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Melancholia and Traumatic Reenactment in Contemporary American Fiction: A Caruthian Reading of Gillian Flynn's Novels

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Abstract

Gillian Schieber Flynn's fiction is laced with such recurring themes as dysfunctional nature of families, childhood abuse and neglect, and tragic murder of the loved ones. The current study, therefore, will set out to prove that the central characters of Flynn's *Sharp Objects*, *Dark Places*, and *Gone Girl* have been traumatized in their childhood, the effect of which still haunts them through hallucinations, traumatic flashbacks, and nightmares. It will be contended that the characters are still melancholic after many a year, thus fixated on past traumatic events, which they reenact through diverse psychological phenomena. In addition, it will be averred that the traumas of individuals and a collective body of people are ineluctably intertwined with each other in Flynn's fiction; consequently, not only are the characters' traumas transferred to the other members of society, but also the collective trauma of fictional communities gets transmitted into the private sphere of characters' lives. To that end, the article will have recourse to Cathy Caruth's trauma theory and terminology as the underpinning theoretical framework of the foregoing study. Furnishing a novel Caruthian reading of Flynn's novels, the current research intends to contribute to the existing literature addressing the said author's narratives.

Keywords: *Childhood Trauma, Incomprehensibility, Traumatic Reenactment, Flashbacks, Intergenerationality of Trauma, Gillian Flynn*

INTRODUCTION

The ineluctable interrelation between trauma and literature has been delved into by myriad trauma theorists such as Harman, Felman, and Cathy Caruth, to name just a few. Cathy Caruth, for instance, avers that the traumatic experience cannot be grasped and "assimilated as it occurs" (Unclaimed Experience 5); therefore, the traumatic knowledge "simultaneously defies and demands our witness", as it is not ordinary knowledge (ibid.). In other words, as a paradoxical experience that resists verbalization yet demands to be communicated, trauma requires a special medium, that is, a "language that defies, even as it claims, our understanding", i.e., literary language (Unclaimed Experience 5).

Throughout the history, Western literature and art have functioned as ideal media for the depiction of psychological distress or "the unspeakable experiences and memories of victims of collective or individual traumas which demand to be written and read or recorded and watched" (Onega 91). Therefore, as Kucmin et al. purport in *History of trauma and posttraumatic disorders in literature*, portrayals of traumatic experiences and the numerous psychological repercussions thereof can be observed in a cornucopia of texts, be it literary, historical, or religious, written in different historical periods, including Homer's *Odysseus* and *Iliad*, *Epic of Gilgamesh*, Herodotus' *The History*, *The Holy Bible*, William Shakespeare's plays such as *Macbeth* and *Romeo and Juliet*, and such modern novels as *Slaughterhouse-Five* (270-78).

The contemporary modern era, however, is notably more concerned with the traumatic experience, thus distinguished by what Luckhurst has denominated as a cultural trauma paradigm, evident in numerous "(pseudo)autobiographical and testimonial works on the Holocaust, sexual abuse or incest" (Onega 91). Consequently, trauma has become a prevailing cultural and artistic phenomenon in the Western world, displaying itself in an inordinate number of cultural artifacts such as literary texts, cinematic adaptations and productions, video games, etc. The pervasive presence of traumatic experiences and the artistic depiction thereof have thus provided impetus for the crystallization of a trauma paradigm in Europe.

In the present era, the said trauma paradigm has paved the way for the portrayal of traumatic experiences and the psychological disorders thereof not only in the realm of literature, depicted in such novels as *The Beloved*, written by Toni Morrison, *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951) penned by J.D. Salinger, and *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* (2005) written by Stieg Larsson, but also in the world of cinema, canvassed in a plethora of films, including *Split* (2016), directed M. Night Shyamalan, and *The Dark Knight Trilogy* (2005-2012) by Christopher Nolan, not to mention *The Machinist*, Brad Anderson. These instances are but few amongst many contemporary artistic artifacts in which trauma takes center stage.

One of the eminent contemporary authors whose literary oeuvre revolves around childhood trauma and its concomitant psychological disorders is the American writer Gillian Schieber Flynn. A critically acclaimed award-winning author, Flynn has written three highly popular novels, namely, *Sharp Objects*, *Dark Places*, and *Gone Girl*. Her fiction is laced with such issues as childhood trauma, self-harm, dysfunctional families, emotional and psychological abuse and neglect. Her narratives, therefore, have depicted melancholic characters who have undergone such psychologically devastating experiences as the loss of loved ones as well as childhood maltreatment and deprivation. Flynn's contemporary trauma novels thus present a perfect case for how traumatic events can influence not only the psyche but also the identity and personality of the traumatized individuals.

In *Sharp Objects*, Camille and Adora are haunted by the traumatic memories of Marian's demise and childhood maltreatment. Moreover, as it turns out, Adora is herself a child abuser and has murdered her daughter, Marian. In *Dark Places,* the past disturbing memories of her family's brutal massacre intrude into Libby's mind in the flashbacks and nightmares. In *Gone Girl*, Nick is constantly haunted by the intrusive voice of his abusive father, who has exposed him and his sister to severe maltreatment and neglect in childhood.

While the central characters' traumata and psychological disorders have been addressed and examined by the former studies based on various trauma theories and psychiatric criteria, there appears to be a dearth of critical studies analyzing Flynn's novels in the light of the Caruthian theory of trauma. The current research, therefore, is intended to fill the void in the critical literature by scrutinizing the traumatic experiences, depicted in Flynn's novels, of the principal characters through Caruth's theoretical perspective on trauma. In doing so, the researchers intend to furnish a fresh analytical interpretation of the corpus narratives.

As mentioned above, the prime underpinning theoretical framework of the foregoing study is Cathy Caruth's theory of trauma, which regards trauma as "the response to an unexpected or overwhelming violent event or events that are not fully grasped as they occur, but return later in repeated flashbacks, nightmares, and other repetitive phenomena" (Unclaimed Experience 91). In other words, the victim of trauma is unable to experience and fully grasp the traumatic event as it comes to pass. Thus, the survivor does not fully realize that he/she has been psychologically wounded at the moment of the traumatization since the traumatic event tends to be "experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known and is therefore not available to consciousness until it imposes itself again, repeatedly, in the nightmares and repetitive actions of the survivor" in a belated manner. (ibid. 3-4). Consequently, the memory of such an unassimilated traumatic event tends to materialize belatedly and unintentionally in the shape of various psychological phenomena, such as hallucinations, delusions, intrusive thoughts, and nightmares (ibid. 11). As further clarified in the second section of the article trauma, as a psychological wound inflicted on one's mind, is not an ordinary or remediable injury and is capable of disrupting the "mind's experience of time, self, and the world" (ibid. 4); therefore, it diverges substantially from a physical or bodily wound.

Lying at the core of the current paper is the central argument that such psychologically devastating childhood experiences as losing the beloved ones and being subjected to maltreatment and deprivation have inflicted an indelible wound on the psyches of the central characters. Having failed to overcome the haunting and adverse impact of their traumata, Flynn's characters unremittingly reenact past disturbing experiences through diverse psychological phenomena. The purpose lying behind the current paper is twofold: initially, it will examine the ineluctable interplay or interrelation between the individual traumas of the characters and the collective ones of the society;

subsequently, it will attempt to analyze the central characters' traumatic memories, repetitively and unintentionally returning to haunt them in flashbacks and nightmares. The characters, as it will be argued, are still melancholic, thus fixated on their past traumatic events. It will be corroborated that Flynn has, in her three novels, created similar characters that have fallen victim to such childhood adversities as abuse and deprivation as well as other cataclysmic events such as the decease of loved ones.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In her seminal treatise on trauma, entitled *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, History*, Cathy Caruth, building on Freudian psychoanalysis and poststructuralist approach, has articulated her trauma theory, which not only addresses the individual trauma haunting a traumatized person but also the collective cultural trauma, which comes to pass on a societal scale, hence psychologically wounding the citizens of a specific society.

It can be construed from Caruth's text that the distinguishing line between individual and collective trauma has been blurred into nothingness. Not only can the individual traumas be transferred to the other residents of society, but also the collective trauma of a nation can find its way into the private realm of individuals' lives. That the traumas of individuals and a collective body of people are ineluctably intertwined with each other is evident in the Caruth's saying concerning how "history, like trauma, is never simply one's own, that history is precisely the way we are implicated in each other's traumas" (*Unclaimed Experience* 24). Addressing the transmission of traumata from the individual to the collective plane, and vice versa, as well as the intergenerational facet of traumatic experience, Hyun-Joo Yoo elaborates:

> . . . the effect of trauma leaks across generations, affecting racial or cultural identities of contemporary individuals. Trauma experienced by a group in the historical past can be experienced by an individual who lives centuries later, owing to the everlasting, overarching, and universal characteristics of traumatic experiences. In short, collective trauma can be experienced by an individual and individual trauma can be experienced by a group, due to transhistoricity and intergenerationality of trauma (47-48).

According to Yoo, therefore, timeless and relentlessly influential as it is, a traumatic experience is liable to be transmitted across several generations, having an adverse impact on the people of the subsequent periods, not to mention its potentiality to profoundly influence and shape their ethnic and 'cultural' identities. The trauma of slavery, for instance, continues to affect the racial identity of the latter-day African-American community, even though those of the present generation have not witnessed and experienced that traumatic event directly. Furthermore, blurring the individual/collective binary, the trauma that a person has endured can be experienced by the other individuals in the society, and vice versa.

Relying on the Freudian concept of trauma, Cathy Caruth defines trauma as "the response to an unexpected or overwhelming violent event or events that are not fully grasped as they occur, but return later in repeated flashbacks, nightmares, and other repetitive phenomena" (Unclaimed Experience 91). Construed from the above-cited text is one of the essential attributes of trauma: the incomprehensibility and unassimilated nature of trauma, that is to say, how traumatic events cannot be grasped and assimilated into the consciousness as they occur, and it is only belatedly and "in connection with another place, and in another time" (ibid. 17) that they can be experienced and registered by traumatized individual's psyche. The belated recurrence or experience of trauma materializes in the shape of multitudinous psychological phenomena such as traumatic flashbacks, nightmares, hallucinations, and intrusive thoughts, not to mention the "numbing that may have begun during or after the experience, and possibly also increased arousal to (and avoidance of) stimuli recalling the event" (Caruth, Explorations in Memory 4).

Even though the traumatic experience is barely integrated into the traumatized individual's consciousness at the moment of occurrence, it is still "preserved just beyond the limits of understanding in a timeless, wordless state and continues to inflict pain on the psyche" (Balaev 363). Therefore, it can be regarded as a liminal and spectral experience, for it is at once absent and present and blurs the lines between past and present (ibid.).

In addition, apropos the haunting impact and the unintergrated nature of trauma, Caruth avers that the impossibility of fully registering "the event as it occurs" (Explorations in Memory 7), a phenomenon that Laud denominates as "the collapse of witnessing" (ibid. 10), is what constitutes the haunting effect and force of a traumatic event: "The force of this experience would appear to arise precisely, in other words, in the collapse of its understanding" (ibid. 7). Simply put, it is the unassimilated and ungrasped nature of the traumatic experience that repetitively returns to haunt survivor later on in the form of flashbacks and nightmares. Addressing Caruth's viewpoint on the inability of the victims to witness or grasp the psychologically devastating events at the moment of occurrence, Anne Whitehead states that "Caruth's interest lies in the collapse of understanding which is situated at the heart of trauma. Trauma emerges as that which, at the very moment of its reception, registers as a non-experience, causing conventional epistemologies to falter" (Whitehead 5). Lying at the heart of trauma, therefore, is its paradoxical nature and temporality, as Caruth observes in the following statement: "the most direct seeing of a violent event may occur as an absolute inability to know it; that immediacy, paradoxically, may take the form of belatedness" (Unclaimed Experience 91-92).

All in all, traumatic events come to pass so quickly and unexpectedly that they cause a breach "in the mind's experience of time", or in Freudian taxonomy, in the psyche's "protective shield against the stimuli" (Freud, qtd. in Caruth 62). Therefore, the psychic wound is not so much occasioned by "a pure quantity of stimulus", that is, the

traumatic event itself, as by "the lack of preparedness to take in a stimulus that comes" unawares (ibid. 62). In Freudian terms, the dearth of preparedness is denominated as "fright" (ibid. 62). As a result, the traumatic event is "recognized as such by the mind one moment too late" (ibid. 62), which distorts the mind's sense of time, i.e., the temporal organization of experiences. Simply put, due to the unexpected and sudden nature of the traumata, the survivor fails to prepare himself/herself for the event that comes to pass; therefore, the trauma victim's 'mind' starts to register the traumatic event only later on in retrospect.

In *Literature in the Ashes of History*, resorting to Freud's account in which he recounts his astonishing encounter with the nightmares of the returning veterans, Caruth illustrates that the traumatic dreams 'bring' to mind not only "the reality of death, but [also] the fright or unpreparedness for it: the dreams not only show the scenes of battle but wake the dreamer up in another fright" (Literature in Ashes 21). Confronted with the traumatic nightmares intruding into the returning veterans' psyche, Freud was impelled to come to the realization that the dreams did not so much function as a platform for fulfilling the repressed 'unconscious, conflictual desires of childhood' as transforming "the psyche itself into the vehicle for expressing the terrifying literality of a history it does not completely own" (ibid.). In brief, recurring in such nightmares were the bloodcurdling images of the battlefield atrocities which could not be "assimilated to the fulfillment of desire" (ibid.). Therefore, Freud and Caruth have placed a great deal of emphasis on the literal nature of flashbacks and nightmares, that is, how the past traumata returning in such psychological phenomena manifest themselves in a perception-like or real-like manner so that the survivors relive them literally. Referring to the literality of the traumatic events, Whitehead clarifies that it is the literal nature of trauma that defies "narrative structures and linear temporalities" (5).

Drawing on the example provided by Sigmund Freud of a child who is repetitively and unwittingly haunted by the traumatic memory of his mother's unexpected death or departure, Caruth explicates that the traumatic events tend to have a devastating and life-altering impact on the survivors' lives. In other words, due to the adverse influence of traumatic stressors, a trauma victim's life is affected and thus reshaped so tremendously that it turns into an unwitting and unconscious testimony to a death that he/ she cannot comprehend. Consequently, the survivor's life narrative, i.e., his departure into life, is entangled with the death story of the loved one who has departed into death, an experience that the traumatized person has survived and silently and recurrently reenacts (Caruth, Literature in Ashes 23). Caruth's observation about the trauma victim's vacillation between "a crisis of life and correlative crisis of death" (Unclaimed Experience 7) attests to "the inextricability of the story of one's life from the story of a death, an impossible and necessary double telling" (ibid. 8).

Presently, a brief light will be shed on the Freudian theory of melancholia, which is consistent with the Caruthian concept of traumatic repetition. Of paramount significance to the Freudian theory of trauma is the concept of melancholia, distinguished from the

process of normal mourning. While melancholia is quite analogous to mourning in some respects, some divergences exist between them as well. According to Sigmund Freud, melancholia is characterized by such pivotal attributes as depressive mood, a dearth of interest in the surrounding environment and the external world, and a lack of capacity to love. Another defining characteristic of melancholia is the disruption of the grieving individual's sense of self or 'self-regarding feelings', which manifests itself in the form of "self-reproaches and self-revilings" as well as "a delusional expectation of punishment" (Freud, 243). While the indispensable attributes of melancholia manifest themselves in normal mourning as well, the former differs in some of the features, such as 'disorder of self-esteem' and pathological fixation on the deceased or the lost desired object, which cannot be observed in normal mourning. Timothy Keogh clarifies, "Grief, which can be considered as intense sorrow, sadness, or anguish, is itself a part of normal mourning and is considered pathological only when it becomes unremitting with adverse consequences on day-to-day functioning" (1). The above-cited saying has been echoed by Jean Michel Quinodoz's theoretical stance on melancholia, as follows:

> In normal mourning, the subject is capable of giving up the "lost" object – a real person or an ideal – and of withdrawing his libido from it, so that the free libido can be displaced on to a new object. In melancholia, however, the subject does not withdraw his cathexis from the lost object; his ego "swallows" this object in fantasy in order to unite with it rather than separating from it, thereby taking the path of narcissistic identification (64).

As Quinodoz clarifies, in normal mourning, the traumatized individual manages to overcome the adverse effect of his/her traumatic experience and thus shift his/her 'libido' onto another object of desire. In melancholia, however, the survivor fails to sever his/her bonds with the lost object, including the deceased loved one, hence pathologically fixated on it. In fact, the victim of trauma identifies with the lost object so much that he/she attempts to unite with it once again, even though it might entail being haunted by hallucinatory episodes and nightmares. In the light of that, Freud's conception of melancholic fixation on the decease of the beloved one is in line with Cathy Caruth's trauma theory in regard to how the traumatized survivors unremittingly and recurrently re-enact their past traumatic experiences (Caruth, Unclaimed Experience 2).

Caruthian Reading of Flynn's Novels

Interplay of Individual and Collective Trauma

In Gillian Flynn's novels, trauma unfolds on two intertwined and interdependent planes, namely, individual and collective. According to Cathy Caruth, trauma is confined neither to a specific period and locality nor to a particular individual and ethnic group, hence transmitted from an individual to society and vice versa, not to mention the transhistorical transmission of trauma from one generation to another. Apropos Caruthian intergenerationality, Hyun Jou Yoo

clarifies that "Trauma experienced by a group in the historical past can be experienced by an individual who lives centuries later" and has not witnessed the traumatic event directly (47). The causal interconnection between collective and individual traumata takes center stage in the narratives forming the corpus of the study, whose settings are deeply traumatic and haunting.

Having set her novels in Midwestern regions of America, Gillian Flynn has deliberately juxtaposed the individual and collective traumata of the present time against the historical trauma of yore, occasioned by the American civil war and slavery. Therefore, on the one hand, the characters are still living under the spell of the past trauma; on the other hand, the current context itself is so life-altering and traumatic that the trajectory of the central characters' lives is being tremendously influenced and transformed by psychologically debilitating events. Hence, the collective societal trauma acts as a principal catalyst for the onset of the characters' individual traumata and the numerous concomitant psychological consequences. However, the relationship between individual and collective trauma is reciprocal in that if the traumatic context induces individual traumata in the characters, the individual trauma returns to haunt and traumatize society itself.

Flynn has set *Sharp Objects* in a fictional town named Wind Gap, located in Missouri, which is riddled with a bloody history of the American Civil War and the atrocities thereof. The trauma and violence of the Civil War have indubitably been transmitted to the current generation through the verbal narration of past traumatic events, running through the popular war narratives prevalent in that society, as well as the shared ancestry:

> It was named for the first mayor of Wind Gap, a Civil War hero. A Confederate Civil War hero, but that made no never mind, a hero nonetheless. Mr. Calhoon shot it out with a whole troop of Yankees in the first year of the Civil War over in Lexington, and single-handedly saved that little Missouri town (Flynn, Sharp Objects 20).

As evident above, the stories of the Civil War are still circulating the society after approximately two centuries, which recount the atrocities perpetrated by the parties involved. As a result, the collective trauma of the Civil War seems to have traumatized or infected the individuals of the current era, even though they have not witnessed it in person.

Additionally, the novel's current fictional context is also highly traumatizing, as it is besotted by a plurality of cataclysmic events. As indicated below, Wind Gap has unfailingly been a catastrophe-stricken region, characterized by ever-present violence and atrocities that come to pass in the form of vicious homicides and child maltreatment, which have befallen and are still befalling the residents: "cataloguing various disasters that might have befallen Wind Gap. It's one of those crummy towns prone to misery" (Flynn, Sharp Objects 4).

Of close affinity to *Sharp Objects*, *Flynn's Dark* Places has been likewise set in a Midwestern region, namely Kansas State. Therefore, traces of past historical trauma induced by the Civil War can also be observed in this novel. Depicted in Dark Places, for instance, are 'Lincoln's death artifacts', placed on display at a museum in the Midwestern state of Ohio, Chicago. According to Hirsch and Spitzer, the relics "inherited from the past" such as "images, objects, and memorabilia" should be regarded "as 'points of Memory'—points of intersection between past and present, memory and postmemory, personal remembrance and cultural recall" (Hirsch and Spitzer 358). Viewed in the light of this theory, the 'death artifacts', or the relics of the Civil War, regarded as testimonial objects, are capable of transmitting the memory and thus the trauma of the said bloody war to the members of the next generation:

> I'd once been to Chicago, seen Lincoln's death artifacts in a museum: thatches of his hair; bullet fragments; the skinny spindle bed he'd died on, the mattress still slouched in the middle like it knew to preserve his last imprint. I ended up running to the bathroom, pressing my face against the cold stall door to keep from swooning. (Flynn, Dark Places 71).

Due to the transmission of past trauma through the war 'artifacts', the citizens of the Midwestern states are still under the spell of the said traumatic experience, even though they have not witnessed the Civil War firsthand. Moreover, as conveyors of the past trauma, these emotionally-charged objects are reminiscent or suggestive of Libby's past traumatic experiences. Therefore, they provoke the disturbing memories of her family members' brutal deaths, resulting in psychological distress.

Even the latter-day Midwest is immensely traumatic in that it is besotted by numerous economic issues and brutal murders. It is the economic setbacks, one can aver, that have instigated the traumatic event that takes center stage in the novel, i.e., the Day Massacre, perpetrated in the fictional town of Kinnakee, Kansas. In effect, had it not been for the crippling economic crises, Libby's mother, Patty, would not have hired Calvin Diehl to murder her so that her children would be able to collect her insurance money. Therefore, it is the society that should be viewed as the principal instigator of trauma.

Moreover, with the efflorescence of Satanism, Kansas City, along with other U.S. cities, has descended into mass hysteria, thus turning into a paranoid and suppressive society, quick to stigmatize and label individuals as Satanists based on their appearance and other peripheral attributes. Mass hysteria pertains to the delusional belief of a 'group of people' who start to "believe that they might be exposed to something dangerous, such as a virus or a poison" (Bagus et al. 2), or Satanism, in this case. As a consequence of such collective hysteria, the residents of Kansas, including the incumbents of the Police Department and Law Enforcement, unjustly incriminate and thus incarcerate an innocent boy, Ben, on

charges of murdering his family members, primarily because of some unsubstantiated rumors regarding his participation in satanic rituals. Even though he is coerced by his girlfriend, Diondra, into partaking in such rituals, which entail the brutal sacrifice of animals, he is by no means a Satanist. He participates in that ritual so as to signal the psychological distress induced by paternal neglect and abuse. Therefore, contrary to the common belief, he is not the perpetrator of the said massacre. Consequently, his indictment largely rests on the biases of the residents.

Not only has the wrongful conviction had an adverse psychological impact on Ben, but also it has stripped Libby of the only individual on whom she could have depended for attention, emotional support, and love in the aftermath of the massacre. In addition, it is worth noting the psychological devastation ensuing from the belief that it is her big brother who has slaughtered her entire family. Consequently, her "preverbal assumptions" (Briere 2) regarding others have been so severely disturbed that she has turned into a paranoid individual. In short, unable to trust others, she has grown into an antisocial individual who can barely trust anyone else. After all, how can she trust other people if she cannot trust her own brother? Thus, if the massacre itself is deeply traumatic, the belief that her older brother is the perpetrator of this offense is even more traumatic for Libby, which has debilitated her psyche and drastically altered the trajectory of her life for the last two decades. Psychologically disturbing as it is, society has thus played a significant role in the inducement of Libby's psychological issues.

Akin to *Sharp Objects* and *Dark Places*, one cannot help but notice instances of traumatic history in Gone Girl, likewise depicted in a Midwestern state, i.e., Missouri. The novel in question is laced with numerous oblique references to the slavery-riddled history of the antebellum era. It is observable in Nick's numerous allusions to Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*, which censures the institution of slavery and racism besetting pre-war America, especially the southern and Midwestern states. Twain's novel is set in Missouri, a slave state back then. In addition to slavery and racism, Flynn has also made an implicit reference to the issue of childhood abuse and neglect in Twain's narrative. The reason behind making such an allusion is that Huck, akin to Nick and Amy, as well as Flynn's other abused characters, has been subjected to parental maltreatment and deprivation. As an erudite author, Nick must be cognizant of the issue of child abuse in Twain's literary text and thus identifies with the character Huck. Therefore, his thoughts persistently and unconsciously turn to Mark Twain and his Huckleberry Finn as he moves around the city, seeking the clues devised by his missing wife for the treasure hunt. Consequently, the allusions made by Flynn to Twain's novel should be interpreted as referring to the traumatic history of both slavery and childhood abuse.

Furthermore, the economic setbacks triggered by the Great Depression of 2008, depicted in Flynn's Dark Places as one of the primary catalysts for the onset

of trauma, have reached their pinnacle in Gone Girl. As reported by The Wall Street Journal, the said recession acted as a collective "economic trauma" that caused multitudinous "psychological problems" and inflicted "financial and psychic scars on many Americans, and that those marks are likely to endure for decades" (Leubsdorf). The author of the corpus novels, Gillian Flynn, appears to have been no exception to this rule, as she lost her job at a journal when the economic crisis befell the U.S., thus falling under the adverse impact of the recession, mirrored in her *Gone Girl*.

In the novel, North Carthage, located in Missouri, has descended into economic turmoil and depression, along with the other states of the U.S., hence turning into a decaying and crumbling city, bereft of even a shred of economic progress. The hope of development seems to elude such a financially devastated community, whose formerly lucrative shopping centers have metamorphosed into a sordid and dust-ridden lair for the vagrants and delinquents. It is the economic drawbacks, namely the loss of her job and financial ability, that function as a crucial factor in Amy Dunne's mental breakdown, thus exacerbating her childhood trauma and the concomitant psychological disorders induced by parental abuse and neglect. Concurring with this argument, Cicih Nuraeni has, in her article, asserted that the economic setbacks and the resultant unemployment function as one of the significant triggers of Amy's psychopathology, with the other cause being "family disruption" (51).

Furthermore, she has been forced, by her uncaring and inconsiderate husband, to move from New York, her birthplace, to Missouri, which is an unfamiliar and alienating environment for her. Therefore, her childhood trauma, exacerbated by an alienating and traumatic environment and the loss of her economic independence, has aggravated her psychopathic tendencies, driving her to the brink of madness and mental breakdown. However, it is barely the end of her troubles since Amy has recently discovered that her uncaring and emotionally detached husband has been having an extramarital relationship with one of his college students. This revelation has had an adverse psychological impact on her.

If society, as a traumatic social environment, has exacerbated her trauma, Amy retaliates by traumatizing the entire community by dint of her fallacious stories, incriminating her husband as the murderer of not only his wife but also his unborn child. In effect, akin to Amma in *Sharp Objects*, Amy emotionally abuses and haunts the whole society as a ghostlike figure believed to be dead throughout the novel. Therefore, such a fabricated narrative, intended to take revenge on her husband, traumatizes the entire community vicariously and generates a hysterical reaction against the guilty husband. The researchers, consequently, believe that the act of staging her murder at her husband's hands is as much an act of vengeance against her husband and her psychologically abusive parents as against the entire community. Society has failed to safeguard her from parental abuse and has thus

played an incontrovertible role in compounding her trauma and psychopathic traits triggered by childhood maltreatment. In short, given that her trust has been betrayed on so many levels throughout her life, she eventually attempts to "get even" (Bloom Violence 98).

Melancholia and Intrusion of Traumatic Memories

As Cathy Caruth argues, a psychologically wounding occurrence cannot be grasped and assimilated into the traumatized individual's consciousness at the moment of the occurrence. Therefore, its traumatic memory returns to haunt the trauma victims repetitively and unintentionally in the shape of various psychological phenomena such as flashbacks, nightmares, and hallucinations, to name a few (Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience* 91). Given the unintergrated and incomprehensible nature of such a psychologically debilitating event, it can be experienced and grasped belatedly "in connection with another place, and in another time" (ibid. 17).

The current section avers that the melancholic characters in Flynn's novels have not overcome their past traumatic experiences yet; therefore, they are still haunted by their traumata after so many years. Moreover, the exposure to the external emotionally-charged stimuli reminiscent of their childhood traumatic experiences causes the return of their traumatic memories. As a consequence, Flynn's characters literally relive past adversities through such psychological phenomena as flashbacks and nightmares.

At the outset, the article will examine the traumatic flashbacks and nightmares haunting the central characters of *Sharp Objects*, namely Camille and Adora. Still melancholically fixated on the trauma of murdering her daughter (Quinodoz 64), Marian, Adora begins to cry when confronted by the psychologically overwhelming stimuli at Natalie's funeral, reminiscent of the way in which Marian's funeral was held two decades ago: "'Was the funeral very hard on you, Momma?' Even now, I couldn't resist making a small conversational offering. 'It was. So much was similar. That little casket'" (Flynn, *Sharp Objects* 52).

As revealed in the last chapter of *Sharp Objects*, it is Adora who has murdered her daughter, Marian, a child abuser as she is. The traumatic experience that returns to haunt the perpetrator rather than the victim of violence is denominated as perpetrator trauma. Vis-à-vis perpetrator-induced trauma, McGlothlin contends that "While the etiology of trauma is very different in the case of the perpetrator of violence than it is in the case of the victim, the symptomatology in both contexts is quite similar" (107). Therefore, this type of trauma, analogous to victim-oriented one, triggers such psychological symptoms as anxiety, depression, irritability, and most importantly, repetitive "intrusion, which refers to the involuntary, often highly distressing disruption of thought by undesired cognitive content, particularly memories that relate to the traumatic event" (ibid.). In *Sharp Objects*, therefore, the present 'trauma-related' stimulus makes the intrusive traumatic memories of Marian's death intrude into Adora's mind, over which she can exercise no control whatsoever.

Furthermore, the traumatic memories, disrupting the process of her thoughts, materialize in the form of other psychological symptoms as well, such as grief, depression, and irritability. As evident below, Adora persistently snaps at the fact that Camille, her oldest daughter, is making notes in order to write an article on the proceedings of the said funeral, a reporter as she is: "I slipped my notepad from my jacket pocket and began scribbling notes to one side until my mother slapped her hand on mine and hissed, 'You are being disrespectful and embarrassing. Stop or I will make you leave'" (Flynn, *Sharp Objects* 39-40). Due to her traumatic past, Adora is a highly irascible individual, for she is inclined to lose her temper with her oldest daughter. The external trauma triggers, reminiscent of her past traumatic experiences, rekindle Adora's grief, hence her irritability.

Moreover, the trauma of taking her daughter's life also persistently returns to haunt Adora in her nightmares. However, it is not the only psychologically disturbing event that disrupts her dreams. The traumatic memories of early childhood abuse and deprivation, to which she has been subjected by her psychopathic mother, Joya, also haunt her repetitively in her nightmares: "'I think she's a very unhappy woman,' I said. 'And troubled.' 'I hear her calling out names when she takes her naps: Joya, Marian…you.'" (Flynn, *Sharp Objects* 233). As Amma elaborates, a melancholic or 'troubled' woman as she is, Adora is inclined to call out names 'when she takes her naps', for her dreams are regularly intruded by the painful remembrances of past adverse experiences. In the above-cited text, 'Joya' is a reference to Adora's childhood neglect and abuse, while 'Marian' adverts to the trauma of poisoning her daughter, Marian, to death.

Adora, however, is by no means the only character still acting out the psychologically devastating memories of Marian's death, along with those of the childhood adversities. It is crystal clear that, far from having overcome her trauma, Camille is also still melancholic (Quinodoz 64), thus haunted by the traumatic experience of losing her sister: "'It was hard for me, too,' I nudged. 'I was actually surprised how hard. I miss her. Still. Isn't that weird?' 'It would be weird if you didn't. She's your sister. It's almost as painful as losing a child. Even though you were so young.'" (Flynn, *Sharp Objects* 52). The memories of her beloved sister have not yet ceased to intrude into Camille's mind even after so many years. Therefore, she is still under the overwhelming influence of her late sibling.

Furthermore, the traumatic memory of Marian's sufferings and demise intrusively and uncontrollably returns to haunt Camille in a hallucinatory episode when she enters Marian's "clinical and utterly lifeless" bedroom and observes her dolls "lined against the wall on a set of stands, like fans in bleachers" (Flynn, *Sharp Objects* 213-14). To further clarify, provoked by the familiar external stimuli, the traumatic remembrance of her sister's severe and chronic maladies begins to materialize in a hallucinatory vision in which her deceased sibling is "sitting cross-legged on that bed, small and sweat dotted, her eyes ringed with purple" (ibid.). It is far from an ordinary memory, as Camille literally

relives the past adverse experience, hence capable of hearing Marian's moaning voice. The remembrance of her sister's acute distress has been so emotionally excruciating and traumatizing for Camille that she relives it in her visual hallucination: "'I could hear that sound: a crayon running in hard lines across a paper. Dark scribbles with the crayon pushed so hard it ripped the paper. She looked up at me, breathing hard and shallow. 'I'm tired of dying'" (*Sharp Objects* 213-14).

In accordance with the diagnostic criteria set forth in DSM-5 for psychotic hallucinations, the hallucinatory episode plaguing Camille is highly literal and "perception-like", that is to say, "vivid and clear, with the full force and impact of normal perceptions, and not under voluntary control" (87-88). The perception-like aspect of the hallucinatory vision can be construed from the fact that Marian actually looks up at Camille and, moaning and breathing heavily, states her life is so agonizing that she has had enough of her current state of existence. The literality of the hallucinatory episode strikes horror into Camille's heart and drives her away as if she were being 'chased' by this haunting vision.

Hence, the traumatic impact of Marian's death is still haunting the central characters after so many years, which resonates powerfully with Cathy Caruth's theoretical position that a traumatic event "shatters identity" and "irrevocably damages the psyche" (Balaev 363), thus the permanent fragmentation of the mind. Such a deterministic stance on trauma rules out the possibility of overcoming one's trauma and asserts that the impact of trauma will never cease to exist and will "unremittingly" return to haunt the victim of trauma for a long stretch of time (Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience* 2). In the light of Caruth's theory, Camille, whose mental growth has been severely stunted, has failed to come to terms with her trauma. For instance, as she acknowledges in the following excerpt, far from having overcome her traumatic past, she is still tremendously haunted by it, for the above-mentioned traumatic experience has inflicted an indelible and irremediable wound on her psyche, thus shattering her consciousness and identity permanently:

> 'You're the only person who understands, I think,' he said.
> 'What it's like to lose a sister and be expected to just deal. Just move on. Have you gotten over it?' He said the words so bitterly I expected his tongue to turn yellow.
> 'You'll never get over it,' I said. 'It infects you. It ruined me.' It felt good to say it out loud (Flynn, *Sharp Objects* 264).

In addition, depicted above is a sympathetic communication generated between Camille and John by the shared traumatic experience of losing a sister, which has, regardless of their different ages and personal attributes, built a bridge between the past and current generations. In other words, akin to the story of the Japanese man who, in Duras' *Hiroshima mon amour*, "turns out, profoundly and significantly, to be the only one able to hear and to receive" the French woman's address "across the distance of their cultures and through the impact of their very different traumas" (Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience* 9), Camille appears to be the only individual in the novel, capable of listening

to John's address and comprehending his acute psychological distress, given the analogies between their traumatic experiences.

Akin to Camille and Adora, Amma also seems to have fallen under the spell of Marian's demise since she is as influenced and traumatized by the absent presence, in Derridean terminology, of the deceased sibling as the other characters. In other words, functioning as a specter, Marian is "neither alive nor dead, neither present nor absent" entirely (Derrida, qtd. in Peim 75) and thus has an adverse influence on the characters' lives, including Amma. The past trauma, therefore, has been intergenerationally transmitted to Amma's life, even though she has not witnessed that traumatic occurrence directly: "Amma's door, just one room down, had been closed for hours. What was it like growing up next to the room of a dead sister you never met? I felt a pang of sorrow for Amma" (Flynn, *Sharp Objects* 213). The transmission of trauma, the researchers believe, has occurred through the verbal narration of the said traumatizing experience by the family members as well as the very presence of Marian's room and the objects therein. The late sibling's properties function as testimonial objects, transmitting the traumatic event to the next generation and thus arresting Amma's psychological development (Hirsch and Spitzer 358).

However, Marian's demise is not the only traumatic event haunting the characters of *Sharp Objects,* as the psychological impact of childhood abuse and neglect is also still haunting them tremendously, as clarified earlier. A case in point is the traumatic flashback that intrudes into Camille's mind when she, returning to her mother's house, finds Amma, Adora, and Alan "gathered in the living room", with Adora "cradling Amma and holding an ice cube to her lips" (Flynn, *Sharp Objects* 73). In this scene, Amma is taken ill and thus is in dire need of assistance and attention. The view Camille encounters is so reminiscent of the adverse childhood experience of witnessing Marian's chronic maladies that the past traumatic memories intrude into her mind literally. To further clarify, she is taken mentally to the past; therefore, she almost begins to re-enact the past experiences in the present, a phenomenon denominated as "actual re-enactment" (Bloom *Violence* 47). As mentioned in the novel, upon exposure to the external stimuli, Camille starts "sinking back into old routines, about to run to the kitchen to heat some tea, just like I always did for Marian when she was sick" (Flynn, *Sharp Objects* 74).

Plaguing her mind, however, is also the haunting memory of emotional deprivation to which she was subjected in childhood. From the current flashback, even though Camille was infatuated with her sister, she was also jealous of all the motherly affection that Marian received. That she has been denied maternal attention as a child is quite observable in the following passage, which attests to her unquenched burning desire to be cuddled and loved by her mother. One cannot help but notice that Adora's parental love was conditional, as Camille was compelled to beg for her mother's attention in childhood, which has psychologically and emotionally devastated her: "I was about to linger near my mother, waiting for her to put an arm around me, too. My mother and

Amma said nothing. My mother didn't even look up at me, just nuzzled Amma in closer to her, and cooed into her ear" (Flynn, *Sharp Objects* 73-4).

Presently, the artcile will veer in the direction of the second narrative of the corpus, namely, *Dark Places*. Severely traumatized by the psychologically devastating experience of the massacre, which has culminated in the slaughter of her mother and two sisters, Libby Day is persistently haunted by the traumatic memories of the past. Hence, analogous to Camille and Adora, her consciousness is recurrently and uncontrollably swamped by traumatic flashbacks and nightmares, in which she literally relives the past trauma, or some related aspects thereof, at present. Psychologically devastating and unbearable as the past traumatic memories are, Libby constantly refrains from brooding over them. Therefore, having categorized them as a "dangerous region", or "Darkplace" (*Dark Places*10), she has consciously avoided and locked away such traumatic remembrances all her life, for 'dwelling in' them arouses traumatic flashbacks, in which she relives the past traumatic events:

> Maniacal smears of bright red sound in the night. That inevitable, rhythmic axe, moving as mechanically as if it were chopping wood. Shotgun blasts in a small hallway. The panicked, jaybird cries of my mother, still trying to save her kids with half her head gone (Flynn, *Dark Places* 10).

As manifest in the excerpt above, upon exposure to trauma-related stimuli, the said traumatic memories flood into her mind so intrusively that she is not able to keep them in check, as evident in the sentence "mind would jerk into Darkplace" (ibid.). In short, no sooner does she lower her guard than the gruesome visual and auditory images of the massacre begin to haunt her.

Furthermore, in some cases, such flashbacks even bring back the gustatory and olfactory aspects of the past experience. In other words, not only can Libby observe what has occurred in the past, but she is also able to smell the scents and taste the flavors that existed in the ambient environment as the event in question came to pass:

> I had a flash of my mother, her red hair tied back in a ponytail, helping me tug off my flimsy winter boots, and then rubbing my toes one by one. *Warming up big toe, warming up baby toe*. In this memory, I could smell buttered toast, but I don't know if there was buttered toast. In this memory I still had all my toes. (Flynn, *Dark Places* 32)

As seen above, in one of her traumatic flashbacks, she not only relives a memory of her mother's helping 'tug off my flimsy winter boots, and then rubbing my toes one by one. Warming up big toe, warming up baby toe', but she can also smell 'buttered toast' as if the said experience were in the present time rather than in the past. In short, Libby literally relives a past experience and the related features thereof in this flashback.

Contemplating the past memories or the family properties, however, are by no means the only triggers of the traumatic remembrances, as any external stimuli suggestive of violence, death, and blood are likely to arouse such memories in Libby,

accompanied by associated negative emotions of anxiety and terror. Her strong emotional responses to the 'death artifacts' of the American Civil War at the museum are a case in point:

> I'd once been to Chicago, seen Lincoln's death artifacts in a museum: thatches of his hair; bullet fragments; the skinny spindle bed he'd died on, the mattress still slouched in the middle like it knew to preserve his last imprint. I ended up running to the bathroom, pressing my face against the cold stall door to keep from swooning (Flynn, *Dark Places* 71).

As war relics, they function as testimonial objects, transmitting the past trauma and the memories of violence and death to the current generation. Therefore, observing the so-called 'death artifacts', Libby commences brooding over the atrocities of the said war. Thus, her consciousness is intrusively and controllably flooded by the memories of her distressing experiences. Unable to stomach the concomitant psychological distress, she flees from the emotionally-charged environment, suggestive of trauma and violence.

Therefore, given that the massacre has left an indelible psychic wound on her mind in childhood, Libby has, since the occurrence of the traumatic event, been susceptible not only to petrifying traumatic nightmares and flashbacks but also to other psychiatric disorders such as PTSD, affective dysregulation, and panic attack, not to mention disturbed or negative assumptions about herself, the others, and the world. Depressed and melancholic, Libby required therapy even as a child to deal with her psychological issues:

> The town used to have a hell of a psychiatric clinic, seriously, there was even a sign on the highway that said something like, "Welcome to Topeka, psychiatric capital of the world!" The whole town was crawling with nutjobs and therapists, and I used to get trucked there regularly for rare, privileged outpatient counseling. Yay for me. We talked about my nightmares, my panic attacks, my issues with anger. By the teenage years, we talked about my tendency toward physical aggression. As far as I'm concerned, the entire city, the capital of Kansas, smells like crazy-house drool (Flynn, *Dark Places* 54).

The distressing remembrances of her frequent visits to the psychiatric clinic begin to swamp her psyche when she returns to her hometown, which she has gone to great lengths to avoid for so many years. This place, analogous to the personal effects passed down to her from her family members, has the potential to trigger past traumatic memories, to be further discussed later. In addition, Libby harbors intense resentment towards her hometown due to all the childhood adversities she has endured there.

The traumatic memories intruding into Libby's psyche, however, are by no means limited to the recollections of the massacre since she is also haunted by the trauma of childhood emotional neglect and verbal abuse at the hands of her father. Traumatic remembrances of such adversities, therefore, still return to swamp Libby's consciousness after many years. All in all, Libby's parent, Runner, has been physically absent from Libby's life for the most part, and even when he determined to return to his family, he

did nothing but cause psychological distress for his children. For instance, the disturbing memories of the summer when her father came back to live temporally with his family still return to haunt Libby after two decades, provoked by the neglectful and abusive behavior of her father at present. As evident in the following passage, Runner's behavior has remained unaltered over the years, as he tends to deride his daughter callously and care about nothing but money, hence bereft of paternal attributes and emotions:

> Runner had always been quick to brand his children as crybabies, cowards. I only really knew the guy for one summer, but it had been a hell of a summer. His mockery always worked on me: I'd end up swinging from the tree branch, jumping off the hayloft, throwing myself into the creek even though I couldn't swim. Never feeling triumphant afterward just pissed (Flynn, *Dark Places* 250).

Runner's abusive behavior seems to have proceeded from his childhood experience of verbal abuse and deprivation at the hands of his father. That the maltreated and deprived individual turns into an abuser and thus perpetuates the cycle of abuse is an underlying theme of Gillian Flynn's novels.

At this juncture, attempts will be made to analyze the traumatic memories in *Gone Girl*. The focus, however, will fall on the central male character of the narrative, namely Nick Dunne. Born in a dysfunctional family, Nick Dunne, along with his twin sister, has been subjected to neglect and maltreatment by an emotionally detached and abusive father, Bill Dunne, analogous to Runner in *Dark Places*:

> My dad had limitations. That's what my good-hearted mom always told us. He had limitations, but he meant no harm. It was kind of her to say, but he did do harm. I doubt my sister will ever marry: If she's sad or upset or angry, she needs to be alone – she fears a man dismissing her womanly tears (Flynn, *Gone Girl* 67-68).

As mentioned above, not only has Bill failed to provide his children with emotional support whenever required, but he has also verbally abused them severely, the psychologically devastating impact of which has barely faded after many years. Such childhood adversities, one can assert, will continue to exert a profound influence on their personalities and behavior for the rest of their lives. As Nick clarifies, his twin sister has endured severe verbal aggression at her father's hands for many years, resulting in her inability to repose her trust in men; therefore, the prospect of her getting married is remote. Moreover, since she was exposed to humiliation whenever she gave voice to her emotions in childhood, his sister has grown fearful of venting her feelings and shedding tears in the presence of a man lest he will 'dismiss her womanly tears' and emotions.

In *Gone Girl*, the familial relationships and the ambient environment of Nick's house were psychologically disturbing in childhood, given his father's ill temper and verbal aggression. Barely did a shred of happiness thaw the coldness of interfamilial relationships, thus Nick's deep-seated hatred towards, as well as the persistent avoidance of, his father:

> He never beat her [mother], but his pure, inarticulate fury would fill the house for days, weeks, at a time, making the air humid, hard to breathe, my father stalking around with his lower jaw jutting out, giving him the look of a wounded, vengeful boxer, grinding his teeth so loud you could hear it across the room (Flynn, *Gone Girl* 66).

Aversive to the emotionally unsettling atmosphere of his childhood house, Nick explains that his father's aggressive behavior had turned "our family life into an endless road trip with bad directions and a rage clenched driver, a vacation that never got a chance to be fun" (*Gone Girl* 66). The verbal aggression of Bill Dunne, however, was not just leveled against his wife but rather against females in general, considering them 'stupid, inconsequential, irritating', a misogynist as he was. As a child, Nick bore witness to his father's maltreatment and verbal abuse of his mother, as his father had a propensity to call her a 'bitch' and thus humiliate her on every occasion. Such acts of emotional violence as "humiliation, degradation, extreme criticism" (Briere and Scott 15), to name just a few, constitute intimate partner violence, which is otherwise known as domestic violence as well as spousal abuse: "Throwing things near her but not exactly at her. I'm sure he told himself: "I never hit her. I'm sure because of this technicality he never saw himself as an abuser" (*Gone Girl* 66). The invective that his father tended to 'fling' at his mother, i.e., the word 'bitch', is still haunting Nick after so many years in the shape of a distressing, intrusive voice and memory flooding his psyche whenever aroused by an external emotionally-charged stimulus, reminiscent of the adverse childhood experiences:

> Sometimes, in particularly shameful moments, I heard his voice in my head. But this was my father's voice, here. His words emerged in wet bubbles like something from a rancid bog. *Bitch bitch bitch*. My father, out of his mind, had taken to flinging the word at any woman who even vaguely annoyed him: *bitch bitch bitch* (Flynn, *Gone Girl* 56-57).

Many a time is Nick's mind intruded by the haunting memory of his father's verbal aggression throughout the novel; in fact, it has grown into a constant disruptive voice on his mind, over which he can assert very little control. As a rule, his father's disturbing voice forces its way unbidden into his mind whenever the female characters of the novel vex him, which indicates that Nick has also grown into a verbally abusive person after being exposed to abuse for many years. In lieu of censuring women himself, the haunting voice of his father does it on his behest.

In addition, Nick is persistently haunted by the disturbing memories of the emasculating verbal abuse he has endured in childhood at the hands of his father. Nick has been censured and degraded all his life; therefore, his father's voice persistently returns to haunt him in such inconsequential matters as borrowing money from his spouse. Nick has been stereotyped as 'the wrong kind' of man due to the lack of so-called masculine attributes. As evident in the following passage, his father's derisive voice condemns him because of his financial dependence on his wife:

> I would not be a man who borrowed from his wife – I could feel my dad twisting his lips at the very idea. Well, there are all kinds of men, his most damning phrase, the second half left unsaid, and you are the wrong kind (Flynn, *Gone Girl* 8).

Having lived under the shadow of an unfailingly abusive father, who has flaunted and, in fact, brandished his machismo on every occasion, Nick has been indoctrinated with the biased patriarchal belief that a man is supposed to be sturdy and independent. Otherwise, he will be stigmatized and labeled as the wrong type of man, or less than a man, to be specific. As a result of his father's verbal abuse, a fear of castration has been generated in Nick, which is still wracking his mind through the above-said derisive voice.

Moreover, impelled to have strong masculine qualities throughout his life, Nick's stance on such so-called feminine behavior as shedding tears has grown negative. Hence, when Amy's father bursts into tears after the disappearance of his daughter, the contemptuous and abusive voice of his father, denouncing men's frailty or lack of masculinity, returns to haunt Nick. Evidently, his personality, identity, and "preverbal assumptions" (Briere 2) of himself and others have been severely disrupted over time: "He [Amy's father] put a hand on my shoulder, wiped his eyes, and I involuntarily turned steel. My father again: 'Men don't cry'" (Flynn, *Gone Girl* 71). As a result, akin to his father, he has turned into a misogynistic person who regards male frailty as a badge of shame. From Nick's perspective, weeping and displaying grief is bizarre and inappropriate behavior for men; therefore, he gets appalled at how Amy's father reacts in public.

CONCLUSION

Gillian Schieber Flynn's fiction was argued to be widely renowned for its immaculate depiction of traumatic experiences and the concomitant psychological repercussions thereof in the central characters' lives. Evident in Flynn's novels, therefore, was an array of psychologically devastating events as well as violent and rather macabre murders coming to pass in her fictionalized Midwest. The foregoing article was intended to analyze the narratives through the lens of the Caruthian theory of trauma, underlying which are such cardinal concepts as incomprehensibility, intergenerationality, and repetitive reenactment of the past traumatic events. Primarily, it was concluded that individual and collective traumatic events are ineluctably intertwined in Flynn's oeuvre. In effect, not only have the traumata of the characters been transmitted to society ensemble and vice versa, but also the historical traumas of the past have been intergenerationally passed down to those of the current generation. In the second place, it was substantiated that the central characters' traumatic experiences, be they childhood abuse and neglect or some other catastrophic events that occurred in the past, return to haunt them in literal traumatic flashbacks, nightmares, and hallucinations, in some cases. The melancholic characters are still fixated on the past and thus relive past traumatic events in the present; therefore, they are emotionally and psychologically

paralyzed. The traumatic repetition of traumata has emanated from its unintergrated nature, that is, from the fact that traumatic occurrences cannot be grasped and assimilated into one's consciousness as they occur, hence the incomprehensibility of trauma in the Caruthian terminology.

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