20. The Weight of Trauma in Philip Ridley's Play; *Leaves of Glass*[1]

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Abstract

Philip Ridley's *Leaves of Glass* (2007) examines the psychological effects of trauma and its lasting impact on identity and relationships. The play centers on two brothers, Stephen and Barry, as they navigate the emotional aftermath of their father's sudden death. This paper examines how unresolved grief influences their struggles, analyzing their fractured identities and recurring behaviors through Freudian psychoanalysis and Cathy Caruth's trauma theory. Stephen, burdened by volatile emotions, and Barry, marked by emotional disconnection, embody different responses to their shared trauma, reflecting the challenges of processing loss. Ridley's portrayal of trauma as a persistent and disruptive force highlights its capacity to fracture lives and strain relationships. The narrative underscores the cyclical nature of grief and its influence on personal and interpersonal dynamics. Ultimately, *Leaves of Glass* offers a profound commentary on the difficulties of healing, emphasizing the resilience required to confront and understand deeply ingrained emotional wounds.

Keywords: Philip Ridley, *Leaves of Glass*, trauma, Freudian psychoanalysis, Cathy Caruth

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Philip Ridley'in *Cam Yaprakları* Adlı Oyununda Travmanın Ağırlığı[3]

Öz

Philip Ridley'nin *Leaves of Glass* (2007) adlı eseri, travmanın psikolojik etkilerini ve kimlik ile ilişkiler üzerindeki kalıcı izlerini ele alır. Oyun, babalarının ani ölümü sonrasında duygusal zorluklarla mücadele eden iki kardeş, Stephen ve Barry'nin hikâyesini anlatır. Bu makale, Freud'un psikanalizi ve Cathy Caruth'un travma teorisi aracılığıyla çözümlenmemiş yasın, kardeşlerin mücadelelerini nasıl şekillendirdiğini incelemektedir. Stephen'ın yoğun duygusal dalgalanmaları ve Barry'nin duygusal kopukluğu, ortak travmalarına verdikleri farklı tepkileri yansıtarak kaybı işlemekte karşılaşılan zorlukları ortaya koyar. Ridley, travmayı sürekli ve bozucu bir güç olarak tasvir ederek, onun bireylerin yaşamlarını nasıl parçalayıp ilişkileri zorladığını vurgular. Anlatı, yasın döngüsel doğasını ve kişisel ile kişilerarası dinamikler üzerindeki etkisini gözler önüne serer. *Leaves of Glass*, derin duygusal yaraları anlamak ve onlarla yüzleşmek için gereken direnci vurgulayarak iyileşmenin zorlukları üzerine güçlü bir yorum sunar.

Anahtar kelimeler: Philip Ridley, Leaves of Glass, travma, Freudyen psikanaliz, Cathy Caruth

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Introduction

The theatre has always had a powerful way of conveying the most profound human experiences and offering a window into emotions that are often too difficult to put into words. Diving into the complexities of suffering and resilience, theatre invites viewers to confront pain and vulnerability, transforming personal tales of struggle into a collective narrative that resonates across cultures and generations. Several playwrights have used their work to explore how harrowing experiences reveal the complexities of the human mind and provide avenues for spectators to engage with themes of loss, conflict, and recovery. In such a way, theatre becomes a vehicle for empathy that encourages one to consider how adversity shapes identity and relationships. Through character and narrative, the theatre provides the viewers with ways to navigate their emotions indirectly as they struggle with their personal and collective wounds, often leading to a deeper understanding and reflection, and sometimes even healing.

The 1990s In-Yer-Face theatre movement turned British drama into a daring and aggressive tool for examining the visceral reality of trauma. Renowned for its explicit content, raw emotional intensity, and transgressive themes, this movement challenged the conventional separation between audience and performance, confronting the uncensored violence of the human experience. Rejecting sanitized depictions of pain, plays in this genre choose horrific and immersive representations of violence, sorrow, and psychological upheaval. Leading movement members include Mark Ravenhill, who examined materialism and moral decline in *Shopping and Fucking* (1996), and Sarah Kane, whose provocative piece *Blasted* (1995) startled viewers with her graphic depiction of violence and pain. Along with Anthony Neilson, famed for *The Censor* (1997), and Jez Butterworth with *Mojo* (1995), both of whom also offered challenging views on power, censorship, and human frailty. Emphasizing the link between the self and society. With pieces like *The Pitchfork Disney* (1991), *Mercury Fur* (2005), and *Leaves of Glass* (2007), another important voice, Philip Ridley, broadened the movement's reach. In *Leaves of Glass*, Ridley shows the gamut of human suffering by moving from overt violence to a softer but equally disturbing examination of familial trauma, memory, and psychological scars. The movement stressed trauma as a mirror of more general existential and cultural crises rather than only individual suffering. It urged audiences to engage profoundly and uncomfortably with the complexity of the human condition.

This essay investigates trauma in *Leaves of Glass*, showing how Ridley shows it as a force that disturbs the lives of particular people and challenges others. Ridley explores how trauma is passed on in families, showing up as warped identities, suppressed memories, and unmet guilt. He also presents trauma as a cyclical and ubiquitous force that shapes the lines separating past from present and between truth and memory. This study examines how Ridley navigates the paths from fragmentation toward possible recovery, even as they strive to reconcile the weight of their shared history, by focusing on themes of memory, identity, and the desire for healing. Drawing on psychoanalytic and trauma theories, the theoretical underpinning for this study explores trauma's several effects on memory, identity, and the family. Particularly in the views of Sigmund Freud, psychoanalytic theory offers an understanding of the mechanisms of repression and the psychological impact of traumatic experiences. Freud provides a basis for comprehending how unprocessed trauma affects behavior and perspective. Trauma theory, especially Cathy Caruth's work, also stresses trauma as an experience that unexpectedly permeates a person's life and is frequently beyond their control. This framework facilitates the examination of Ridley's portrayal of trauma as both a personal burden and a family legacy via memory fragmentation and psychological strain.

Seen via these theoretical lenses, *Leaves of Glass* becomes a work that shows the depths of psychological anguish and begs important issues about the potential of healing, reconciliation, and recovery inside broken families. Trauma in this drama is not only a fleeting disturbance but also an ongoing journey requiring audiences and characters to face the long shadows created by past violence and suffering. This essay seeks to clarify the tenacity of the human spirit and the rugged, sometimes terrible road toward healing by analyzing Ridley's representation of trauma.

Trauma in *Leaves of Glass*

Scholars have long sought ways to explain how profoundly upsetting events challenge an individual's perspective of reality and the self. They have investigated trauma's long effects across psychoanalysis and trauma theories, highlighting how it breaks memory, twists time, and changes identity in ways that conventional narratives find challenging to depict. Though fundamental as these categories are, trauma is nevertheless an enigmatic and very personal phenomenon that frequently resists straightforward interpretation or healing. Its effects are diverse, erratic, and entirely subjective, showing themselves in ways that challenge language and conventional wisdom.

Trauma, according to Freud, is a complicated psychological reaction to very upsetting or unpleasant experiences that can affect a person's mental, emotional, and physical well-being for years. Natural catastrophes, accidents, violence, abuse, and untimely death are only a few of the several causes of trauma. Its effects may show up as anxiety, sadness, PTSD, or problems in interpersonal interactions, among other things. Freud underlines that these extreme events disturb the brain's machinery, which causes feelings of helplessness and usually results in suppressed memories that could reappear later, affecting a person's behavior and emotional condition, as he maintains:

> The essence of a traumatic event lies in its ability to overwhelm the protective shield against stimuli, rendering the mind incapable of responding adequately. The result is a breach in the mind's defences, an injury to its integrity, which sets off a series of reactions. Repression occurs as the mind seeks to expel the unbearable content, yet this very act of repression ensures that the trauma remains active in the unconscious, perpetuating its influence in distorted forms in the individual's life. (1939, p. 67)

Freud says a traumatic incident overwhelms the mind's natural defenses—what he refers to as the "protective shield against stimuli, "leaving the person unable to process or respond appropriately. Experienced as an "injury" (p.68) to the psyche, this break in mental defenses causes considerable psychological suffering. According to Freud, repression is the mental attempt to cope with the intolerable quality of the experience. Pushing the terrible incident out of conscious awareness helps the person avoid direct engagement with upsetting memories or emotions. Freud underlines, nonetheless, that suppression hides the trauma rather than eliminates it; instead, it buries it in the unconscious, where it still has power. Though it is hidden from conscious consciousness, the repressed trauma may show itself indirectly as dreams, obsessive behavior, or emotional upheaval.

Freud's observation emphasizes the complicated character of trauma is not just the first overwhelming experience but also the mind's attempt to control it, which helps to determine its long-lasting psychological consequences. This theory is fundamental in explaining disorders like PTSD, where unresolved trauma shapes ideas, emotions, and actions long after the original incident. Although Freud notes the importance of trauma, he mainly emphasizes how early events impact a person's mind and conduct. According to Freud, significant experiences like childhood maltreatment, the untimely death of a parent, or other traumatic events like rape can leave strong traces on a person's psyche, therefore upsetting their emotional development and impacting their behavior in adulthood. He believes:

> The child's experiences in relation to its parents and other influential figures in its early years determine its later reactions to life, its capacity for love, and its eventual mental health. Repressed memories of traumatic events in childhood persist in the unconscious and are expressed in later life through symptoms, behaviors, or relationship patterns, even if the individual is unaware of their origin. (1917, p. 377)

Freud highlights the profound influence of childhood experiences on an individual's psychological development and adult life. He argues that early interactions, especially with parents or significant figures, leave a lasting imprint on how a person navigates emotions, relationships, and mental health later in life. Traumatic events such as loss, neglect, or abuse may overwhelm the young mind and lead to repression, where painful memories and emotions are pushed into the unconscious to avoid conscious distress. However, repression does not resolve trauma; instead, it hides it, allowing unresolved experiences to resurface later in disguised forms. These may include anxiety, phobias, relationship difficulties, or self-destructive behaviors. For example, a child who experiences abuse may internalize feelings of shame or fear, manifesting in adulthood as emotional instability or compulsive behaviors aimed at coping with unresolved feelings. Similarly, an individual who loses a parent abruptly in childhood might struggle with trust or emotional unavailability in relationships, as unresolved grief continues to influence their psyche. Freud referred to such disruptions in development as "hysterical symptoms," which could include physical ailments without a medical cause, compulsive behaviors, or emotional instability(Breuer & Freud, 1895, p.23). He emphasized that early traumas often resurface in adulthood in ways the individual does not consciously recognize, affecting emotional well-being and interpersonal dynamics. Through psychoanalysis, Freud believed that bringing these repressed memories to awareness could help individuals understand and address the root causes of their difficulties, paving the way for healing and personal growth. This perspective underscores the enduring impact of early experiences on human psychology.

Freud's theories laid the groundwork for subsequent explorations into trauma, influencing both the understanding of its effects and the development of treatment approaches. His insights highlighted the intricate connection between past traumas and present psychological conditions, paving the way for later theorists like Cathy Caruth to delve deeper into the nature of trauma and its long-term impacts. Caruth asserts that deeply traumatic experiences resist representation because they occur before individuals are prepared to comprehend them, encapsulating the essence of trauma as an experience that defies easy articulation. She states:

> Trauma is not simply an effect of destruction but also, fundamentally, an enigma of survival. In its most general definition, trauma describes an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often uncontrolled, repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena. The traumatized, therefore, carry an impossible history within them, or they become themselves the symptom of a history that they cannot entirely possess. What returns to haunt the traumatized is not only the reality of the violent event but also the reality of the way that its violence has not yet been fully known. (1996, p. 5)

Caruth's concept spotlights the multifaceted and intricate nature of trauma. Trauma is not merely a past event but a persistent presence that disrupts the individual's current perception of reality. It presents a challenge to the individual's capacity to comprehend their history and identity, resulting in a state of perplexity. The paradox at the root of traumatic experiences is emphasized by the notion that trauma is linked to both survival and destruction. Survivors must continue confronting the repercussions of events they cannot comprehend or articulate completely. This is comparable to Freud's theories of repression and the unconscious, in which traumatic experiences are suppressed but persist in influencing the

individual's emotional state and conduct. Caruth's emphasis on the relational aspect of trauma also implies that rehabilitation cannot be conducted in isolation. Freud's emphasis on the therapeutic relationship is consistent with this, as the trauma survivor requires assistance in comprehending the experience and obtaining validation from others. This perspective enriches our comprehension of trauma by considering it not only as an internal, personal event but also as a factor in how individuals interact with the world, their identity, and their relationships.

As Freud suggests, trauma and its underlying causes play a crucial role in shaping characters by influencing their behaviors, emotions, and identities. According to Caruth, the healing of trauma requires confronting painful experiences, as facing these memories allows individuals to process and move beyond their suffering. These notions are vividly illustrated in Philip Ridley's *Leaves of Glass*, where characters grapple with the haunting echoes of their past. Ridley's works are distinguished by their central motifs of trauma, childhood shocks, and adolescent freakouts. His characters frequently encounter the enduring ramifications of their past as they strive for connection and understanding.

Philip Ridley is a British playwright, screenwriter, and visual artist renowned for his solemn, provocative works that frequently contemplate the human psyche and the themes of violence. Ridley was born in East London on April 19, 1964. His profound passion for visual art substantially impacted his subsequent theatrical career. His early involvement in cinema and art afforded him a distinctive perspective, which he frequently integrated into his plays by combining surreal elements and visual imagery with intense emotional narratives. He was acknowledged for his works, which include *The Pitchfork Disney* (1991), a surreal narrative about two siblings who navigate a fantastical yet fearful environment; *The Fastest Clock in the Universe* (1992), which explores the themes of ageing and desire through the life of an ageing man who clings to youth; *Ghost from a Perfect Place* (2005), which centers on loss and redemption; *Leaves of Glass* (2007), which explores the impact of past traumas on two brothers; and *Mercury Fur* (2005), which is set in a post-apocalyptic world and explores questions of morality and survival. Ridley places a high value on the visual elements of drama, recognizing their essential role in developing emotional resonance and narrative. The author asserts that "the visual aspect of drama has always been essential to me. I have consistently observed images that elicit a meaning without words, an image-aria if you will" (Sierz, 2001, p. 43). His works are a testament to this approach, as they utilize striking, frequently surreal visuals to amplify the psychological intensity of the narrative. Ridley asserts that these visual elements are not merely embellishments but indispensable elements of the narrative process, capable of eliciting visceral responses and offering audiences a more immersive experience.

Alex Sierz's analysis of Philip Ridley positions him as a pioneering playwright who was ahead of his time in exploring bold and taboo subjects. At the beginning of the 1990s, Ridley was almost alone in addressing themes that others hesitated to tackle, and his works were marked by shocking stage images, explicit language, and references to popular culture, as Sierz notes:

> At the start of the decade, Ridley was almost alone in exploring ideas no one else dared to touch, but soon some of his trademarks—violent stage images, blatant language, pop culture references—became staples of the new drama. Because of his background in visual art, Ridley was ahead of his time, using shock tactics before the Royal Court made confrontation fashionable. (p. 47)

By highlighting Ridley's early use of different techniques, Sierz emphasizes his role as a trailblazer in shaping the new wave of British drama. Ridley's ability to blend visual artistry with intense, often unsettling subject matter allowed him to engage audiences in an emotionally impactful and aesthetically innovative way. His work prefigured the confrontational style that would later define the In-Yer-Face

movement and set a precedent for future playwrights to explore similar themes with the same intensity and visual flair.

Leaves of Glass is one of Philip Ridley's most significant works, first staged in 2007. It is about two brothers, Stephen and his younger sibling, Barry, who are haunted by the traumatic death of their father during their childhood. As adults, they continue to be affected by their past, leading to strained relationships and unresolved emotional issues. The play is set in a confined space, heightening the sense of tension between the brothers. Throughout the play, both characters confront their memories of the trauma of their father's death and abuse. The older brother, Stephen, struggles with volatile emotions, while his younger sibling remains emotionally distant. As they navigate their past and the emotional scars it left, the brothers grapple with the difficulty of healing and understanding each other. The play portrays the lasting impact of trauma on individuals and relationships. Critics note that the play presents a gripping exploration of trauma and depression, highlighting Ridley's skillful balancing of accusations and shifting narratives, which illustrate how trauma persists and shapes lives (Luke, 2024). The glass motif is a powerful metaphor throughout the play, symbolizing fragility, vulnerability, and the transparency of their emotional states. As the brothers navigate their turbulent relationship, the play poignantly illustrates how past traumas can ripple through their lives, affecting their ability to form meaningful connections and cope with their emotional pain.

In *Leaves of Glass*, the trauma caused by Steven and Barry is the sudden loss of their father, an event that profoundly affects their psyches and creates a stark before-and-after divide in their lives. Both brothers grapple with the emotional repercussions of this loss, though Barry is particularly affected due to his status as his father's favorite son. Steven states:

> Ice!' Someone mentioned ice. I'm at the top of the stairs. Barry's next to me. He's crying and he's clutching the banisters – 'Frozen!' Something's been frozen. I peer between the banisters. The front door's open. Snow outside. People going in and out. Treading slush into the house. Down the hall. Into the living room. Mum won't like that. I can hear Mum crying. I can see shadows moving in the front room. Boots. Strange boots. I can hear walkie-talkies crackle. Police. I want to rush down but I know I mustn't. I've got to keep out of the way. The whole house feels different. It's two days since Dad went missing – 'Peaceful!' What's peaceful? I know all these words have something to do with Dad. Every time one of them is said Mum cries louder. Keep listening … Victoria Park … Canal … Dad has been found now. He's been found in the canal by Victoria Park. The canal has frozen over. Dad is in the ice. He looks peaceful. (Ridley, 2007, p. 360)

In this passage, the family grapples with the traumatic reality of the father's disappearance and subsequent death. The imagery of ice and snow symbolizes emotional stagnation and the chilling finality of loss. As they hear phrases like "frozen" and "peaceful," the contrast between his childhood innocence and the harshness of grief becomes evident (p. 360). The repeated sounds of their mother crying and the police presence highlights the disruption of their family life, emphasizing how trauma affects not just the individual but the entire household. Overall, this excerpt poignantly illustrates the helplessness and despair experienced by those left behind in the wake of trauma.

Freud posited that the sudden death of a loved one, particularly a parent, can lead to profound psychological trauma. This trauma disrupts the normal process of mourning, leaving the individual in a state of emotional shock. For Barry, the death of his father marks a pivotal moment, creating a split in his identity. His mother poignantly observes this change; she states:

> It's like … like I've had three sons, not two. There's you. And then there's the two Barrys. There's the Barry before your dad died. And then there's the Barry after your dad died. (p. 345)

This division reflects Freud's idea of trauma causing a split in the self. The "first Barry" is remembered as a happy, curious, and engaged individual, full of life and laughter. In contrast, the 'second Barry' emerges post-trauma as a shadow of his former self, burdened by grief and emotional disconnection. According to Freud, unresolved grief often leads to repression, where painful memories or emotions are buried in the unconscious. This repression can surface in various forms, such as Barry's fixation on ghosts. His belief in ghosts may symbolize his struggle with the unresolved trauma of his father's death. The ghost serves as a metaphor for the lingering presence of grief and the haunting memories of his past. Barry states:

> I can crash a computer by just looking at it. I've been born in the wrong time, I reckon. Wrong era. Few hundred years ago – that would have suited me. Sort of Renaissance times. That's more like five hundred, ain't it?" (p. 330)

Barry gives us a glimpse inside his mind, showing layers of grief and alienation that can be examined through the lenses of Freud and Caruth. Freud could interpret Barry's desire for the Renaissance as a type of regression, a psychological defence mechanism in which an individual retreats to a safer, more familiar mental space to avoid confronting current concerns and unresolved feelings. Barry's statement about feeling inadequate with current technology, "I can crash a computer by just looking at it," reveals his inadequacy in today's world. This technological ineptness hints at a deeper emotional issue created by his father's death and unresolved trauma. By idealizing the Renaissance, Barry constructs a mental fortress, imagining a time when he believes he would have been more comfortable and capable, allowing him to escape the constraints and emotional weight of his current situation.

According to Caruth, Barry's nostalgia for a bygone age could be taken as an indication of trauma's delayed effects. According to Caruth, trauma is not fully understood at the time it occurs but rather expresses itself in fragmented and delayed ways. Barry's fascination with the Renaissance is more than a desire to escape; it reflects his quest to comprehend his trauma. His father's unexpected death had a severe influence on him, leaving him with a fractured sense of self, which he tries to overcome by clinging to a romanticized past. The Renaissance, a time of rebirth and enlightenment, represents an unconscious longing for clarity, healing, and a cohesive story to offset his inner anguish.

While Freud's analysis focuses on Barry's retreat to a safer historical past to avoid his current emotional anguish, Caruth emphasizes the repeating character of trauma, illustrating how Barry's unresolved grief manifests itself in his fascination with a simpler and more aligned period. Both perspectives highlight the long-term impact of trauma on Barry's sense of self and perception of time, implying that his refusal to accept his father's death derives from a desire for an idealized past. This dual interpretation demonstrates how trauma can affect both one's current experience and one's relationship with the past.

Trauma has long been recognized as a significant factor influencing various psychological and behavioral issues, including substance abuse. According to American Psychological Association:

> Research indicates that exposure to trauma significantly increases the risk of developing substance use disorders, including alcohol use disorder. Individuals may turn to alcohol as a means of self-medicating to cope with distressing symptoms of trauma, such as anxiety, depression, or PTSD. (American Psychological Association, 2020, p. 150)

People who have been through traumatic experiences frequently use alcohol as a coping method to reduce the mental anguish and pain caused by unresolved grief and worry. The link between trauma and alcoholism is widely established, with many trauma survivors attempting to break away from a never-

ending cycle of recovery and relapse. Barry, a man dealing with his father's unexpected death, has an emotional talk with his mother, Liz, and older brother, Steven. Their conversation displays the family's understanding of Barry's continuous struggle with drinking.

> **Steven** He hasn't drunk anything in three months.
>
> **Liz** He'll start again. (Ridley, 2007, p. 338)

This conversation illustrates a terrible part of Barry's continual struggle with repressed trauma, specifically how it manifests itself through alcoholism. This brief exchange sheds light on Barry's conflict's cyclical nature, as well as the acute emotional distress that fuels his dependence. According to Freud, Barry's drinking is a defence mechanism—a way of ignoring and dulling the great sorrow caused by his father's abrupt death. Freud felt that when people are unable to address and integrate traumatic experiences, they frequently resort to tactics that bring short-term emotional relief. In Barry's situation, alcohol acts as a coping mechanism for the overpowering feelings that come with his loss and the subsequent alienation from his former self. Liz's resigned tone, especially the remark, "He'll start again," reveals her understanding of this tendency. Despite Barry's momentary recuperation, she predicts a relapse by pinpointing the unresolved basis of his suffering. This anticipation implies that Barry is aware of his continuous trauma, revealing the depth of his emotional troubles.

The repeated cycle of recovery and relapse indicates Barry's failure to process his experiences. Each period of sobriety may indicate a momentary attempt to confront his sadness, but the return to drinking represents his escape from that confrontation back into the comfort of numbness. Liz's response exemplifies the ongoing nature of this struggle, in which unresolved grief resurfaces, forcing Barry back into old coping methods. Steven also shows signs of trauma. Steven explains how he hit a kid who is like a ghost:

> **Barry** You swerved cos a kid ran out?
>
> **Steven** A boy, yes.
>
> **Barry** Fuck.
>
> **Steven** And he ... he didn't run out. Barry Oh? Steven No. He was just sort of ... there.
>
> **Barry** There? Steven In the middle of the road – Has Debbie told you all this?
>
> **Barry** No, no.
>
> **Steven** I turned a corner and – There he is! Barry Fuck me!
>
> **Steven** Right in front of me. Just staring.
>
> **Barry** You've been seeing too many horror films, brov.
>
> **Steven** It's not a joke. (p. 450)

Steven's meeting with Barry demonstrates the severity of his trauma, precisely his inability to absorb a terrible occurrence. His fragmentary, hesitant language reveals his emotional bewilderment and trouble explaining the event's significance. Steven's hazy memories, like describing the child as "just sort of ... there," indicate he struggles to process the encounter. This incoherent speech exemplifies how trauma impairs a person's capacity to recall and communicate their experiences effectively.

Steven's care for the youngster, combined with Barry's scornful response, emphasizes the isolation that many trauma survivors face. Barry trivializes the incident, dismissing it as something from a horror movie, highlighting how trauma is frequently misconstrued or rejected by others. This lack of attention

contributes to the individual's emotional isolation, making mending more difficult. A lack of affirmation may make it more difficult for trauma survivors to understand their experiences and seek appropriate treatment in the end.

Caruth (1996) argues that trauma alters the narrative flow of an individual's experience, resulting in a shattered, fragmented sense of self and reality. She underlines that trauma not only alters a person's thinking but also disrupts the flow of their thoughts and memories, making it difficult for them to express their grief in a way that others can understand. She claims that trauma survivors have difficulty sharing their experiences and often feel separated from themselves and others.

The confusing discourse and Steven's emotional detachment demonstrate how trauma distorts speech, making it difficult to connect with others and communicate pain. This is represented in *Leaves of Glass*, which employs fragmented dialogues, non-linear patterns, and heightened physicality to portray a trauma survivor's bewilderment, disordered state of mind, emotional collapse, and internal instability. Characters living with trauma struggle to interact or completely express their emotions, allowing the spectator to experience the disorientation and paint a clear image of the chaos that comes with horrific memories. Debbie and Steven's conversation in this section from Leaves of Glass creates a complicated picture of trauma through their interactions:

> **Debbie** I'm pregnant.
>
> **Slight** pause.
>
> **Steven** When?
>
> **Debbie** Now. I'm pregnant now.
>
> **Steven** But ...
>
> **Debbie** Ain't it good news? The best. I couldn't wait to tell you. We can start decorating that spare room. Like we said.
>
> **Steven** What did we say?
>
> **Debbie** Nursery trauma portrayal in this dialogue
>
> **Steven** We said that? (Ridley, 2007, p. 240)

Steven's emotional confusion and inability to comprehend the information provided by Debbie are illustrated by the conversation's fragmentary tone, which is defined by interruptions and incomplete thoughts. The initial remark, "But...", and the peculiar cadence of his subsequent responses suggest a sense of detachment or denial. Steven's hesitation suggests that he is not psychologically or emotionally prepared to confront the reality of the situation. This may be a consequence of unresolved trauma from his past, such as his father's traumatic death.

Fragmented discourse in contemporary British theatre is not merely a stylistic choice, as per Angelaki (2013); it is a genuine representation of the emotional disintegration characters experience in response to psychological distress and trauma. This speech fragmentation symbolizes the characters' inability to communicate their emotions coherently, the collapse of their interior worlds, and their struggle to interact with others. To represent the characters' mental instability, fragmented dialogue is implemented in plays that investigate the themes of trauma, memory, and loss. The incomplete, frequently disconnected interactions that are indicative of the disconcerting consequences of trauma demonstrate how individuals who have experienced severe psychological traumas frequently struggle to articulate their inner distress. This form of discourse creates an emotional barrier between the

characters and the audience, as well as between the characters themselves. It creates a sense of perplexity and alienation in the audience, allowing them to observe the characters' detachment. As a result, the characters' capacity to engage in therapeutic, meaningful interactions with others is impeded by their fragmentary speech, which impedes their ability to express their emotions effectively. The challenges associated with trauma processing and the enduring consequences it has on emotional connection and communication are underscored using fragmentary discourse.

In *Leaves of Glass*, Ridley effectively uses fragmentary conversation to illustrate his characters' psychological breakdown. The conversation between Steven and his wife, Debbie, regarding Debbie's pregnancy illustrates this approach. Steven's emotional coldness and inability to experience the joy she brings when Debbie discloses that she is pregnant are revealed in his broken remarks, which reveal his perplexity and detachment. He is uncertain about their previous conversation about nursery design as he fumbles over his words. Nevertheless, his inability to express emotion in response to the news is directly linked to his unresolved sorrow over his father's death. The fragmentary nature of their discourse serves to emphasize Steven's psychological fragmentation, which has resulted in his inability to engage entirely in the present moment because of his emotional detachment, unresolved mourning, and prior trauma.

The disruptive nature of communication in *Leaves of Glass* underscores the primary motif of emotional isolation. The fragmentary dialogue exacerbates the characters' suffering by preventing them from fully confronting their trauma and establishing genuine relationships. Ridley's use of broken speech effectively demonstrates the challenges that trauma imposes on the lives of individuals, providing a profound commentary on the alienation and difficulty of recovery that are associated with unresolved bereavement.

Steven's reticence and Barry's necessity to revisit the past indicate that both characters cannot adequately articulate or confront the traumatic memories that continue to influence their lives. The complexities of recovery serve as a reminder that trauma necessitates more than just recollection; it must be resolved through the resolution of emotional distress, the restoration of relationships, and the development of strategies for effectively integrating and processing the traumatic past.

Barry and Steven’s confrontation is layered with unspoken grief, repressed trauma, and the burden of memory. Their father’s funeral was the first rupture—an absence of visible mourning that solidified Barry’s sense of isolation. The only ones who cried were Barry and the man who sat in the back row, an old friend of their father’s, a former teacher.

> **Barry** The man sat in the back row. Mum came and sat between us on the front row. She said, ‘It’s an old friend of your dad’s. One of his teachers. He heard about your dad’s accident and wanted to pay his respects.’ I kept looking back at the man. You know what I remember the most? He was the only one crying. Apart from me, that is. I was crying. And the man was. Mum didn’t. Not once. Nor did you.
>
> **Steven** I did.
>
> **Barry** Not one fucking tear. (Ridley, 2007, p. 366)

Freud’s concept of repression suggests that traumatic experiences, when unprocessed, do not vanish but persist in the unconscious, influencing behavior and emotions in ways that may only become evident much later. As mentioned before, according to Freud (1917), the psyche defends itself against overwhelming experiences by repressing them, pushing them into the unconscious where they continue

to exert an influence. Caruth (1996) extends this by emphasizing that trauma is not fully assimilated as it occurs; rather, it returns in fragments, haunting the survivor until it can be properly acknowledged. In this sense, Barry's confrontation with Steven is an eruption of the repressed—a moment when the past, long buried, forces itself into the present, demanding recognition. Their dynamic reflects Freud's notion that repression does not erase trauma but rather ensures its later return in disruptive, unconscious ways.

Further elaborating on this process, Dori Laub argues that the dissociation or "not knowing" of trauma is not a passive forgetting but an active internal refusal. He explains:

> Not knowing trauma or experiencing or remembering it in a dissociative way is not a passive shutdown of perception or of memory. Not knowing is rather an active, persistent, violent refusal; an erasure, a destruction of form and of representation. (1992, p. 57)

In this passage, Laub is emphasizing how trauma operates in a way that is not simply about forgetting or suppressing memories in a passive way, but rather it's a willful and violent internal process. This means that the survivor actively refuses to acknowledge the trauma, even if they are not consciously aware of this refusal. The phrase "active, persistent, violent refusal" suggests that the mind is engaged in a defensive mechanism to protect the individual from the overwhelming impact of traumatic experiences.

This isn't just about repressing memories, as Freud suggests, but about actively avoiding them. The individual is not just passively unaware; their psyche is working to block or prevent the trauma from coming to the surface. It's as though the mind is making a conscious effort to keep certain painful memories locked away, even when they are not fully accessible to the individual. Laub describes this as a form of erasure, meaning that traumatic memories are not just forgotten, but are actively destroyed or made inaccessible in the mind. This can result in fragmented recollections or dissociation, where the person may have memories that don't make sense or are disconnected from their full experience. It's as though the trauma is being wiped from the narrative of the person's life, but the trauma still exerts a silent, yet powerful, force on their emotions and behaviors. Laub further explains that trauma causes a destruction of form—meaning the memories of the trauma lose their coherence and meaning. For the survivor, the trauma may seem incomprehensible, existing as something unrepresentable, or outside of language. This results in an inability to fully articulate or even recognize what happened, making the process of healing much harder.

Laub's idea of an "active, persistent, violent refusal" complements Freud's notion of repression by elaborating on the intensity of this internal defense mechanism. The trauma isn't just forgotten; the individual actively blocks their ability to recall or process the traumatic event. This is a stronger, more deliberate act of self-protection, and when the repressed trauma inevitably resurfaces (like in Barry and Steven's confrontation), it can be overwhelming and disruptive.

Caruth (1996) builds on Freud's ideas, asserting that trauma isn't fully integrated or understood when it occurs. Instead, it returns in fragments—like bits of images, sensations, or emotions—that are difficult to make sense of. These fragments "haunt" the survivor, continually disrupting their life. In this way, Caruth's idea of trauma returning in pieces aligns with Laub's notion of an "active refusal" of memory. Both suggest that trauma doesn't go away—it lingers, waiting for a moment to be confronted and understood.

In the context of analysis, Barry's confrontation with Steven represents the eruption of repressed trauma. Until this moment, both characters have lived with the unacknowledged weight of their experiences. Their psyches have actively blocked full awareness of their past pain. But when they face each other, this long-suppressed trauma forces its way into the present, demanding recognition and understanding.

Barry and Steven's encounter mirrors Laub's description of trauma as active refusal: they may not have consciously processed the events that shaped their pain, but the confrontation brings these repressed memories to the surface, disrupting their lives. Freud's theory explains why the trauma doesn't simply disappear but keeps impacting their emotional and relational worlds. Caruth's perspective suggests that by confronting the trauma, these characters can begin the difficult work of recognizing and processing their painful histories.

In summary, Laub gives us a deeper understanding of how trauma doesn't just fade away or get buried passively; it is actively denied and erased by the psyche. This intensifies Freud's theory of repression and complements Caruth's idea of trauma returning in fragmented, disruptive forms. Barry and Steven's confrontation, then, becomes a crucial turning point where the past cannot remain suppressed any longer—it erupts, demanding attention and recognition.

Barry's recollection shifts from the funeral to the moment that fractured his trust in Steven.The man who wept at their father's funeral lived in a large house on the corner. A big tree stood in his front garden. Barry remembers his excitement, his anticipation. But what followed was a moment neither brother ever spoke about. The moment trauma embedded itself in silence.

> **Barry** The man lived in this big house on the corner. There was a big tree in his front garden. I was so fucking excited. I felt sick with it. I kept tugging at your hand. You kept telling me to calm down. (Ridley, 2007, p. 367)

They were invited inside. The man offered Barry the chance to see his father's poems. Upstairs. Barry was eager. Steven hesitated. Barry states that:

> The man said to me, 'Would you like to see your dad's poems now?' And I said, 'Yes.' And the man said, 'Come on, then. They're upstairs.' And the man stood up. And I stood up. But you didn't. I said, 'Come on, brov. (p. 367)

Steven didn't move. The weight of that inaction is what Barry cannot forgive. Because upstairs, in that house, behind a closed door, something happened that Barry had no words for. The man gave Steven money. And with that money, he bought a gift for his mother—leaves of glass. A gift that shattered the moment he handed it over. Steven, the elder brother, was supposed to protect him. But he didn't. Barry's anger is not just about the past, but about the years of silence that followed. Steven, burdened with guilt, never spoke of it either. Trauma festered between them, unacknowledged, poisoning their bond. But in speaking the unspeakable, in confessing, the possibility of healing emerges.

Caruth (1996) argues that a process of working through it is needed once articulated trauma is allowed. Until it is confronted, it remains lodged in the psyche, shaping behaviour and relationships in ways that the survivor may not fully understand. This confrontation is that moment for Barry and Steven. By finally vocalizing the buried pain, they move from repression to recognition. Freud's psychoanalytic theory reinforces this notion, asserting that the path to healing lies in bringing unconscious material into conscious awareness. As Freud states, "The patient cannot remember the whole of what is repressed

in him... He is obliged to repeat the repressed material as a contemporary experience instead of remembering it as something in the past" (1958,150). Thus, when Barry and Steven confront the trauma of their past, they initiate the first essential step toward understanding—a possibility neither had previously imagined.

In his article "The Sense of an Ending: A Postmodern Challenge of Truth", Özçelik emphasizes the persistent impact of repressed trauma on the identities of individuals which in turn affects their emotional well-being and current behaviors. He contends that trauma is not merely a historical event but a persistent force that prevents an individual from establishing stable relationships, maintaining a coherent self-perception, and engaging meaningfully with the world. Individuals are unable to completely integrate their experiences due to the persistent sense of disconnection, emotional apathy, and fragmented memories that trauma manifests. He underscores that self-destructive behaviors, cycles of remorse, and an inability to differentiate between past and present suffering can result from unresolved trauma. The portrayal of trauma in *Leaves of Glass* is closely aligned with his perspective, as both Steven and Barry's journeys are influenced by the trauma they experienced, even though their respective pathways of recovery diverge substantially.

A gradual and arduous process of confronting the past and reestablishing his relationships is the hallmark of Steven's voyage toward recovery. Steven is initially profoundly isolated, unable to process or articulate the trauma he has experienced, particularly the violence perpetrated by the man who attended their father's memorial against his brother, Barry. Steven was obligated to safeguard Barry but neglected to do so. Instead, he accompanied Barry to the man's residence, where he requested payment for a glass of leaves for his mother. His fragmented dialogue and emotional withdrawal from those in his vicinity are indicative of the psychological and emotional barriers that trauma erects.

Nevertheless, Steven's level of candor towards his family members, which includes his wife, child, and mother, increases as the play evolves. Steven's capacity to communicate and establish connections with them indicates his recovery, and by the play's conclusion, he has exhibited symptoms of recovery. He reconciles with his past, confronts the pain, and establishes a more stable and loving relationship with his family, illustrating that trauma can be managed and surmounted through connection and understanding, even though it is never entirely gone. This is consistent with Özçelik's assertion that it is fundamental to confront past traumas to foster personal development and resolution.

Barry, in contrast, pursues an alternative course of action. Furthermore, Barry is profoundly traumatized by the abuse despite his initial outward appearance of being unaffected by it. Instead of confronting his past, he employs his career as a means of regaining control over his life, concealing his suffering beneath a fade of fortitude. In the end, Barry succeeds and becomes renowned for his art exhibitions, which reflect his efforts to reclaim his sense of self-worth and escape the shadows of his traumatic past. However, his professional accomplishments do not result in emotional recuperation. Barry's emotional vulnerability persists despite his apparent successes as the trauma he experienced continues to torment him. His tragic death in an accident serves as a poignant reminder that success cannot protect an individual from unresolved trauma. Barry's failure to confront his past and recover from the abuse underscores the importance of directly confronting trauma rather than burying it, which ultimately results in his diminishing health. Barry's tragic fate serves as a testament to Özçelik's investigation of trauma as a persistent force that shapes an individual's reality (Özçelik, 2022).

The intricate and profoundly personal nature of trauma and recovery is poignantly examined through

the contrasting journeys of Steven and Barry in Leaves of Glass. The characters' experiences throughout the play serve as a reminder that past traumas can fester and result in calamitous repercussions if left unattended. Steven's journey is not linear or straightforward; however, he ultimately uncovers a path to healing through emotional confrontation and reconnection with his family. The significance of active participation in one's trauma is emphasized by his gradual process of recognizing his past suffering, challenging his memories, and pursuing emotional resolution.

In contrast, Barry's descent into self-destruction serves as a distressing counterpoint, underscoring the dangers of repression and denial. His tragic and unavoidable collapse is the result of his inability—or unwillingness—to confront the agonizing realities of his past. Barry's fate reinforces that recuperation is not merely a matter of time. Instead, it requires intentional effort and assistance, as avoidance can be as detrimental as the trauma itself. The stark contrasts between the brothers' trajectories serve to emphasize that trauma is a uniquely personal experience, and there is no singular path to recovery. Specific individuals like Steven can navigate their suffering and reclaim a sense of agency. In contrast, others, like Barry, may become entirely consumed by the memories they refuse to confront.

Ridley critiques the societal tendency to overlook the long-term psychological repercussions of trauma, particularly within familial structures where silence and denial frequently serve as self-soothing mechanisms, through these two characters. The play forces the audience to confront unsettling truths about the enduring impact of formative experiences, responsibility, and memory. The portrayal of the responsibilities that trauma survivors endure in Leaves of Glass is sombre yet indispensable, and it also raises critical questions about the prerequisites for recovery. Steven's pursuit of reconciliation is juxtaposed with Barry's calamitous demise to accomplish this.

Conclusion

Leaves of Glass provides a compelling depiction of the enduring consequences of trauma, mainly how it distorts one's connection with the past and the present, disrupts relationships, and fractures identities. The play is centered on two brothers, Stephen and Barry, who are profoundly affected by their father's sudden mortality but are unable to confront or discuss it directly. Their inability to articulate their shared trauma has led to a fractured relationship and dialogue. The siblings' communication is frequently fragmented and fractured, a reflection of the emotional distance that trauma has induced between them. The primary cause of this fractured interaction is the unresolved mourning of the brothers, as neither can confront the painful reality of their father's death, and the silence about what happened in the house of their father's friend only deepens their unspoken grief.

Throughout the play, both siblings struggle to preserve a sense of control over their lives. Stephen's emotional withdrawal and Barry's volatile emotions are both indicative of their attempts to manage the profound anguish they experience but are unable to articulate accurately. The alcoholism of Barry and the internalized wrath of Steven are both examples of how trauma can manifest in destructive behaviors when left unspoken.

Nevertheless, the brothers must confront their shared history as the drama progresses. The pinnacle of their emotional journey is the day of their father's demise, a day that they have both avoided and repressed. This confrontation represents a critical juncture in their relationship as they finally address the event they have been evading for years. By acknowledging the trauma, they begin to reconstruct their fractured identities and, ultimately, their relationship with one another. Due to this dialogue, they begin

to regain their sense of control and power.

Ridley's use of fragmented dialogue illustrates how trauma can distort communication, preventing individuals from expressing their distress. Nevertheless, the siblings begin to recover by confronting and discussing their shared sorrow, which demonstrates the transformative potential of addressing trauma. The play underscores the importance of confronting the past to recover and regain control over one's emotional life.

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