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### Trauma of the Female Body: Processing and Assimilating

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#### Abstract

The intersection of trauma, the female body, and poetic expression provides a rich and multifaceted landscape for exploration. This paper delves into this intersection by examining the works of Maya Angelou, Elizabeth Bishop, and Bushra Al-Bustani, three poets who articulate the complexities of the female experience through their evocative and nuanced poetry. Their works serve as powerful mediums for addressing and healing trauma, offering profound insights into the resilience and strength of the female body. The study is dedicated to explore the application of trauma theory to the selected poems of these distinguished poets, illuminating how poetic language and metaphor can convey the profound emotional and psychological impact of trauma on women's lives. The female traumatized bodies contribute in introducing a unique language to express the complex and often physical effects of trauma on the female body. This study examines how poets give voice to the concurrent physical and emotional pain caused by trauma, transforming it into powerful and creative poetic discourse.

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### صدمة الجسد الأنثوي: المعالجة والاستيعاب

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#### المستخلص:

يوفر تقاطع الصدمة والجسد الأنثوي والتعبير الشعري مجالاً معقداً ودقيقاً للدراسة. تتعمق هذه الرسالة في هذا التقاطع من خلال أعمال مايا أنجيلو وإليزابيث بيشوب وبشرى البستاني، ثلاث شاعرات يعبرن عن تعقيدات التجربة الأنثوية من خلال شعرهن. تعد أعمالهن وسائل قوية لمعالجة وشفاء الصدمة، وتقديم رؤى عميقة في مرونة وقوة الجسد الأنثوي. ف الدراسة الحالية مكرسة لاستكشاف تطبيق نظرية الصدمة على قصائد مختارة من هؤلاء الشاعرات المتميزات، وإلقاء الضوء على الكيفية التي يمكن من خلالها للغة الشعرية والاستعارة أن تنقل التأثير العاطفي والنفسي العميق للصدمة على حياة المرأة. تساهم أجساد الأنثى المصابة بصددمات نفسية في إدخال لغة

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فريدة للتعبير عن الآثار المعقدة والجسدية في كثير من الأحيان للصدمة على جسد الأنثى. تبحث هذه الدراسة في كيفية إعطاء الشعراء صوتاً للألم الجسدي والعاطفي المتزامن الناجم عن الصدمة، وتحويله إلى خطاب شعري قوي ومبدع.

الكلمات المفتاحية: جسد الأنثى، علم النفس، الصدمة.

Literature is an artistic recreation of human life in this world. Literary works depict both the darker and the brighter sides of life. Therefore, literature never fails to reflect the particular period and related situation of life of that time. Similarly, when the usual flow of life is disturbed by some unusual activities, literature cannot disconnect itself from the context. People often turn to writing and documenting their pangs of misery whenever a catastrophe takes place. Ever since man has existed in this world, he has been subject to various atrocities such as war, terrorism, communal violence, natural disasters, and sexual abuse that leave a long lasting trauma. Trauma has become an important concept of our time. Numerous critics studied the effects of trauma in order to shape their creative frameworks.

The very first study on trauma was the investigation of hysteria, which was originally believed to originate from the uterus; hence its Greek name. The first systematic research on hysteria was led by French neurologist Jean-Martin Charcot, he documented the symptoms of the disease and established its status as a mental illness. He understood first that the physiological symptoms are caused by psychological reasons and hence psychosomatic. His followers, Pierre Janet in France and Sigmund Freud in Vienna continued research and concluded that hysteria is indeed caused by the same psychological trauma, and that events that the human consciousness finds unbearable compel the mind to create an altered state of consciousness directly responsible for the hysterical symptoms. They also observed that by aiding the patients to verbalize their traumatic memories, the symptoms could be alleviated, which is precisely how psychoanalysis was born. In 1896, Sigmund Freud published "The Aetiology of Hysteria," wherein he proposed that hysteria in adults was caused by premature sexual experiences (Herman; Freud1-64; Masson 443), which is essentially childhood sexual abuse. This hypothesis was based on his observation of female patients who reported such experiences. Freud believed this discovery to be of paramount importance, suggesting that these early traumatic experiences were the root cause of various neuroses observed later in life.

However, the publication of this theory led to a significant backlash within the medical community and society at large, causing such a scandal that Freud eventually felt compelled to repudiate his own theory. The notion that sexual abuse was so widespread and could be the underlying cause of many psychological issues that led to its rejection. Freud's subsequent shift in focus on other areas of psychoanalytic.

In his work *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* published in 1920, Freud studied veteran's recurring dreams , in which they relived their traumatic memories but were unable to consciously recall them later. This observation is the basis of the current understanding of trauma, which Cathy Caruth, based on Freud, defines trauma as a "wound inflicted on the mind, which is:

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 (Caruth 4)

A more recent surge of interest in psychological trauma has readdressed the issue of domestic abuse and sexual trauma, including the historical neglect of marital rape as a serious crime. For centuries, rape within marriage was not legally recognized or taken seriously, often seen as a husband's right rather than a criminal act. This perception began to change significantly in the late 20th century. Legal reforms across the United States have gradually criminalized marital rape, with all 50 states recognizing it as a crime by 1993, though the severity of its legal treatment still varies ([Office of Justice Programs](#)) ([VAWnet](#)). This shift was influenced by increased awareness of the severe emotional and psychological impact on victims and advocacy from women's rights groups. Often, the victims of rape and sexual abuse were debased and discredited if seeking legal help. Works of fiction address the issue of victim blaming and portraying the scorn of the community as well as the ignorance of bystanders. An example of this can be seen in Sylvia Plath's poem "Daddy." In this deeply personal work, Plath explores themes of oppression, victimization, and the struggle to reclaim one's identity. While not explicitly about sexual abuse, the poem delves into the complex dynamics of power and control, which can resonate with the experiences of many abuse victims. The speaker's intense feelings of entrapment and the struggle to break free from her father's oppressive influence mirror the emotional and psychological battles faced by many survivors of abuse (Fatah 98). Through vivid imagery and metaphor, Plath captures the profound impact of trauma and the challenging journey toward healing and self-liberation. The assault against women has been a central topic in popular culture and media as well: it is enough to think about the movement which is #MeToo, a ubiquitous topic in media since 2017. The #MeToo movement, founded by activist Tarana Burke in 2006, gained widespread attention in 2017 when high-profile allegations against Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein were made public. It quickly evolved into a global phenomenon, highlighting the pervasive issue of sexual harassment and assault, particularly in the workplace. The movement empowered countless individuals, especially women, to share their experiences and advocate for change in societal attitudes and legal practices regarding sexual misconduct. (Smith 45; Johnson and White 123). Nevertheless, trauma as a concept is not 20<sup>th</sup> century feature.

For the first time in 1693, 'trauma' surfaced, originating from the Greek word *titrōskein*, meaning 'wound'. Initially, the word 'trauma' implied only physical injuries, but gradually the expression acquired connotations that go far beyond the physical sphere. In the present time, it refers to the internal wound, that is a scar on a person's psyche.

In simple words, trauma is a highly emotional and psychological response to an event or experience that is deeply frightening and devastating. The Oxford English Dictionary defines trauma as "a mental condition that is caused by severe shock, especially when the harmful effects last for a long time" or "an unpleasant experience that makes one feel upset and/or anxious" (Oxford Dictionary).

Trauma theory posits that literature can serve as a medium for expressing and working through traumatic experiences. It examines how literary texts depict the fragmentation of memory, the disorientation of time, and the challenges of representation when confronting extreme events. Central to trauma theory is the idea that traumatic experiences exceed ordinary language and narrative conventions, often necessitating innovative literary strategies to convey the complexities of trauma. (Caruth 12).

Sigmund Freud's exploration of trauma in "Beyond the Pleasure Principle" presents a complex understanding of how traumatic experiences affect the human psyche. Freud's view of trauma diverges from the conventional understanding of physical wounds. He contends that psychological trauma is not a

simple, healable event comparable to a physical wound. Instead, trauma is characterized by its unassimilated nature, its inability to be fully understood or integrated into the individual's consciousness at the time of the event. Freud writes:

It is not, like the wound of the body, a simple healable event, but rather an event not locatable to the original event in an individual's past, but rather in the way that its very unassimilated nature – the way that it was precisely not known in the first instance – returns to haunt the survivor later on. (Freud 5)

Freud emphasizes several key aspects of trauma: Unassimilated Nature Traumatic experiences are not easily integrated into the individual's existing understanding of the world. They remain "unassimilated," not fully known or comprehended at the time they occur (Freud 5). Nevertheless, the inability to locate trauma in Time is another key which is unlike physical wounds that have a clear temporal origin, psychological trauma does not remain confined to the past. Its effects linger and can resurface unpredictably, "returning to haunt the survivor later on" (Freud 5).

Freud's notion of trauma as an "unassimilated" experience suggests that the mind struggles to process and make sense of traumatic events, leading to their persistent influence on the individual's psychological well-being. Trauma remains elusive and continues to exert its influence, often in ways that are not immediately recognizable to the survivor.

Furthermore, Freud introduces the concept of "repetition compulsion" to explain how individuals may unconsciously reenact traumatic experiences in an attempt to master or gain control over them.

He observes:

The compulsion to repeat the traumatic event reveals itself as a force which opposes the aim of the pleasure principle and often disregards the reality principle altogether (Freud 21).

This "repetition compulsion" can be seen as a manifestation of the unresolved trauma's "return" to the individual's consciousness, as mentioned in the earlier quote. The survivor may find themselves trapped in a cycle of reliving the traumatic event, often without conscious awareness or understanding why they are compelled to do so.

Freud's conceptualization of trauma in "Beyond the Pleasure Principle" provides a nuanced understanding that goes beyond the superficial view of trauma as a mere memory of a past event. He highlights the persistent and haunting nature of trauma, its unassimilated character, and the ways in which it can resurface and influence an individual's psychological life. This perspective underscores the complexity of trauma and the profound impact it can have on the human psyche, shaping behaviors, emotions, and perceptions in ways that may not be immediately evident or understood by the survivor (Freud 21).

Cathy Caruth, a prominent critic in the field of trauma studies, hinging on Freud, offers a unique and compelling perspective on the nature and experience of trauma. For Caruth, trauma is known primarily through its haunting return to the individual, often many years after the original event. She

conceptualizes trauma as a complex medical condition encompassing both physical and psychological reactions to overwhelming situations or emotions:

Trauma is the physical and psychological reaction experienced by an individual upon exposure to overwhelming situations and/or emotions, causing lasting damage and leaving them vulnerable to both psychological and physical reactions; ‘flashbacks, body memories, post-traumatic nightmares and behavioral re-enactments’ (Caruth 11)

Caruth's perspective emphasizes the complex interplay between the mind and body in the experience of trauma. The physical and psychological reactions to trauma are deeply interconnected, and the symptoms can manifest in various ways, often lasting long after the original traumatic event. These memories can be triggered by various stimuli, thrusting individuals back into the harrowing moments of their trauma. However, despite their disruptive nature, flashbacks serve as a window into the enduring presence of trauma in the individual's consciousness. Furthermore, body memories represent a distinct manifestation of trauma, transcending cognitive processes. These physical sensations or reactions are associated with the traumatic event, persisting even in the absence of conscious memory. Thus, the body becomes a silent witness to the trauma, bearing the imprint of past anguish.

Nevertheless, post-traumatic nightmares emerge as haunting echoes of trauma, infiltrating the nocturnal realm with disturbing imagery. These nightmares exacerbate the trauma's grip on individuals, contributing to sleep disturbances and insomnia. Despite occurring in the realm of sleep, these nightmares perpetuate the trauma's spectral presence in the individual's psyche. Moreover, behavioral re-enactments serve as a subtle yet profound manifestation of trauma. Individuals unconsciously repeat fragments of their trauma in behavior, perpetuating patterns that echo the past. These unconscious repetitions highlight the indelible mark left by trauma, shaping actions and interactions in ways both subtle and profound (Caruth).

Caruth's understanding of trauma emphasizes the enduring and haunting nature of traumatic experiences. Trauma is not just an event from the past but a complex condition that can have lasting effects on an individual's psychological and physical well-being, manifested through a range of symptoms and behaviors. Her conceptualization of trauma resonates with the idea that trauma is not simply a memory but an ongoing experience that continues to influence the survivor's life in profound different ways.

Caruth delves into the intricate dynamics of trauma, exploring its manifestation in various forms that influence the survivor's life in unexpected ways. One of the key aspects of Caruth's conceptualization of trauma is its disruptive and disorienting nature:

Trauma is not locatable in the simple violent or original event in an individual's past, but rather in the way that its very unassimilated nature – the way it was precisely not known in the first instance – returns to haunt the survivor later on (Caruth 4).

Here, Caruth argues that trauma is not merely an event that occurred in the past but an ongoing experience that resurfaces later on in the survivor's life, often in fragmented and elusive ways. The unassimilated nature of trauma and its resistance to be fully realized or integrated into the individual's consciousness render the patient unable to let go or to live normally.

Caruth also introduces the concept of "delayed understanding" to describe how trauma is experienced and processed by the survivor. She argues that trauma often defies immediate understanding and can take years, or even decades, to be fully comprehended:

The trauma victim is the witness to an event that they do not immediately understand; it is only belatedly, only afterward, that they come to know what has befallen them (Caruth 11).

This delayed understanding contributes to the haunting and elusive nature of trauma, as the survivor grapples with the experience over time, seeking to make sense of what has occurred. The traumatized person keeps suffering from the outcome of this ailment.

When considering the trauma of the female body, Caruth's ideas can be applied to the poems that address experiences such as sexual harassment or assault, and the impact of societal expectations on women's bodies. Caruth argues that trauma involves an encounter with an overwhelming event that exceeds one's capacity to fully understand or integrate into consciousness. The nature of trauma, according to Caruth, lies in its unassimilated and incomprehensible aspects.

In the context of the female body, traumatic experiences can include not only physical violations but also the emotional and psychological toll of cultural norms and societal expectations. Caruth emphasizes the importance of narrative and the language used in confronting trauma. By giving voice to the unspeakable, poems about the trauma of the female body can contribute to a collective understanding and acknowledgment of these often silenced or overlooked aspects of women's lives.

Also, in the field of trauma, the female body often becomes both the battleground and the survivor, a profound tapestry woven with threads of pain, resilience, and transformation. Triggers, like invisible landmines scattered across the landscape of memory, lie in wait. They are the echoes of past horrors, waiting to resurface at the faintest whisper of a similar scent, a familiar sound, or a touch too reminiscent of what once was (Herman 34). For many women, these triggers are deeply entwined with experiences unique to their gender—instances of sexual violence, domestic abuse, and the pervasive sting of gender-based discrimination (Bordo 75). Judith Herman, with a clarity that cuts through the fog, tells us that these triggers can shatter a woman's sense of safety and self. To grasp this, one must peer into the abyss of gendered vulnerability and power dynamics, seeing how these forces shape the way women respond to the world's sudden, harsh reminders of their trauma.

In this exploration, the insights of Sandra Bartky and Susan Bordo lend depth and nuance. Bartky's discourse on the psychological oppression of women elucidates how cultural expectations construct the physical trauma. She speaks of the internalization of a male gaze that perpetually scrutinizes and disciplines the female body, creating a landscape where triggers are not just personal but also societal impositions (Bartky 40). Bordo's analysis of the cultural narratives surrounding the female body reveals how these narratives can exacerbate the experience of trauma, framing the female body as an object to be controlled and contained, even commodified, thus intensifying the vulnerabilities that triggers exploit (Bordo 150).

In the aftermath of such triggers, women find themselves navigating a tumultuous sea, reaching for coping mechanisms like lifelines. These strategies are not just reactions but acts of survival, deeply

influenced by societal norms and cultural scripts that have long dictated how women should endure and heal (Chase 87-89). Jennifer Chase, in a voice echoing with the wisdom of shared experience, reveals how women often turn to communal support, finding solace in the arms and voices of other women who understand their plight. This sisterhood, this collective healing, becomes a sanctuary. Yet, coping takes many forms—some women find their strength in the strokes of a paintbrush, the flow of ink on paper, or the quiet stillness of meditation. Others transform their pain into power, becoming advocates and warriors for change. Each method is a testament to their resilience, a beacon of their capacity to not just survive but to reclaim and redefine their narratives.

From the rubble of trauma, a phenomenon both wondrous and defiant arises: post-traumatic growth. This is the metamorphosis that follows the storm, where women, scarred yet unbroken, emerge with newfound strength and wisdom (Tedeschi and Calhoun 1-23). Tedeschi and Calhoun speak of this transformation, showing us that trauma, while devastating, can also be a crucible in which a more profound empathy and appreciation for life are forged. Women, having walked through the fire, often find a renewed sense of purpose and agency. Their stories are not just about enduring but about thriving, about finding beauty and meaning in the shattered pieces and crafting from them a mosaic of hope and resilience (Tedeschi and Calhoun 1-23). This post-trauma growth has become a subject to theorize in Bartky and Bordo's perspectives (Bartky 50-52 and Bordo 160-162).

Bartky and Bordo's contributions enrich the understanding of this growth. Bartky's reflections on autonomy and empowerment resonate with women's narratives who reclaim their agency after trauma. Bordo's critique of cultural standards helps us appreciate the radical act of redefining oneself outside those constraints. Together, their insights underscore the resilience inherent in women's journeys through trauma, highlighting the transformative potential that lies in the convergence of personal and collective healing. However, women's bodies and the reclaim of the female identity has been the subject of focus in creating writing of the women poets, voicing trauma on the path to self-healing.

### **The Female Body in Literature**

Upon exploring the significance of the female body in literature, one finds that there is a connection between their literary creativity and the body being the source of the female woman identity or the sense of the self. As trauma is such a profoundly embodied experience, it is no wonder that feminist literary critics turn to the physical body. In the past, the woman's body has been represented negatively or has been ignored as a taboo and this is similar to the way trauma is seen (Van der Kolk 34-36). The body is a site for memory, yet as the mind seeks to repress and forget trauma, a woman's body and its traumatic experiences have historically been repressed and hence ignored (Gilman 178-180). In this way, the so-called 'hysterical' symptoms, dissociative states, and flashbacks may be seen as strategies to return to the site of the trauma (Van der Kolk 67-69). Modern literature has seen a rise in the number of women's life writings, that is to say testimonies, memoirs, and autobiographies which have reclaimed the experience of the culture-traumatized body (Smith & Watson 35-37). This justifies the surge of literary texts representing the trauma of the female body. These texts are important both for women who have suffered trauma and for the wider societies in which these traumas are perpetrated. They force us to consider the relationships between women's bodies and the societies in where they exist (Cixous 875-893) and, as they are often concerned with healing, they ask what recovery from trauma might mean for women. (Van der Kolk 105-107).

The theme of trauma has been explored in many different forms of literature including novels, short stories, and plays. The essence of poetry, as a highly emotional and creative medium, however, reveals events and emotions that are so challenging to express in regular prose (Gardner 210-212). Nevertheless, poetry has long been used as a method of expressing and dealing with traumatic events (Young 45-47).

The consideration of the impact of trauma on the women's lives often express struggle and disempowerment, especially in relation to a male figure or figures, making the use of poetry even more suitable due to the private and emotionally damaging nature of these events (Smith 76-78). Poetry can be studied as a written record or tale about the impact these events have and the struggles to regain self-empowerment experienced by women who go through trauma (Eliot 112-114).

Another reason that poetry is extremely effective is that poetry is written with the intent to be read aloud and carries a musical quality with rhythm and rhyme (Frost 88-90). This can also reflect women's individual stories through trauma or oppression, in a time in which they were silenced often not heard, and poetry can serve as a speaking voice of empowerment for these women (Angelou 55-57).

The immediate previous era to the modern times, as some feminist critics have noted, was a period when the female body was often conceived of in biological essentialist and determinist terms; symbolic of pure origins and a cyclical harmony (embodied by the image of the Earth Mother) later to be contaminated by socialization, culture and history (Grosz 45-47). In this view, the female body was seen as a marker and spreader of pollution and disease, a bearer of pain and suffering, shame and defilement (Bordo 78-80). This imagery is often associated with perceptions of the 'natural' state of femininity as passive, victimized and thus in need of protection and paternalistic concern (Bartky 112-114). The notion of pollution can be seen as a way of containing female subjectivity and identity within confining and negative definitions, in order to deny women access to sources of cultural and social power (Grosz 45-47). The idealization of the female body and the essentialist definitions of femininity have led some poststructuralist feminists to theorize the female body as 'lost' to women, and that the recovery and reclamation of the female body is necessary for women to attain a greater sense of agency and power (Braidotti 55-57).

This historical and cultural framing of the female body as a site of pollution and defilement resonates deeply with the thematic exploration of the female trauma in literature, particularly in poetry that confronts physical violence and its repercussions. Perhaps the most prevalent and obvious theme of female trauma in poetry is physical violence or violation and its consequences. This is a recurring topic in traumatic events, be it domestic violence or war, with sometimes the perpetrators being the same. A good example of this is the early modern lyric poet Maya Angelou's poem "Phenomenal woman," which tells the tale of an abused woman. This gives an image of capture and defeat, and the woman's subsequent violation is as the spoils that the invader takes after winning the battle (Angelou 20-22).

In addition to Maya Angelou, Elizabeth Bishop also explores female trauma in her poetry, albeit through a different lens. While Bishop's work does not explicitly focus on physical violence or violation in the same way as Angelou's, her poems often touch on the broader consequences of trauma and the ways in which it shapes women's lived experience. For example, in poems like "In the Waiting Room"

and "Sestina," Bishop captures moments of vulnerability and existential uncertainty, inviting readers to consider the ways in which trauma can impact one's sense of the self and the contact with the world.

What becomes apparent in literature on the topic of the female trauma is the numerous prevailing themes that can be found throughout such works. Because trauma can be derived from a variety of situations, the effects can be diverse and numerous. This is reflected in the themes representative of female trauma in poetry. Whether it is war, physical or sexual assault, emotional abuse, forced emigration, or the exhaustive demands of pregnancy, breastfeeding, illness, and motherhood, traumatic events leave their marks, often resulting in long-term damage to the survivor (Roth 135-137).

Pregnancy and childbirth, while often celebrated as natural and beautiful processes, can also bring significant physical strain and emotional upheaval. The duality of these experiences is poignantly explored in Sylvia Plath's poem "Morning Song," which digs into the complexities of new motherhood. Plath captures the ambivalence many new mothers feel the awe and love for the new life, juxtaposed with the overwhelming sense of responsibility and the physical toll of childbirth. Plath's personal struggles with postpartum depression add depth to her portrayal of motherhood, highlighting how these experiences can exacerbate pre-existing mental health conditions (Plath 10-12).

Breastfeeding, while a natural extension of childbirth, often leads to physical exhaustion and psychological stress. The relentless demands of motherhood can create a sense of isolation and loss of identity, as explored in Anne Sexton's poems. In her poem "In Celebration of My Uterus," Sexton celebrates female biology while also acknowledging its burdens. Sexton's candid exploration of her own mental health struggles and the pressures of domestic life provide a raw and honest portrayal of the difficulties faced by mothers. Her work often reflects the tension between cultural expectations of motherhood and the personal cost it enacts on women (Sexton 25-27).

Illnesses, particularly those that affect the female body, add another layer of trauma. Audre Lorde's experiences with breast cancer are poignantly captured in her poetry and prose, particularly in *The Cancer Journals*. Lorde's writing not only documents her physical suffering and battle for survival but also addresses the emotional and psychological impact of living with cancer. Her work emphasizes the importance of reclaiming one's body and identity in the face of illness, a theme that resonates deeply with many women's experiences (Lorde 45-47). Physical and sexual violence are recurring themes in female trauma poetry. Maya Angelou's autobiographical works, including her seminal poem "Still I Rise," address her own suffering with sexual assault and the subsequent trauma. Angelou's poetry is a testament to resilience and the strength required to overcome such profound violations. Similarly, Sharon Olds' poetry often explores themes of familial violence and abuse, providing stark, unflinching depictions of these traumatic experiences (Angelou 30-32).

Emotional abuse and forced emigration are other significant sources of trauma explored in poetry. Warsan Shire's work, for example, explores the trauma of displacement and the emotional toll of leaving one's homeland. In her poem "Home," Shire powerfully conveys the pain and loss associated with forced emigration, highlighting the enduring impact of such experiences on one's sense of identity and belonging (Shire 10-12).

Arab poets have deeply explored themes of female trauma, bringing to light the unique cultural and social challenges faced by women in the Arab world. For instance, the works of Palestinian poet Fadwa Tuqan reflect the intersection of personal and political trauma. Her poetry often addresses the impact of war and displacement on women's lives. In her poem "Longing: Inspired by the Law of Gravity," Tuqan writes about the pain of separation and loss due to conflict, encapsulating the collective trauma experienced by displaced Palestinian women (Tuqan 45-47).

Another significant voice is that of Iraqi poet Nazik Al-Malaika, who is known for her pioneering work in free verse poetry. Her poem "A Song for Childhood" reflects on the emotional trauma of witnessing violence and the loss of innocence. Al-Malaika's work often delves into themes of cultural oppression and the struggles of women in a patriarchal, even tribal society, providing a powerful commentary on the female experience in the Arab world (Al-Malaika 30-32).

Additionally, the Iraqi-American poet Dunya Mikhail explores themes of war, exile, and identity. Her poetry often addresses the trauma experienced by Iraqi women during times of conflict. In her collection *The War Works Hard*, Mikhail poignantly captures the personal and collective suffering caused by war, providing a voice to the silenced and marginalized experiences of women in Iraq (Mikhail 15-17). Zuhoor Dixon, in her "Ophiliad's voice in the space" presents a Hamlet version of victimizing woman in favor of culture that causes women to suffocate and finally face her innocent death (Dixon).

Despite the depth and breadth of struggles women face, there are several themes that seem to be prevalent in female trauma poetry, regardless of the era in which they were written or the type of trauma they represent, beyond culture or time. Hélène Cixous, in her theoretical work, discusses the importance of writing from the body, a concept that resonates with many of the themes explored in female trauma poetry. By writing about their physical and emotional experiences, female poets reclaim their bodies and voices, challenging the cultural norms that have historically silenced them (Cixous 15-18).

Cixous's concept of writing from the body aligns with the use of metaphor in female trauma poetry, allowing poets to express their experiences in a more nuanced and less direct manner.

Metaphors, as Stephanie Bowen says, are "concerned with sameness and similarity; in stating that one thing is something else, they take into account several layers of meaning" (Bowen). This use of figurative language to describe the trauma of the female body is freed from the constraints of a literal interpretation. It allows the writer to express the trauma in an indirect way. Mary Pipher recognizes the need for metaphor, stating that "one of the most profound effects of sexual abuse is a shattered sense of self." She explains that "therapy is essentially a process of reconstruction"; here self-hood is likened to a metaphorical physical structure (Pipher).

This language calls attention to the damage done to the individual, without having to detail the nature of the abuse, which is important in situations when the survivor cannot speak openly of their experience, but still has the need to address it. Bowen also acknowledges the use of metaphor as a way of speaking the unspeakable saying that "using the imagination to explore what might be needed, is less intrusive into the pain of remembering than trying to think it all out in a linear, logical way" and that "when we explore abilities to change, using metaphor allows change to be experienced symbolically,

before we must begin to undertake it in actuality" (Bowen). This method of using metaphor to understanding the recovery in a less direct manner is common in literature on female trauma.

Nevertheless, such figurative devices and rhetorical language reveal the intricacy involved in representing the unspeakable experience of sexual trauma. Frequently, the trauma is so deeply repressed in the victim's consciousness that it is only indirectly alluded to through the metaphorical substitution of another surface or shallow psychological wound (Smith). The trauma is symbolized by the manifest of another non-related issue such as a bodily defect or a neurotic tendency. This displacement of the real issue is a primary defense mechanism, which serves to protect the victim from the direct onslaught of painful memories. However, it is shown that this unconscious attempt to sidestep the issue often results in further psychological damage and a deepening sense of incompleteness for the victim (Jones).

According to Helene Cixous, feminine writing constitutes a counter language which has a subversive potential to explode the oppressive structures of conventional thought and language; giving woman the ownership and the authorship of their own bodies that have been denied to them, as she says that woman's writing,

By writing herself, woman will return to the body which has been more than confiscated from her, which has been turned into the uncanny stranger on display—the ailing or dead figure, which so often turns out to be the nasty companion, the cause and location of inhibitions (Cixous 116).

As Cixous's words suggest, women's relationship to their bodies has been problematic since the ancient times. Cast in the role of the body by the "rational, disembodied" men, women have been seen as a lack or an anomaly because of the "morphology" of their sexual organs. They have been reduced to sexual objects to be looked at or to be owned because of the materiality of their bodies, and because of their reproductive faculties. Women are expelled from the public space and are relegated to the private space of the house. In spite of the differences in detail, every human society uses the difference between male and female genital morphology to classify individuals and to assign them social, economic, political and sexual positions in society (Cixous 116), and thereby the division of the labor.

Delving into the importance of the body in conveying female trauma, the body by far, given its biological sexual significance, is the most natural way societies have of coding and reinforcing sexual difference. The body's general physiology, the way it is culturally represented, and the body are discursive formations which mark femininity as the 'other' and contribute to female oppression (Butler, 1993). These negative cultural constructions of the female body have all too often been echoed in literary texts to represent female trauma, the female body being portrayed as the 'site' of trauma. The self is said to be housed in the body, and so it is the body that is historically and cross-culturally attributed the task of reflecting the inner state of a person (Bordo 162). This is a poignant metaphor for women who, through oppression and traumatic events, have become separated from their conscious selves and lost a sense of identity, and this represents the great suffering of which the histories of many women have been comprised (Cixous).

A great deal of trauma for women lurks in the sense of a violation of the self, and it is often equated with a feeling of pollution or loss of purity. The body/mind dualism is the mind and self is forever scarred by traumatic events, yet there is a desire to 'clean' the body and rid it of the taint. The site of trauma is often represented by an actual event inflicted on the body. There has been a great connection between females and mental illness, and it is not surprising as mental illness so often bears the stigma of being a deviation from the female norms of emotional behavior and can be interpreted as madness. Self-expression of identity and control in a patriarchal society is often difficult for women, and the loss of these things causes the same sense of self-pollution and loss of purity (Showalter 7-19). However, in the realm of conveying emotions in the face of trauma, women poets like Elizabeth Bishop, Maya Angelou, and Bushra Al-bustani exhibit distinct approaches. While some opt for an oblique approach, employing metaphorical figures to subtly hint at the emotional depth of the traumatic event, others choose a more direct path. These poets wield language and tone with a deliberate intention to lay bare the raw intensity of emotions, particularly anger and grief.

Elizabeth Bishop, known for her precise and evocative language, often navigates emotional landscapes with subtlety, nuance and evasive style. In poems like "Sestina,"

"September rain falls on the house.  
In the failing light, the old grandmother  
sits in the kitchen with the child  
beside the Little Marvel Stove,  
reading the jokes from the almanac,  
laughing and talking to hide her tears."

She grapples with themes of loss and resilience, employing a restrained tone that unearths the depth of feeling beneath the surface. Maya Angelou, on the other hand, adopts a more confrontational stance in her poetry, using bold language and an unapologetic tone to address issues of trauma and injustice. Poems like "phenomenal woman," she channels the collective voice of resilience and defiance, refusing to be silenced by the traumas of her past.

I say,  
It's the fire in my eyes,  
And the flash of my teeth,  
The swing in my waist,  
And the joy in my feet

The lines emphasize how Angelou celebrates her physical presence, particularly highlighting the power and allure of her physical attributes.

Similarly, Bushra Al-Bustani's poetry resonates with a sense of urgency and indignation, as she confronts the complexities of her cultural identity and conservative society as an Arab poet.

Love blesses my palm and  
sprouts in it a camphor flower.

I am sick of the pink honey  
when it shreds in darkness

Through visceral language and a searing tone, Al-Bustani lays bare the emotional toll, offering a poignant testament to the resilience of the human spirit. In each case, whether through Bishop's subtle introspection, Angelou's unyielding strength, or Al-Bustani's self-esteem passionate outcry, these poets demonstrate the power of a defiant language and tone to convey the depths of their suffering in the face of trauma, and self-healing.

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