

The Signified and Signifier of Trauma and Identification—A Case Studies of Mom's Trauma in Amos Oz's a Tale of Love and Darkness

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Abstract: *Though the signified and the signifier are the linguistic terms, they garner great significance in literature which sheds great light on the connotation of the concept in literary works, such as trauma and identification. To the majority of Jews, trauma has the historical root in their mind which haunts everyone, particularly to women. Amos Oz who is regarded as most prolific writer in Israel kept portraying Jewish wish of identification and Zionism. However, the road to fulfil the wish turned out to be more like a disillusionment which deepens the trauma of Jews. The thesis is going to explore the trauma of Fania in A Tale of Love and Darkness so as to better apprehend the trauma suffered by Jews from the perspective of the signified and the signifier.*

Keywords: the signified; the signifier; Jews; Trauma; Amos Oz; A Tale of Love and Darkness.

1. INTRODUCTION

Trauma in literature refers to the emotional or psychological impact that a traumatic event or experience has on a character, which is then portrayed through their thoughts, actions, and dialogue. The signifier in literature is the representation of trauma through language, symbols, and imagery. It is the way in which the writer conveys the emotional and psychological effects of trauma on the characters and the reader. The signified in literature is the deeper meaning or message [1] that the author is trying to convey through the depiction of trauma. It can be interpreted in various ways depending on the reader's perspective and understanding of the text. Some possible interpretations of the signified of trauma in literature include: 1) The power of words and storytelling in healing and recovery from trauma. 2) The importance of empathy and understanding in overcoming trauma and building stronger relationships. 3) The destructive nature of trauma and its impact on individuals, communities, and society as a whole. 4) The role of personal resilience and coping strategies in managing and overcoming trauma. 5) The universality of trauma and its impact on people from all walks of life. Examples of works that explore the signifier and signified of trauma in literature include: 1) Sylvia Plath's "The Bell Jar": This novel portrays the mental health struggles of its protagonist, Esther Greenwood, as a result of her experience with sexual assault. Through Esther's thoughts and actions, Plath explores the emotional and psychological effects of trauma on individuals and the stigma surrounding mental health issues. 2) Toni Morrison's "Beloved": This novel tells the story of Sethe, a former slave who endures unspeakable horrors during slavery and its aftermath. Morrison uses vivid imagery and symbolism to portray the physical and emotional scars of trauma on Sethe and her community. 3) Harper Lee's "To Kill a Mockingbird": Set in the Deep South during the 1930s, this novel explores the themes of racial injustice, social inequality, and the impact of trauma on individuals and communities. Through Atticus Finch's defense of Tom Robinson, Lee portrays the devastating effects of prejudice and discrimination on those who have experienced trauma. 4) Gabriel Garcia Marquez's "One Hundred Years of Solitude": This novel weaves together multiple generations of the Buendia family, exploring their lives and experiences as a result of war, colonization, and other forms of trauma. Marquez uses magical realism to convey the emotional and psychological impact of trauma on his characters.

There is a trauma in all Jewish mind that haunts them in everyday in life and push them to seek for an ethnic identity which is recognizable in the world. Amos Oz is Israel's most influential writer who used to be a perennial candidate for the Nobel Prize in literature in recent years. In A Tale of Love and Darkness, Oz's attempt of addressing his mother Fania's unfortunate destiny can be seen more clearly from the perspective of trauma [2]. However, the study of trauma on A Tale of Love and Darkness is far from enough in the West and China. The majority of the previous studies upon the Jewish Identification in wartime. It is the trauma that lingers in mind

which serves as the inner-driver to the identification process for Jewish at that time.

2. THE PREVIOUS STUDIES OVER A TALE OF LOVE AND DARKNESS

The study of Zionism and identity issues are the most frequently discussed topics on *A Tale of Love and Darkness*. The Zionist ideal of the negation of the past is replacing by an attempt to recover a personal as well as collective traumatic past[3]. He believes this work is an attempt to renovate the identity with the loss of Europe and the trauma of the existential threat after the 1948 War of Independence[3]. Ari Ofengenden also concerns the negation of national Zionism ideals. He points that Oz would like the readers to accept and see the old Jew inside the New Jew[4]. He comments that Amos Oz engages in a rewriting and reinterpretation of the meaning of Zionist national identity by writing *A Tale of love and Darkness*, which coincides with Kaplan's conclusion and accomplishes a further exploration. Ofengenden further articulates Oz's deconstruction of Zionism in his second article on *A Tale of love and Darkness*. He analyzes that Oz renders his peripheral position to bring positive transformation to the Israeli society [5], which grabs Amos Oz's efforts to reveal the fact that some Jews do not favor the Zionism ideal all the time, or has changed their sides in the half way. At the same time, the theme of the work is the suicide of his mother who does not adjust to the new/old land as the Zionist narrative requires and urgently implies. Furthermore, they examine the nature of Zionist claims and contemporary counter-claims and illustrate how it is impossible to be genuine "native" at that time to adjust themselves to Israel. Zhong Zhiqing pointed out that ,in *A Tale of love and Darkness*, apart from presenting different identities of Jews, pioneers, holocaust survivors, and native Arabs in Israel, Oz highlights the marginalization of Ashkenazi Jews [6].The interests in *A Tale of love and Darkness*, are trending in master theses, most of which concern with symbolic images within Jewish community and the historical background of Zionist movement. Tang Shi systematically interprets *A Tale of love and Darkness* from three parts: identity construction, historical memory and narrative discourse[7]. Angie probes into the positive significance that Amos Oz's novels bring to himself, the Israeli society, the Jews and Arabs by analyzing the concept of literature therapy embodied in Oz's works[8]. Oz has witnessed the founding of the State of Israel and the following continuous wars and attended community religious school and served in army for three years. After he served in army and experienced the Six-Day War, Oz was unable to hold the optimistic views and Zionist ideology as he used to be.

In the Six-Day War (1967) Israel occupied the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, the Sinai Peninsula, the Golan Heights, and Jerusalem's Old City, annexing the latter two territories in 1980 and 1981. Israel returned Sinai to Egypt in 1982 and passed partial control of Gaza and the West Bank to the Palestinians by agreements signed in 1993 and 1994, but peace efforts were hampered by outbreaks of violence, by disagreement over the status of Jerusalem, and by the building of Jewish settlements in the occupied territories.He became active in the Israeli peace movement solution to the Israeli-Palestine conflict. His mother Fania committed suicide when he was only twelve, which pushed him to abandon his family name. Although many studies focus on identity issues and the significant Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the traumatic experience of his mother Fania and his reflection deserves further studies, considering Oz's life experience and his concern for love and family in literary works.

3. THE ANALYSIS OF FANIA FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF TRAUMA

Trauma can be etymologically dated back to ancient Greek which indicates wound and damage, and generally refers to injury on a physical build. Today, however, as opposed to bodily harm. As a contemporary popular discourse of knowledge and research paradigm, trauma studies originated from industrial accidents in clinical medicine and modern psychology at the end of the 19th century, especially Freud psychoanalysis [9].

Freud suggests that the trauma in the mind is always coming back and is not as healable as the trauma of the body [10]. Freud regards trauma as a gaping hole in the psyche's defensive wall, which caught the patient off guard in a unconscious way [11]. Judith Herman categorized the symptoms of trauma into three: hyper-arousal, intrusion, and constriction. " Hyper-arousal reflects the persistent expectation of danger; intrusion refers to indelible imprint of the traumatic moment; constriction denotes the numbing responses of surrender" [12]. To Fania, the model of trauma goes as follows in Figure 1:

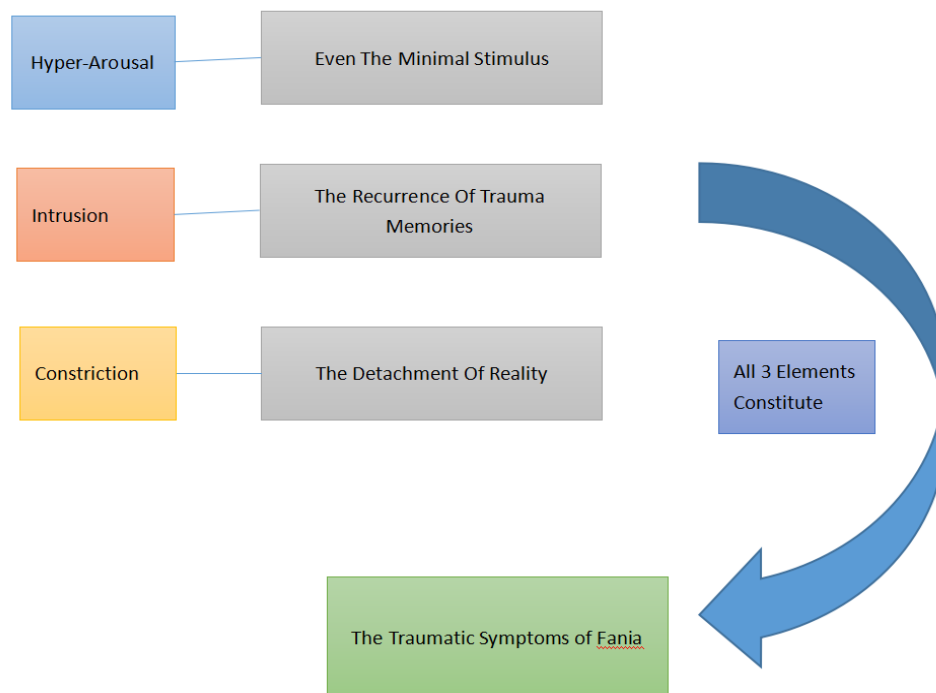


Figure 1: Hyper-Arousal: Even The Minimal Stimulus

"Mother was sent to the clinic for thorough tests and even had to spend a couple of nights at Hadassah Hospital.....The test were inconclusive" [13]. From insomnia became routine, which could be seen as an increase in the level of hyper-arousal, Fania was bothered by all kinds of ordinary sounds and phenomena around.

All external sounds and incidents become signals of potential threats. She dreads sleep, and stayed awake every night in her chair, and " the slightest disturbance made her start", " the wailing of lovesick cats, distant gunfire in Sheikh Jarrah or Isawiya, the muezzin's call at dawn from a minaret in Arab Jerusalem, across the border" [13].

4. INTRUSION: THE RECURRENCE OF TRAUMA MEMORIES

Even though the danger is past, traumatized people will keep revisiting the event as if it is happening again. They cannot return to normal life because the trauma is repeatedly interrupted. The traumatic moment is coded as an abnormal form of memory that naturally splits into consciousness, both a flashback while awake and as a trauma nightmare during sleep [12]. Trauma events constantly invade reality, making people unconsciously act according to the situation of the events in the past.

Comparing with hyper-arousal, intrusion is not a recognizable symptom that can be observed from outside if the victims do not actively share the experiences, which makes it difficult to be perceived from the perspective of young Oz. An intrusion symptom appears at an early age after Dora's tragic abortion, "once, in the night.....Fania saying that she could hear very clearly from the garden, in the dark---- it was a rainy, windy night---- the sound of a baby crying" [13].

5. CONSTRICTION: THE DETACHMENT OF REALITY

As a symptom of constriction, the perception of those are traumatized may be partially anesthetized, numb or distorted, mainly because their perception of time may change and result in slow motion, which is easier for outsiders to notice. The person may feel as if it does not happen to her, as if she is observing from the outside of her body, or as if the whole experience is a nightmare from which she would soon awaken [12].

Compare with hyper-arousal and intrusion, the symptom of constriction makes Fania more detached from reality. She has lost interest in exploration of unknown fear and gives up the protection of her body and self-consciousness

after the torture of hyper-arousal and intrusion symptoms. Oz's description accurately presents Fania emotional and mental state at the time: "she was soaked and frozen like a drenched bird that would never fly again" [13]. The same scene on an indoor chair or on a sunny day would not draw Oz's or reader's attention so strongly. It is the heavy rain that makes this scene so shocking, which reveals Fania's numbness and detachment.

Numbness and indifference to external stimuli induced by constriction because Fania develops a detached perspective and believes she would not be bothered by any potential danger and suffering. Fania sit in the rain and does not care if she got wet, because she no longer feels her physical body and has shrunk to her conscious self as the heavy rain pours down on her. She sit quietly as if watching someone else's drama, so there is an expression similar to smile on her face, a typical sign of extreme numbness and relaxation.

6. TRAUMATIC NARRATION IN JEWISH WOMEN

Modern medicine and psychology view post-traumatic stress disorder as a mental illness that requires necessary manual intervention, rather than a reactive disorder that can heal itself. American scholar J.Roger Kurtz commented in Trauma and literature that "what trauma means in the lives of individuals and communities, and how to promote the healing of this type of wound, are the principal concerns of the capacious field of trauma studies"[14]. However, traditional Jewish community places special emphasis on the interests of the state, the collective and the family, and ignores individual appeals, especially lack of humanistic care on individual psychological level. On the other hand, individuals also tend to regard mental illness as a by-product of physical, and tend to conceal and hide mental problems instead of expressing and releasing it.

Judith Herman has made great efforts to explore trauma therapy, pointing out that " recovery unfolds in three stages. The central task of the first stage is the establishment of safety. The central task of the second stage is remembrance and mourning. The central task of the third stage is re-connection with ordinary life" [12]. The ultimate way to cure trauma is to resort to trauma narratives which connect traumatic stories or a series of unfortunate events through words and have a significant impact on the recovery of adjustment and the reconstruction of interpersonal relationships--- physical neurosis caused by terror can be reserved by the use of language [12]. Therefore, the failure of Fania's recovery can be charted as follows in figure 2:

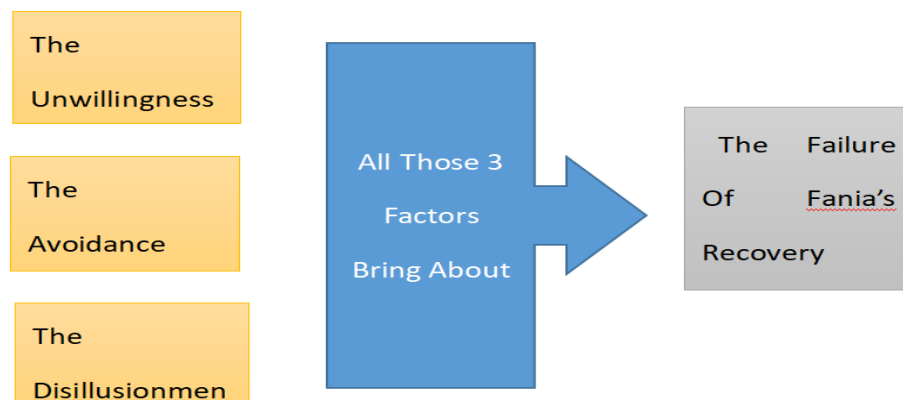


Figure 2: The Unwillingness in Fania's Recovery

The premise of all this is that traumatized victims are willing to take part in the recovery, and then they have to expose their traumatic experience to externalize the trauma, gain sympathy and understanding from others and get out the long and challenging nightmare. The therapist's first task is to conduct a thorough and informed diagnostic assessment,so as to be fully aware of the disguises that traumatic disorders can present [12]. However, the foundation for recovery is not successfully established in the relationship between Fania and Arieh.

On the social level, Jews are not good at expressing personal feelings, while on the personal level, Fania and Arieh are far apart in their interests. "what came out was something tense, dry,even frightened, the result of generation upon generation of repression and negation." [13]. The private conversations between Arieh and Fania are always "overshadowed by the fear of appearing or sounding ridiculous"[13]. Both Arieh and Fania can be said to be very kind and friendly people, but their combination has caused a very terrible tragedy. This lack of intimacy makes the

traumatized Fania lack a exit out of her pain and suffering. The traumatized Fania could only spend sleepless nights in Agon's novels to relieve her loneliness. " she used to read and re-read the stories in the collection at the handles of the lock almost every winter. Perhaps she found an echo there of her own sadness and loneliness" [13]. The result of this tragedy is mainly the lack of family intimacy. There is no sufficient and caring communication in the relationship between Arieh and Fania, which blocks the possibility of the establishment of safety in Fania.

7. THE AVOIDANCE OF STORY-TELLING

According to Herman, the second stage to recovery is remembrance and mourning based on the establishment of safety. The survivor changes the traumatic memory by telling the story of the trauma, so it can be integrated into the life story of the trauma victims. The narrative has to be complete, deep and detailed [12]. Remembrance and mourning has two dimensions, either as a deep and complete story telling to another person or as a logical and detailed recording of the traumatic memory into narrations.

Fania always talks to Arieh like a child, whereas with Oz, "she spoke as one might speak to a confidant" [13]. However, Fania's story telling to Oz is deliberately avoided to address her traumatic memories. The bedtime stories for Oz include giants, fairies, witches, and the remote cabin in the forest, but nothing about the past [13]. As compensation, Fania tells Oz lots of her opinions and understandings wrapped in fairy tales, hoping that he can understand a lot of truth, and realize the need for understanding. Fania's approach is successful for Oz 's growth, who shows interest in storytelling and a high level of literary talent at a very young age, which is largely due to Fania's act of substituting fairy tales for her own traumatic memories.

With lack of assistance and Fania 's unwillingness to actively recall the traumatic past, this leads to the lack of what Herman called the most important remembrance and mourning in the second stage of recovery. Traumatic memories of the past have haunted Fania and make it unable to be integrated into her own life story. It reminds Oz that Fania seems to keep a diary during the war time. He vaguely remembers that Fania sometimes sitting on the hallway floor during bombing raids in the corner, writing with an exercise book in support of a closed book on her lap, ignoring the deafening noise of exploding shells and mortars and machine guns [13].

8. THE DISILLUSIONMENT OF ZIONISM AND IDENTITY

In literature, the signified and signifier of identification refers to the ways in which characters are represented as either identifying themselves with a particular group or individual, or being identified by that group or individual[15]. The signifier of identification refers to the external representations of identification, such as clothing, hairstyle, mannerisms, and other physical characteristics that can be used to identify a character with a particular group or individual. For example, a character who wears a red hoodie might be identified as a member of a certain subculture or fandom. The signified, on the other hand, refers to the internal representations of identification[16] . This includes a character's beliefs, values, attitudes, and experiences that shape their sense of self and their relationship to the group or individual they identify with. For example, a character who has experienced discrimination or prejudice based on their race or gender may feel a strong connection to a group that advocates for social justice and equality.

From 24,000 in 1882 to 650,000 in 1948, the waves of anti-semitism in the late 18th and early 19th centuries push a large number of Jews " making Aliyah" to the Land of Israel, which means " the act of going up" in Hebrew, that is, towards Jerusalem. Anti-semitism usually consists of two parts: Hostility toward or prejudice against Jews or Judaism and Discrimination against Jews. Immigrants have continued to pour into Palestine ever since. Palestinian Mediterranean coastal plain is not suitable for human habitation, and there is a large area of "gentlemen of limestone mountain, the mountain of Samaria, and Judah high soil barren, mostly in many areas such as loneliness, desolation" [17], which took the pioneers years of construction to transform it to be suitable for human survival. Many European Jews, persecuted by anti-Semitism and fled to Palestine, hope for the good life the Zionists had painted. But the barren Palestine and the ongoing conflicts sapped their dreams. The living environment is harsh and the material conditions are extremely poor. Palestine is not the " land flowing with milk and honey" to the immigrants as they have been dreamed of.

As Jews they are supposed to love the land, but many found it embarrassing and painful that their true love belong to Europe. A childhood promise is inevitably frustrated and even ridiculed. Fania grew up in an angelic, hazy beauty, and her wings eventually broke on the hot, dusty pavement of Jerusalem [13]. The disillusionment of the Zionist ideal makes Fania's ideal self and real self to contradict each other again. She could not get out of this state

and no longer care about politics and lofty topics as she used to. " I only grieve for what never was. Only for those pretty pictures we made for ourselves, and now they've faded" [13]. Zionism is a dream that had never been true, and Fania is disillusioned for the fact that she has struggled and been attracted to illusory ideals.

Erickson argues that self-identity refers to teenagers' consistent and relatively complete awareness of their nature, beliefs and essential aspects in their life, as well as the integration and coordination between the internal state and the external environment [18]. the development of self-consciousness lasts in the whole life of individuals with different stages. According to Erikson's psych-social development theory, when children enter the youth stage, the individual self-identity divides into the ideal self and the real self. To establish self-identity, the ideal self and the real self must unified [18]. In order to achieve this goal, the individual needs to either work hard to modify the real self to conform to the ideal self, or vice versa. If this task cannot be completed, it will be challenging to establish self-identity and lead to confusion and even hinder the healthy development of personality. In literature, authors often use these signs to explore themes related to identity, belonging, and power. They may also use them to challenge dominant ideologies or to critique societal norms and expectations. By examining the ways in which characters are represented in literature, readers can gain insight into the complexities of identity and the ways in which it is shaped by various factors, including socialization, culture, and personal experience. In literature, the signified and signifier of identity refer to the ways in which characters are represented and how those representations shape the reader's understanding of their identity[15]. The signifier, also known as the linguistic or visual cues that represent a character's identity, can include things like name, appearance, clothing, and other physical characteristics. These cues can be used to create a sense of familiarity or recognition for the reader. The signified, on the other hand, refers to the deeper meaning or significance that these cues carry[20]. In other words, what is the character's identity beyond just their outward appearance? Is their identity defined by their race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, nationality, or something else entirely? How does this identity shape their experiences and relationships with others?[21] For example, in James Baldwin's novel "Giovanni's Room," the protagonist Giovanni is struggling to come to terms with his homosexuality and his identity as a gay man in a society that despises and marginalizes him. The character's name itself can be seen as a signifier of his identity, as it is not traditionally male and may be perceived as unconventional or even "effeminate." Additionally, Giovanni's desire to become a woman and live as a wife and mother can be seen as a symbolic representation of his longing to be accepted as a traditionally feminine person. Overall, exploring the signified and signifier of identity in literature allows readers to gain a deeper understanding of the complexities of human experience and the ways in which our identities shape our lives and relationships with others[16].

Lilka, a good friend of Fania, once writes to Oz to share similar feelings that Fania dying "out of disappointment or longing" [13]. "disappointment" is to the cruel reality while "longing" refers to Fania's idea that has formed from her childhood and education[22]. In Fania's occasion, what push her to death is her disillusionment of ideals, including the disillusionment of life, women's status as well as Zionist ideal[23].

9. CONCLUSION

Amos Oz demonstrates readers the destruction of individuals by war and unfortunate families through the image of traumatized female through its autobiographical mother Fania[2]. On the other hand, he has reflected the great damage disillusionment does to the mind and body of educated women[24]. As a disadvantaged group, they have been educated to escape the fate of ignorance, but the cruel reality is still constantly intruding on their lives and sapping their dreams. Amos Oz's attention to his mother's experience not only pays tribute to the educated Ashkenazi Jewish women[25] who has suffered from the disillusion of displacement during World War II, but also draws the reader's concern for the suffered victims of trauma in reality[26][27][28]. So trauma cannot be faced alone, and that only in relationships can there be gradual healing. This confirms that recovery of trauma is not only an individual matter, but more importantly, an ultimate goal for society[29][30]. It is essential to help the traumatized victims reconnect with the society and live a normal life.

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