory. Very soon, the trauma theory started to encompass a variety of traumata including child abuse, sexual abuse and violence (Kaur, 2023, p.17). The modern medical nomenclature for experiencing psychological wounds is called as 'post-traumatic stress disorder'.

Cathy Caruth, is an American contemporary theorist and a pioneer of Trauma Studies. Inspired greatly by Sigmund Freud, Jacques Lacan and Paul de Man Caruth examines how trauma affects individuals and people's collective memory. Caruth's book *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* written in 1996 is one of her significant works. She authored *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (1995) and *Literature in the Ashes of History* (2013). Both the works explores how trauma impacts memory, history and literature. Caruth represents how trauma is experienced, processed, remembered and represented in literature. Her perspectives on trauma play a vital role in studying Holocaust and War literatures. According to Cathy Caruth trauma is an overwhelming sudden experience of catastrophic occurrences for which the response is often delayed. The response of overwhelming happenings is uncontrollable repetition of hallucinations or intrusive experiences (Caruth, 1996). In the drama *Stone Angel* written by Margaret Laurence in 1964, the characters experience emotional paralysis, grief repression and fractured relationships. Hagar Shipley, the main character does not react when her brother dies in the World War I. She refuses to process the trauma and uses emotional coldness, pride and denial to shield her psychological pain. Hagar becomes emotionally distant from her son and passes down the same emotional coldness to him. This is called as intergenerational trauma, which passes down from one generation to another through genetics, behaviours, beliefs, communication patterns within families and cultures. It is impossible to process the sudden outbreak of the event and thus the psyche resituates it to process it for better clarity. Resolving the experience becomes uncertain due to fluctuation of memories and emotions.

Trauma makes people to struggle in narrating their experiences fluently. Trauma is best expressed in literature and it is represented through fragmented storytelling

narratives, repetitions (Caruth, 1996, p. 12). Trauma is a wound inflicted upon the mind that is not easily healable, but that can be processed through ordered narratives. In Toni Morrison's *Beloved* the protagonist Sethe's trauma is expressed in fragmented haunting metaphors and in *Slaughterhouse-Five* by Kurt Vonnegut the protagonist becomes unstuck in time and it is represented through disjointed timelines. Cathy Caruth argues, art forms, literature and storytelling can be effective in expressing trauma effectively. Literature as an art form that represents the victim's experience which is not fully comprehended and that of the author. (Dewani 3). Holocaust Centre North, an association that educates on Holocaust and Post-holocaust issues explains how the holocaust experience traumatizes the survivors even after being freed. Arek Hersh, a holocaust survivor somehow managed to withstand the extremity of cruel Nazi treatment. He wrote a book in 1995 about his struggles. Arek did not talk about his experiences and suffered nightmares till he wrote down his memories of the holocaust. Thus, through writing, he expressed his experiences.

## II. A VOICE FROM THE ANNEX ECHOES THE LIFE OUTSIDE

The **headings** and **subheadings**, starting with "**1. Introduction**", appear in upper and lower case letters and should be **set in bold and aligned flush left**. All headings from the Introduction to Acknowledgements are numbered sequentially using 1, 2, 3, etc. Subheadings are numbered 1.1, 1.2, etc. If a subsection must be further divided, the numbers 1.1.1, 1.1.2, etc.

The font size for **heading is 11 points bold face** and **subsections with 10 points and not bold**. Do not underline any of the headings, or add dashes, colons, etc.

Anne Frank was a Jewish girl born in Germany in 1929. Anne's family along with eight people went into hiding in 1942 in a concealed annex above Anne's father's office to escape the Nazi's anti-Jewish escalation in Germany. They were arrested by the Gestapo, the Nazi police force in 1944 and taken to different concentration camps. They were living in hiding for two years and one month. Only Anne's father survived the Holocaust and Anne died of sickness in the concentration camp just a week before the camp was liberated.

During her hiding in the annex, Anne recorded her experiences in a personal diary. She named it Kitty which became her confidante. Her self-expressionistic narration depicts her longing for freedom. The journal reveals her complex relationship with other inmates, psychological fluctuations due to puberty and her mental conflicts. Her reflections while living in confinement represents her

refined evolution. Amidst isolation, and disconnection from family, tackling complicated relationship, falling in love, self-discovery and finding true identity and enhancing one's passion by writing a diary is too optimistic in times of despair and uncertainty (Lily Baha Aind, p. 2).

The diary is not just a personal reflection but a documentation of the collective suffering under harsh social and political condition during the World War II. I can feel the suffering of millions (Frank, p. 90). She writes her experiences which mirrors that of the others. Anne's diary encompasses representative trauma. "History, like trauma, is never simply one's own... history is precisely the way we are implicated in each other's traumas" (Caruth, 1996, p. 24). History makes Trauma to transcend personal experiences and makes it a part of collective memory. Anne writes about the anti-Jewish laws that marginalize the Jews economically, politically and psychologically. Increasing scarcity of food, prohibition from public spaces, lack of education, terror of genocide and dehumanization, doomed future and hopeless living in isolation are the dark pages of history seen in the diary. She writes, "Countless friends and acquaintances have gone to a terrible fate, evening after evening the green and grey raided the streets. Watches, radios, bicycles, and everything else they could lay their hands on were sent to Germany" (Frank, p. 59). Anne says, she is so blessed as she is safe inside the annex and is shielded from the cruel regime of Hitler. "We eat the same rotted food day in and day out...it's either rotten cabbage or soggy potatoes" (Frank, p. 144). The diary portrays the plight of Jews who go into hiding because under similar circumstances people share similar experiences in varying degrees. Thus, Anne's personal trauma speaks for a larger group who share her fate. Her diary written from the annex gives voice to the collective suffering of Jews. diary is evidence of an individual's trauma during World War II and also a documentation of representative trauma.

### III. IDENTITY FORMATION

Cathy Caruth argues that trauma survivors have a fractured self-identity because of the disconnected past and the struggle for present identities. While sending the Jews to concentration camps, healthy men were segregated to do hard chores by the German force. The healthier-looking men are shaved and are identified with the numbers that were tattooed on their bodies. From then on, they were referred to by their numbers. The survivors lived with this identity all through their lives along with the pain carried. Unable to detach from their past identities they strive for creating a new one. This is called

as pre-trauma and post-trauma identities. Pre-trauma identity is a personality, thoughts, behaviours and how the victims saw the world, and, post- traumatic identity is how they feel, behave or see themselves and others.

Anne Frank received the diary on her 13<sup>th</sup> birthday before her hiding. The first entry in the diary was, "I hope I will be able to confide everything to you, as I have never been able to confide in anyone, and I hope you will be a great source of comfort and support" (Frank, p. 7). Anne personifies her diary as her best friend and named it Kitty. The diary is a means to externalize her internal conflicts. Within a month's time, her life changes and she consider the Diary to be her sole companion. Anne talks about her passion, longingness, hope for the future, perception of sexuality as an early adolescent girl, love with Peter- a fellow inmate and, even the boring happenings in the annex. In the beginning, the readers see an immature little girl struggling to fit into the hiding life. Living in an annex without surety of life creates psychological distress, creating numbness. Anne was the youngest of all the eight inmates. She sculpts her 'sturm und drang' behaviour throughout the memoir. Sturm und Drang is a German phrase to describe psychological turmoil of adolescence. Under extreme turbulence she self-evaluates her emotional ups and downs, rebellious nature, inner conflicts and stubborn behaviour. "I don't fit in with them, and I've never felt like I really belong to the group. They don't understand me at all" (Frank, p. 53). She detaches herself and stops reacting to external disturbances. "I've reached the point where I hardly care whether I live or die. The world will keep on turning without me, and I can't do anything to change events anyway" (Frank, p.177). Throughout the memoir, she articulates the sense of detachment and numbness where she does not want to react to happenings because she believes nothing would change. However, she never stops writing. She writes, reads and, re-reads her diary and tries to become a better version of herself. "When I write, I can shake off all my cares. My sorrow disappears, my spirits are revived!" (Frank, p. 243).

According to Cathy Caruth trauma divides the self-identity and identity becomes fluid and unstable (Caruth, 1996, p. 11). Anne Frank's internal conflicts transformed her from childhood to forced maturity due to war. "I know what I want, I have a goal, I have opinions, a religion, and love. If I'm forced to watch other people suffer and do nothing, I'm not the Anne I want to be." (Frank, p. 244). She gets wise beyond her age because she keeps redefining her identity and often feels disconnected and unstable. She lives inside the enclosed space, yet she has access to the outer world through the radio and the people who helped them. Both looks like two different worlds altogether, from

one which Anne envisions the hopeful another. "I don't want to have lived in vain like most people, I want to be useful or bring enjoyment to all people... I want to go on living even after my death! And that's why I'm so grateful to God for having given me this gift, which I can use to develop myself and to express all that's inside me!" (Frank 243). Anne uses writing as a tool to analyse her identity and to build one.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Cathy Caruth does not focus on healing in *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, rather she explores how to understand trauma and how it shapes memory, language and storytelling. According to Cathy, trauma is not fully experienced in the moment it occurs but is fragmented and returns through repetitions. While trauma may never be fully resolved, the process of articulating it can help in shaping its understanding. Cathy suggests artistic forms like literature, storytelling and narrative helps to approach trauma. She also emphasizes the role of the listener: trauma is shared in the space between the speaker and the empathetic witness.

In Anne Frank's case, she processes her traumatic experience through writing. Her diary, which she addresses to an imaginary friend named Kitty, becomes a space for emotional survival and reflection. However, her arrest cuts short this process, silencing her voice before. Kitty as a passive listener, cannot respond or bear witness in the way Cathy envisions. Thus, the relationship between speaker and listener is left unfulfilled in the process. Like trauma itself, Anne's narrative ends without resolution.

Anne Frank's diary may be further explored through feminist, postcolonial, or therapeutic writing frameworks, revealing new dimensions of voice identity and resilience. Her personal trauma becomes a representative testimony for countless others whose stories remain untold. Even in its unfinished and unhealed state, Anne's voice continues to demand to be heard.

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