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## Traumatic Creativity. Peirce's Abductive Inference as a Resource for Literary Trauma Studies

A concept introduced in the 19<sup>th</sup> century by the American philosopher Charles S. Peirce represents a potentially helpful resource for today's literary trauma studies. Abductive inference, one of Peirce's most famous innovations, is a third type of logic, complementing the traditional dyad of deduction and induction. The experiment of employing Peirce's idea as a conceptual filter for the re-seeing of trauma provides a point of departure for rethinking a fundamental problem that has troubled our theories of trauma: namely, the difficulty of comprehending the events and experiences we gather under the rubric of trauma solely in terms of woundedness. Woundedness, of course, is basic to our concept of trauma and essential to its manifold social and scholarly usefulness, but it is not the whole story. A brief review of the history of the rise of the concept of trauma will demonstrate the need for alternative strategies for conceptualizing trauma that are able to account for resiliency and posttraumatic growth.

On the one hand, in literary trauma studies the concept of the traumatic experience as one of temporal disruption, a theory descended from the work of Caruth, Felman and Hartman in the early-to-mid 1990s, increasingly has drawn fire for its inability to imagine trauma as other than as a pathology. On the other hand, the closely related concept of PTSD from psychiatry has also been criticized on somewhat similar grounds, for allegedly pathologizing normal reactions to extreme events. This convergence of complaints creates an opening for a cognitive semiotic approach to the understanding of trauma that recognizes in Peirce's idea of abductive inference a hitherto unrecognized theory of trauma.

Summarizing Peirce's complex discussion of abduction, I especially emphasize three points: the identification by Peirce of abductive inference as an engine of

creativity closely associated with the making of scientific discoveries; the ubiquity of abductive reasoning in everyday life, as the mental capacity underlying all interpretive activities; and the salience specifically of Peirce's 1903 model of abduction's »perfectly definite logical form« stipulating the disruption of »a surprising fact« which contradicts a background presupposition in the mind of the observer, thus creating real doubt and discomfort and requiring an effort of accommodation. The 1903 formula might be brought together with the current definition of PTSD from the DSM-IV with the effect of securing a toehold for the project of critically articulating the relation of abduction and trauma. The work of the psychologist Ronnie Janoff-Bulman provides a context for elaborating the connection that comes into view when we recognize that the traumatic stressor is a kind of super surprising fact, a surprising fact on steroids, and that the disaster of traumatization strictly conforms in its underlying structure to that of the revolutionary scientific discovery. While woundedness is still a major emphasis in this abduction-centered rethinking of psychological trauma, mental creativity of the highest order is now pointedly employed to characterize the inner life of victims undergoing the worst depredations of the peritraumatic moment, an emphasis which helps to reconcile »the obvious strengths that victims so often show« with »the severity of injury that is equally indisputable« (Greenspan 1999, 45).

Finally, I contemplate Toni Morrison's *Beloved* as a test case for my approach. I note that certain formal features of the novel which repeatedly have been identified via a Caruthian reading as elements of an authorial strategy for not merely representing, but for performing or transmitting the effects of trauma, are readily remapped with recourse to Peirce's 1903 formula as instances of abductive inference. This effortless translation of rhetorical patterns that are ubiquitous in the novel makes clear Morrison's tacit agreement with the proposition that there is indeed a substantive relationship between abductive reasoning and traumatization. I go on to consider the remarkable autonomy of Sethe's thinking and feeling as evidenced in the story's most important moments, including especially her spontaneous decision to kill her children rather than permit them to return to slavery. In the perspective made available by my abduction-centered approach, this conceptual independence registers the extremity of the experiences of traumatization that have wounded and deformed her, even as it represents a potential for growth and recovery all the more trenchant for being folded so deeply into the worst moments of the experience of trauma. In conclusion, I review disagreements some critics have had in assessing the novel's conclusion, suggesting that my approach may provide a way for accounting for the affirmative uplift some critics have sensed as operative in the story's closing pages, a positive turn that arguably is incompatible with a theory of trauma centered on the Caruthian structure of temporal belatedness.

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