1. Introduction

Long before Darwin made his world-changing prognosis on the origin of species, the human person knew that life was based on the principle of ‘the survival of the fittest’. In the long run, the weakest link became vestigial and the idea of safeguarding the interests of those denied a legitimate share in social power is a relatively recent concept in the evolution of humanity. Thomas Hobbes provides the perfect picture of the warring Original in his theory of the State of Nature as described in *Leviathan* (1651). He says,

Hereby it is manifest that during the time men in live without a common power to keep them all in awe, they are in that condition which is called war; and such a war is of every man against every man...In such a condition there is no place for industry...and consequently no culture of the earth; no navigation, nor use of the commodities that may be imported by sea...no knowledge if the face of the earth; no account of time; no arts; no letters; no society; and which is worst of all, continual fear, and danger of violent death; and the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.(Ch XIII)

Humankind has obviously moved on from the State of Nature: we have the industry, the options for travel, the commodities, the arts, knowledge and society. Being human is considered a benevolent flaw, and in some cultures even a boon—one that makes us more empathetic, that renders us more than the distinction of being higher up in the evolutionary ladder. Our anthropocentric canon has led us to believe that to be human is to be better than the other species in the natural world, and that improved cognition is congruent to improved character, for lack of another word. Several comfortable centuries of peace and alienated violence later, it is easy for the human psyche to become complacently cocooned within a misplaced sense of completion.
Yet history and human actions lead us to a different conclusion. Regardless of
civilisation, the human person seems to remain caught in that original state of violence. We
still live in a dangerous uncertain world characterised by “...continual fear, and danger of
violent death...” and the life of people in several parts remain “...solitary, poor, nasty,
brutish, and short.” Peace, no matter how fleeting, is a fairly recent phenomenon in the
history of the human race and war remains the greater marker for historical movement.

Lawrence L. Langer writes in his book The Age of Atrocity. Death in Modern
Literature (1978),

When history forces a choice between adaptation to a humanly insupportable
environment immediate (and hence premature) death, the individual who would
survive psychologically must surrender some of those values we traditionally identify
with human dignity and acknowledge a heritage from the animal world that the veneer
of civilisation desperately seeks to disguise... The era of modern atrocity continues an
erosion of the human image that began over a century ago. (172)

In the course of two centuries, scientific progress has also been dogged by extensive
and immaculate violence. The nature of human evil carries a different weight from that of
natural disasters or a circumstantial accident which cater to the comforting fatalism of ‘the act
of God’ rhetoric or a general scientific understanding of the event, thereby allowing the
bystander— and sometimes even those who underwent the travails— to shoulder the
emotional weight. The nature of helplessness involved is different because the futility of
action and response are not tied to or engendered by any human parameters. The event is free
of any moral implication, allowing the individual and society to recoup their losses and move
on; creating a certain bewildered resignation that does not equate to surrender but to endure.
However, the politics of human violence brings with it not only the weight of the experience itself but also indicts humanity. When the perpetrator of violence is a human being she is automatically a part of the social system of justice and judgement, the denial of which is violation of the laws of humanitarian fellowship. This idea takes for granted that the laws of humanity and human rights are universal that recognises all people as human. The denial of this aspect from a strictly humanist point of view is one of the crucial factors in the perpetuation of violence.

One of the key justifications for violence is the impulse to tame—whether through physical conquest or intellectual and psychological colonisation. It has been a deciding factor in delineating western civilisation as we know it and, more importantly, in moulding our ideas of the rational and the human. The incredible ability to implant a righteous motive to an action is the cornerstone of the civilised mien. This blindness is centred on the idea of upholding an ideal or order and denying the existence of the other—the binary opposite of Levinas’ philosophy. Certain forms of violence are sanctioned by governing bodies to enforce a law and subdue anarchic forces. They are seen as necessary evils to support order rather than the abuse of power. Hannah Arendt writes in her piece On Violence (1970).

The chief reason why warfare is still with us is neither a secret death wish, nor an irrepressible instinct of aggression, nor, finally and more plausibly, the serious economic and social dangers inherent in disarmament, but the simple fact that no substitute for this final arbiter in international affairs has yet to appear on the political scene. Was not Hobbes right when he said: “Covenants, without the sword, are just words”? (5)

The colonial period was characterised by subjugation and racial violence, but these were attributed to the civilising mission. Similarly, the eviction of natives from their
homelands was written off as a disciplining measure to control the rabid masses rather than an example of exploitation. It is only when used upon members of the same race and/or members of a civilised community that these actions were recognised as acts of violence. Susan Sontag gives a telling example of this double standard in the opening pages of her piece *Regarding the Pain of Others* (2003). She writes in relation to the photographs that inspired Virginia Woolf's "Three Guineas":

They show a particular way of waging war, a way at that time routinely described as "barbaric" in which civilians are the target. General Franco was using the same tactics of bombardment, massacre, torture and the killing and mutilation of prisoners that he had perfected as a commanding officer in Morocco. Then, more acceptably to ruling powers, his victims had been Spain's colonial subjects, darker hued and infidels to boot; now his victims were compatriots (9)

The First World War saw the beginnings of fissures in this cast iron belief in the rhetoric of a just war, which spread into full-fledged fault-lines with the Second World War. The algorithm of violence morphed from its righteous guise of supposed good intentions into naked greed and pointless pain.

The sacred "covenants" of the last two centuries have set new parameters for the nature of war and the scale and scope of violence and, more importantly, the involvement of the idea of the human in the discourse of violence. Furthermore, with the advance in modes of information collection and transmission, we have been able to reduce violence to a spectator sport and its recording an archival exercise for the intellectual. Modern weaponry brought with it a new alienation which effectively cut off men from their actions, blurring the lines that reined in humanity's baser instincts. Hannah Arendt writes,
The technical development of implements of violence has now reached the point where no political goal could conceivably correspond to their destructive potential or justify their actual use in armed conflict. Hence, warfare - since times immemorial the final merciless arbiter in international disputes - has lost much of its effectiveness and nearly all of its glamour. (3)

It is a telling fact that the critique of modernity shares a parallel development with the critique of violence and its manifestations. Violence itself is fuelled by discourse which delineates the tropes for its recognition. These paradigms are often influenced by the perceived impact of a certain kind of violence on the society, the economy or the individual and the magnitude and duration of this effect. The ability to create a discourse on the nature of human existence by using violence or the absence of it as the key marker is a reflection of its abiding connection with the human condition and the stake it holds in delineating the sketchy borders of permissible conduct. The presence of such a discourse facilitates the creation of phantom zones for legitimate forms of evil and violence with a prescribed reaction and corresponding judgement. The idea of legitimate violence automatically brings into question the parameters for what may be considered as punishable violence; that which is a violation of public rights which the law is obliged to vindicate. Giorgio Agamben discusses this in his collection of essays called *Homo Sacer III: The Remnants of Auschwitz. The Witness and the Archive* (1999) where he writes, “Law is solely directed toward judgement, independent of truth and justice” (18).³

Consequently, one might conclude that the mechanics of the law requires a qualitative analysis of the action to ascertain the level of offense and decide on the appropriate compensation. The idea of an equal and opposite reaction is the balancing note in the mechanics of the law where the understanding and awareness of the magnitude of the crime in terms of scale of influence decides the action to be taken. In effect, the articulation and
assessment of a form of violence and its affect allows for the allocation of a suitable punishment. This conceptualisation of violence and its results as a series of checks and balances begs the immediate question: What if the results of the violence cannot be articulated?

In the articulation of violence, the phrase ‘violence to self’ automatically outlines certain basic benchmarks for the idea. It establishes two key characters—the perpetrator of the violence and the oppressed self. According to Arendt, the key source of violence is the need for sovereign autonomy either on the individual or the community/country level. This notion is applicable to the trauma scenario since the traumatic undermines any existing beliefs of self-reliance and compromises self-possession and will. The idea of a self with a self-sustained will becomes flawed in the traumatic scenario where the outside either submerges or shatters the individual’s universe. As a result, the disenfranchised self becomes a displaced entity which is simultaneously at the centre of the violence equation while occupying a marginalised position by virtue of its objectified role as the receiver of the violence inflicted. The displaced nature of categories makes the trauma text forever at risk of magnifying a single voice because of the victim-oppressor equation that exists within such a text, and the complications arising from permitted and reclaimed voices. The voice that speaks from the periphery need not remain there forever and consequently becomes the overwhelming discourse. Similarly, the voice reclaimed from repressed memory may not be the true voice of the event. Conversely, the historical fact may differ from the subjective narrative. Besides this, there is the obvious tension in the usage of the term ‘victim’ and its implications of passivity whose transformation requires outside intervention. The situation grows more complicated since a text of violence entails an indirect transference of the oppressors’ impulses on to the now empowered victim either through identification or through subconscious doublethink⁴.
These concerns are underscored, in the light of the crisis of representation that rises from the overwhelming of existing structures of meaning in the face of insurmountable violence. The act of recording itself is a uniquely human characteristic, which implies a deep need to reflect, an impulse which forms the heart of philosophy and discourse. In the short period of time that human beings have achieved cognisance and the safe haven of civilisation, intellect has driven itself in a pendulum like back and forth between metaphysics and materiality. The understanding of reality has based itself on either empirical solidity or philosophical abstractness. The purview of human cognisance rested assured in the belief of its own unshakeable rationality and infallible righteousness. Both rationality and righteousness are rendered obsolete when confronted with the previously unthinkable.

The central premise of trauma is that it is the breaking point of cognisance and thereby implies the consequent inarticulation of the witness-author. Holocaust testimonial writer Elie Wiesel states categorically that the horrors of the camps are unrepresentable and Adorno famously decreed that there can be no poetry after Auschwitz\(^5\). However, this does not account for the numerous texts being written on these unrepresentables and the continued theoretical contemplation of its socio-political implications. In a certain sense, this supposed unrepresentability is used to assert the uniqueness of the event denying its generalisation or categorisation with other events or markers. The modern thinker/philosopher is faced with a conundrum of not only maintaining but also creating new categories. What are the criteria for trauma? How can academia hope to set a code of requisites for an event that is intensely and inconveniently personal? Furthermore, if the mimetic paradigm is inadequate for the task of creating a trauma text, what are the possible means of creation?

This thesis aims to examine these questions within the paradigms of Narratology and Trauma Theory so as to contextualise the modern preoccupation with trauma, and to ascertain the degrees of negotiation that exist between each link in the narrative chain: namely, event
and writer, writer and text, text and reader, reader and writer and reader and event. A traumatic event does not brook narrative negotiation of consciousness. The author faces the formidable task of translating an inscrutable event into a manageable text, while keeping it authentic even in its stylisation. The trauma text is the perfect example of the cycle of influence between the different elements of the text since the trauma text, more than any other kind of literature, requires the reader’s sympathy.

The ideal aim of the trauma text is empathy, an aim that implies a route. The route in a literary context is a plot and consequently points towards a contrived aspect. The aestheticisation of pain is rife with uncomfortable implications, and the trauma text goes through stringent sieving through sceptical lenses which is quick to decry the entire narrative on this basis. As a result there is a certain denial of the aesthetic in a trauma text. While Marxist theories of aesthetics attempt to capture the ‘real’ at its grittiest, this deliberate focus too involves a certain accrued agenda that manifests in the unavoidable fabrication of the reified real. Precisely by trying to avoid it, they play into it. The artifice of creation must negotiate the knee-jerk denial of artistic aesthetics that is characteristic of the general approach towards the trauma text, its literary merit constantly walking the tightrope between admiration and disapproval. To look at a text of trauma as merely a sociological tract is to be blinded to the artistic elements of the text and the emotional implications of the piece. Furthermore, a purely social scientific approach pigeonholes the nature of the text into obstructing cubes that deny the multiplicity of truth and the telling. At the same time, one cannot be blind to the likely possibility of an authorial agenda and the all-pervasive strain of ideology that runs through any creation, a concept that Althusser made amply clear in his study on the Ideological State Apparatus (Althusser).

The trauma text requires a treatment that is not defensive about its artistic nature and yet is aware of the delicate nature of the subject and its propensity for distortion and
appropriation. At the same time, a trauma narrative has a tendency to fall prey to interpretive tyranny, simply by virtue of its origins and subject. Hence, its representation in text is fraught with the threat of inauthenticity and the narrative is in danger of both intentional and affective fallacy. Consequently, it is crucial to maintain the negotiation between empathy and objectivity.

The element of objectivity is a recurring issue in the trauma text from the very point of its genesis both in theoretical and practical terms: the event itself. Neurobiological theories of trauma maintain that the traumatic memory remains inaccessible to the victim through the defensive tactics of the individual’s psyche and physiognomy. The neuropsychologist Bessel Van der Kolk maintains that the traumatised victim cannot access the complete memory of events that transpired simply because the body does not allow it, yet at the same time the memory is engraved in the individual’s cognitive epidermis (Caruth, *Trauma* 158-183). Blackouts and mnemonic blind-spots are characteristic symptoms of PTSD and traumatic neuroses. The body fights to keep you from re-experiencing the same event that caused your nervous break-down. Latent survival instincts kick-in to protect the individual from the threat while leaving the body in a state of perpetual readiness and paranoia. As a result, the patient is caught in desperation without any discernable cause. This frustration is compounded by the fact that, the traumatic memory itself is inarticulate. Unlike other memories, the traumatic memory is stored in a kinaesthetic, sensory code that refuses the normal negotiation of language and narrative. The immediate implication of this approach is that any narrative of the traumatic event may be incomplete.

The issue is further complicated by the presence of therapeutic pitfalls like screen memories and hypnotic suggestibility. Freud, in his paper titled “Screen Memories”, proposes the notion that the mind puts up memory obstacles and creates false memories based on similar situations to screen the already scarred mind from re-experiencing the trauma through
memory (Smith, 485-503). Consequently, the patient may find herself recalling an event that, in actuality, never happened. Hypnotic suggestibility entails a similar misconception fuelled, in this case, by the suggestions and questions put to the patient during hypnotic therapy. The suggestions offered by the therapist through her questions leads the floundering mind into a possibly untrue supposition which further clouds the actual events. Such possibilities bring the credibility of a trauma text into question.

This problem becomes underscored in the context of historical archives which rely on factual credibility for its authenticity. In such a scenario, the trauma narrative comes under stringent scrutiny since it not only attests to historical events but also lends credibility to the justification or vilification of the parties involved. However, how true are these ghost memories, especially when summoned in a charged political climate? In a certain sense, the writer becomes implicated in a subterfuge that goes beyond the general artifice of the narrative craft and into the judicial and consequently into discourse. In effect, the narrator is under duress to produce the incomprehensible within the parameters of the text while incorporating and upholding dominant ideas of the permissible, the unforgivable, the victim and the oppressor.

Language is required to place the players in the prescribed polemic roles requisite to classic historical records. One recognises that the lawful may not be just and vice versa and that there are no sides to take, especially when one is looking at a collapsed vision. The archive of traumatic histories becomes a site for the reassessment of these categories while recalibrating ideas of truth, responsibility and the articulation of the same in a language ill-equipped to express the nuances of these new shades.

From a literary point of view, the epistemological approach becomes incompatible with the ethos of the trauma text considering that a traumatic experience automatically deteils
existing structures of knowledge and cognisance. How can one negotiate the inconceivable into the structures of reality prescribed through banal general experience? We live in a world beyond good and evil, where the former is fallible and the latter constantly overstepping its own shadowy bounds. At the crossroads of the evolution of humanity we are forced to ask that embarrassingly melodramatic question: can we be human anymore?

The idea of ‘humanity’ is largely based upon the idea first articulated in Rousseau’s *The Social Contract* (1762). He put forward the concept of the General Will: a larger prerogative that influences the individual Self to act for the greater good, thereby achieving not only greater social harmony but also moral elevation. But more significantly, and perhaps more honestly, the true impulse of humanity lies in self-love. Rousseau claims that all love springs from self-love that separates one from the rest and encourages one to treat others so as to achieve an individual goodwill for oneself, and it is in this element of self-improvement that humanity as a mien takes form. The true catalyst of the idea of humanity lies in this development of the rather insignificant *homo sapien* into an individual, and consequently into a person in control of her actions. The individual is unique in the sense that she is a distinct cog in the machinery of society, fully responsible for herself and, through the self, for others as well. Humanity as a social plan would not be half as effective without the presence of this element of choice. This unique ability to make a choice and to exert control over ones existence, if not in a larger philosophical sense, then at least in the everyday business of living, is the first casualty in a state of trauma.

Judith Herman, in her seminal work *Trauma and Recovery: From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (1992) describes psychological trauma as “an affliction of the powerless” (33). She writes,
Traumatic events are extraordinary, not because they occur rarely, but rather because they overwhelm the ordinary human adaptations to life. Unlike commonplace misfortunes, traumatic events generally involve a threat to life or bodily integrity, or a close personal encounter with violence and death. They confront humans with the extremities of helplessness and terror and evoke the responses of catastrophe. (33)

A feeling of helplessness is central to an understanding of trauma; it is a purely experiential phenomenon which does not brook the negotiation of either body or mind. The element of accident is the fulcrum on which swings the entire trauma experience since it entails an absolute unpreparedness. It disarms and leaves one gasping for assurance, for familiarity, only to inhale alien air in lung-less desperation. Thus the victims of trauma are left floundering in a state of panic unable to summon the nameless spirit that haunts them. A traumatic event strips an individual of choice and more importantly removes the assurance in anything that substantiates the illusion of choice or security, rendering one mired in a paranoid limbo and the mind unable to assimilate day to day reality. Reason, as it were, snaps.

The link between trauma and literature lies in this slim isthmus of reason that connects articulation and experience. The traumatic experience attacks this narrow space and deprives one of the necessary crutches of cognisance and expression, leaving experience stranded and language under siege with no supplies. Logos, the Greek word for 'word', also meant 'reason' and 'plan'. The word lends meaning to the world; in a sense, the world comes into being through the word. A traumatised individual is rendered 'wordless', their existing language of reason ceases to be viable. The inability to integrate the traumatic event into the mental, logical framework nurtured by a lifetime of conditioning and normalcy places the writer in the same allegorical cave described by Plato at the genesis of philosophy.
Trauma is a new epoch in the history of philosophy, or rather a strange circuitous return to a forgotten place. We return once again to the age old idea of mimesis and representation. If literature is a doubly reflected shade of a crystal vision conceived in the cavern of the mind, what is the fate of a vision that can barely achieve the misty substance of a memory? Its representation cannot hope to be true to that which is too real to be real.

The transmutation of any experience into expression and its reading and understanding have always come under critical scrutiny; none more so than in the case of violence. The extreme reaction to violence, therefore, becomes the fulcrum for understanding the new idea of the human and more importantly to make sense of the ineffable, that which ought not to have been. It cannot be understood in an epistemological frame since the event cannot be prepared for and can only be accessed at an experiential level. However, the transferred trauma faced by the observer and recorded in text cannot be denied credibility simply because the observer did not go through the ordeal. The notion of referentiality becomes crucial to the study of the traumatic phenomenon and more importantly to the idea of truth.

The thesis proposes to trace the development of trauma theory in relation to art in general and literature in particular. Furthermore, it hopes to delineate the means by which the modern understanding of trauma and its treatment have come to influence the transmutation of a traumatic event into a literary narrative and, consequently, its reading and representation.

The trauma text does not work in terms of endings—it is the story of the continuation. The end of the ordeal does not signify the end of the story rather it is the beginning of the real one. The tracing of the genesis, development and culmination of a trauma narrative provides a fascinating view into not just the working of a mind under siege, but also of the resilience of the human spirit. Though an intrinsically bitter and often
horrifying treatise, the trauma narrative defines through negation the same hope that it seems
to distrust. The very act of writing becomes an elucidation of this characteristic.

The classic bildungsroman portrays a protagonist, often not a perfectly good person,
having to undergo trials and travails and finally achieving a happy ending. Trauma’s literary
twin, tragedy, has certain classic patterns too. There is the tragedy marked by renewal: the
sad, yet unavoidable end of an old order so as to make way for a new one. There is the
tragedy of the man out of time, born in an age that he does not belong to and doomed to the
solitary suffering of the misfit. Then there is the tragedy of the underachiever, one whose life
ought to have reached certain heights was crippled by circumstance and then cynicism. There
is the unavoidable tragedy of devastating fate that tosses the protagonist into suffering like a
canoe in a stormy sea. And then, of course, there is the tragedy of the non-immanent life
where living has disintegrated into existence. Trauma, at one point of time or the other,
touches all these elements: It is a series of events that are inevitable and unplanned for, which
results in the disruption of an existing order of consciousness leaving the individual unable to
realign herself with the rest of the world and not allowing her to achieve her potential,
making her life an exercise of habit.

When there is no explanation or comforting justification for the unprovoked suffering,
our psyche buckles leaving us forever stretched over the wrack of time. As a result the
present is inscrutable, the past inaccessible and the future irredeemable. This is the basic
quality of trauma, and having been stripped of our ‘greater good’, we are able to recognise it.
And with the recognition begins the struggle.

The thesis hopes to look at trauma as that which catalyses the psyche, affecting the
modes by which we read, represent, and interpret life. It proposes to study the body of trauma
theory keeping an eye on the means in which it affects structures of interpretation and
representation so as to create a paradigm which encourages reconcilement without
depreciating the horror of the events.

To this end, the thesis will be divided into four chapters. The first one, “Trauma
Theory: An Overview”, will mark pertinent milestones in the development of Trauma Theory
and establish its connections to literature. To effectively trace the scope and scale of trauma
theory in the literary context, the thesis will be employing the ideas of psychoanalysis as
propounded by Sigmund Freud and Lacan, as well as eminent thinkers in the field of Trauma
theory such as Judith Herman and Cathy Caruth, to name a few.

The second chapter, “Trauma and Social Discourse” will examine various factors that
delineate the popular idea of trauma and the role of context in powering these viewpoints. To
locate trauma on the experiential level, it is necessary to first outline the requisites for normal
behaviour and what constitutes violence and deviancy. The tenets that rule accepted
behaviour also point to the elements central to defining the idea of human and parallel the
formulations of what constitutes violence and the thresholds for permitted violence. The
traumatic event’s conceptualisation as an attack against the social body through a discursive
negotiation either in terms of alienation or generalisation has an impact on its representation
and requires theoretical analysis. The telling fact that not all violence is physical and that a
large factor effecting and generating trauma also stems from the social forces that affect the
nature and perception of an experience opens up avenues of relevant analysis. Examining
these aspects will allow us to study how the text translates them to recreate and transfer the
emotional connect elemental to the trauma text.

In the fourth chapter, “Representation, Reconstruction and Creative Misreading”, I
will be studying the transformation of the idea of mimesis and identification in the context of
the trauma text. Locating the traumatic experience and its representation involves the
inevitable task of recollection. A task that becomes doubly problematic in the spectrum of trauma. I would like to explore the problems of transcribing a memory into narrative and to study the currents influencing the representation of a certain event. I would like to examine the difference between the tenets of collective trauma and personal suffering. Suffering is a deeply subjective, private domain that finds most of its source in the individual herself and cannot be evaluated using standard objective methods. However, one cannot forget that the socio-political context and the emotional loyalties of the individual play a significant role in the framing the idea of suffering and more importantly in providing the vision to recognise an event as an act of violence. At the same time, this same conditioning may allow for the manipulation of a text to further a particular point of view. Through my analysis I hope to draw connections between the ideas of personal truth versus the dominant historical truth and to locate the mnemonic act of reconstruction. The creative impulse of the traumatic, and its translation into the creative is, an important part of the art of literature. I would like to look at the similarities between the condition of trauma and the idea of the sublime while drawing connections to the literary activity of creation and interpretation. The aesthetics of the trauma text and the literariness of such a narrative is important factor in locating the literatures of trauma as a distinct demarcation.

In connection to this I would also like to look into the handling of time in a traumatic scenario and the spatio-temporal flux this entails in the narrative and the in the structuring of the recollection, and the contention between fiction and non-fiction in the field of trauma literature and its implications on the evergreen problem of credibility and authenticity that dogs the steps of any trauma narrative.

In the concluding chapter, “Trauma in/and Art”, I would like to look at the role of art in a traumatic scenario. Art and literature have been accused time and again of being frivolous pastimes in the face of a strenuous reality or worse a mode of escapism. The trauma
text categorically proves the fallacy of such an approach. Art, in its performative capacity, attempts to catalyse the stasis of trauma so that the raw wound heals. Trauma is not a disease, it is a wound and its impact persists in the indelible scar; it will always remain a swathe of raised scar tissue on the epidermis of the psyche. Literature becomes a means for the articulation of the incomprehensible and more importantly it hastens the process of reconciliation by providing a common world community of healing. I would like to look at the relevance art in terms of agency and appropriation and the recalibration of the idea of catharsis.

The recasting of an event in a relatable form, entitles the location and adherence to a certain mode of expression and a metaphor of signification. The concretisation of the unreal through the diaphanous veil of language has been a constant preoccupation with literature, spurring literary theory and western philosophy since its genesis in Plato’s cave. The trauma scenario in its incomprehensibility and its deep subjectivity sets a new challenge to the task of representation. What is the signifying metaphor for the unsayable? What epistemology powers the depth and scale of the traumatic event? Has trauma become the new metanarrative for the 21st century? I would like to look at how a traumatic scenario engenders a recasting of accepted categories and stereotypes and how its intrinsic suspicion leads to the rereading of accepted norms of responsibility, creativity and epistemological understanding.

The thesis will make use of various examples from popular and canonical literature to elucidate the arguments described in this proposal. It will attempt to examine the cognitive act of perception of the psychological trauma in collaboration with the artistic and literary act of mimetic representation and the textual analysis. By following this trail, we may be able trace the development and inculcation of the incomprehensible and the inconstant into the scheme of the literary universe of experience creating a chain of signification between language, suffering, art and through art a certain degree of affirmation.


3. In the essay “The Witness”, he draws the important distinction between the judiciary and justice and the subtle but telling difference between moral responsibility and penal responsibility. The notion of responsibility entails a repayment of debt which makes the individual answerable to a certain system. The moral system implies a fixed code that is individually determined with or without social support. The penal code, on the other hand is subject to revisions and editions according to circumstance. Justice exists separately from these formulations which are based on judgements.

4. Judith Herman uses this term to describe a victim’s ability to simultaneously entertain two diametrically opposite thoughts in their system in favor of sustaining the individual’s fragile balance and coping with the present traumatic scenario. (Herman 87)

5. This is a paraphrase of the original quote from his essay titled “Cultural criticism and Society”, which appears in the collection Prisms (1949) which discusses the problems of reification and theoretical dissociation.

   The more total society becomes, the greater the reification of the mind and the more paradoxical its effort to escape reification on its own. Even the most extreme consciousness of doom threatens to degenerate into idle chatter. Cultural criticism finds itself faced with the final stage of the dialectic of culture and barbarism. To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric. And this corrodes even the knowledge of why it has become impossible to write poetry today. Absolute reification, which presupposed intellectual progress as one of
its elements, is now preparing to absorb the mind entirely. Critical intelligence cannot be equal to this challenge as long as it confines itself to self-satisfied contemplation. (34)

6. Rousseau propounds the concepts of *amour de soi* and *amour proper*, the former being a more basic degree of personal happiness and the latter coming into being with the advent of society and from the broader, more pervasive call for social welfare.