

Tribhuvan University

Narrativizing Psychological and Gender Trauma in Philip Roth's *The Humbling*

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**Letter of Recommendation**

Mr. Damodar Ghimire has completed his thesis entitled “Narrativizing Psychological and Gender Trauma in Philip Roth’s *The Humbling*” under my supervision from December 2011 to August 2012. I hereby recommend his thesis be submitted for viva voice.

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**Approval Letter**

This thesis entitled “Narrativizing Psychological and Gender Trauma in Philip Roth’s *The Humbling*” submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University by Damodar Ghimire has been approved by the undersigned members of research committee.

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## **Abstract**

The research is a study on Philip Roth's *The Humbling* as a narrativization of characters' psychological and gender trauma caused by the capitalist and patriarchal ideologies. It argues that the traumatic narrativization in the text does not only unburden the psychological pain, but also critiques on the cruelty of the capitalist and patriarchal ideologies. Simon Axler and Sybil Van Buren, the representative characters in the novel are repeatedly haunted by the unexpected traumatic events and involve in the violent actions. Buren gets traumatized by seeing her little daughter being raped unexpectedly by her stepfather. As a result, her traumatic psyche searches violent outlets. So, she kills her husband. Simon Axler, a wellknown stage actor unexpectedly loses his power of magical actions, memory and confidence to go on the stage. Due to his failure, he is psychologically traumatized. After that misfortune, he loses his acting company, his caring wife, his professional identity and becomes so much depressed. He is repeatedly driven by the suicidal urges and commits suicide. The stage actor's suicide and Buren's murder of her own husband replicate the possible violent consequences of the trauma caused by the capitalist and patriarchal system.

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## **I. An Introduction to Philip Roth's *The Humbling* as a Narrativization of Psychological and Gender Trauma**

The research explores the characters' psychological trauma as narrativized in Roth's *The Humbling*. Simon Axler and Sybil Van Buren are the representative traumatic characters in the novel who receive traumatic shocks and remain being haunted by the traumatic memories and prone to involve in violence. Axler gets traumatized out of his steady failures in his stage performance while Buren gets shocked by witnessing a raping incident of her daughter by the stepfather. Sybil Van Buren violently kills her rich and powerful second husband where as Axler fails to cope with the traumatic losses and commits suicide.

Because of the modern capitalistic consumer culture, everything has been commodified. Arts and artists too are not free from modern consumerism. Axler, a great artist, highly respected in his heyday, cannot maintain his personality in the later period of his life. He appallingly fails while playing the roles of Prospero and Macbeth at the Kennedy Centre. He is left by his audience, acting company, friends and relatives. He is left alone to suffer from the traumas. He is not given any value for his past deed by the consumer society. On the other hand eight years old little Allison is mercilessly raped by her stepfather. It shows the extreme kind of disastrous condition in human ethical relationship. A rich and powerful father sexually exploits and consumes his stepdaughter. Sybil Van Buren cannot conceal her miseries and cannot properly work through her traumatic memories after seeing the raping incident of her lovely daughter so that she kills her second husband, which is one of the violent outlets of the traumatic psyche.

Philip Roth in *The Humbling* shows the commodification of arts and artists, the failure of Axler like great theatrical hero, destruction of the basic human, ethical and familial relationship, and the gender violence and death in the family. By

exposing the violence and narrativizing the characters' trauma, the text criticizes the modern society ruled by the dominant patriarchal and capitalist ideologies. Axler fails to maintain his identity and get dignity as an 'intellectual proletarian', which ultimately leads him to commit suicide.

To prove and substantiate the claim of the research, researcher has taken different critics' reviews and criticisms, and theoretical support from trauma theory. The focus of the research is psychological trauma of self failure and gender trauma. Although this study makes significant use of concepts developed in trauma study, it does not offer the comprehensive analysis of trauma theory rather an analysis of psychological trauma in relation to the traumatic psyche of the characters in the novel as conceptualized by Cathy Caruth, Dominick LaCapra, Kali Tal and Anne Kaplan.

Trauma to some extent refers to the phenomenon where people exist in the abnormal situation whether in terms of psychological or physical stress. The term "Trauma" refers to the action shown by the abnormal mind to the body which provides a method of interpretation of disorder, distress and destruction. In general sense "Trauma" is a medical term of Greek origin denoting a severe wound or injury and the resulting after effects. In this sense, trauma can be resembled with losses though losses occur in day to day life. However, traumatic losses are a bit different things as they have long lasting effect upon the victims. As a result people survive leading the life of fragmented existence.

In the light of trauma theory it attempts to study unusual condition and mental state of an individual in relation to the accident or the event that has happened in their past. It assumes that certain horrific and atrocious events in the experience of the victims give sever shock and shatters their previous conception and making of world or life. Thus, this lack of ideal or state of conflict generates confusion and something inexpressible that is trauma. So, exploring the past trauma theory tries to revisit it in a



newer manner. In such a way, it has become the mode of representation of narrative, history, culture and various other philosophical fields. Geoffrey Hartman in his essay “Trauma within the Limits of Literature” talking about trauma theory says:

It provides the more natural transition to a real world often falsely split off from the universe, as if the one were activist and engaged and the other self absorbed and the other self absorbed detached. There is an opening that leads from trauma studies to public, especially mental health issue, an opening with ethical, cultural and religious implications. (543-44)

Hartman’s investigation makes clear that trauma theory has opened up many new modes in the study of mind body relation. Trauma is mainly concerned with psychological network extending into the body.

Trauma theory has shown its close affinity with external effects of violence in psychic disorder and it has crossed the boundaries of psychiatry and medic-clinical. That’s why there is no single trauma but traumas, such as historical, national, individual, ethnical, and war trauma. So, trauma has its wide limits and territory with the development of structural and historical trauma.

In the same way, Jenney Edkins in her essay “Introduction: Trauma, Violence and Political Community” strengthens the view that the trauma theory now has become a mode of discourse which studies any text in relation with trauma violence and political community. She elaborates the fact that each traumatic figure has a distinct tale to tell because of the violence they have faced. She relates trauma with political community and also examines the terms of connection between these terms.

Cathy Caruth, another important critic, systematically elaborates the concept of trauma in *Unclaimed Experience*. The basic concern of Cathy Caruth is the dichotomy between the event and its representation. So, she says that the traumatic

experience is unrepresentable because of the ambiguity and so on. Further she classifies the historical power of trauma is not just that, “the experience is repeated after its forgetting, but that is only in and though it’s inherent forgetting that is first experienced at all” (187). She says:

Trauma is constituted not by the destructive force of violent event but by the very act of its survival. If we are to resist the impact of violence, we can’t therefore; locate it only with the destructive moment of the past but in an ongoing survival that belongs to the future. It is because violence inhibits, incomprehensively, the very survival of those who have lived beyond it that it may be witnessed best in the future generations to whom this survival is passed on. (25)

In Cathy Caruth’s “Psychoanalytic Theory of Trauma,” it is not the experience itself that produces traumatic effects, but rather the remembrance of it. In her account there is always a time lapse, a periodical of ‘latency’ in which forgetting is characteristics, between an event and the experience of trauma links past to present through representation and imagination. In psychological account, this can lead to distorted identity formation, where “certain subject portion may become especially prominent or even overwhelming, for example those of victim or perpetrator, where, one is possessed by the past and tend to repeat it compulsively as if it were fully present” (3 Eyerman). And also Crauth in *Trauma: Exploration in Memory* asserts:

The trauma requires integration both for the sake of testimony and for sake of cure. But on the other hand, the transformation of the trauma into a narrative memory that allows the story to be verbalized and, to be integrated into one’s own and other knowledge of the pasts may lose both the precision. And the force that characterizes traumatic recall. Yet beyond the loss of precision, there is another profound,

disappearance: the loss, precisely, of the events essential  
 incomprehensibility, the force of its affront to understanding. (154)

In psychological or psychic trauma, the articulating discourse is a process of meditative involving alternative strategies and alternative voice. A traumatic tear evolves the need to narrate new foundations, which includes reinterpreting the test as a means toward responses or paths to resolving physic trauma that emerge in a specific event or context but all of them in some way or other involve identity and memory.

Dominick LaCapra, in his theoretical text *Trauma Theory* argues:

Traumatic experience is understood as a fixed and timeless photographic negative stored in an unlocatable place of the brain, but it maintains the ability to interrupt to non-traumatized individuals and groups. Moreover, this concept of trauma perceives response as fundamentally pathologic and privileges the act of speaking or narration as the primary avenue to recovery. In other words, presenting trauma as inherently pathologic perpetuates the notion that all responses to any kind of traumatic experience produce a dissolute consciousness. (7)

Narrating traumatic memories is an effort to make sense not only of the past but of the present as well. In narrating the traumas, they have experienced people are trying to establish a sense of continuity between past and present and to terms with the ruptures in their lives and their selves. Traumatic body memories result in the fragmentation of the lived body.

In this way, the effect of trauma is profound. Trauma theory is developed out of psychological foundation, which not only encompasses psychological theories, but also includes various disciplines. Up to now trauma theory has crossed a number of

boundaries and has made special position in the field of literary theory. Trauma theory has become the cry of the day because contemporary frustrated, alienated, chaotic and destructive phenomena compel modern men to think about their trauma.

In this regard, philosophical, ethnical, and aesthetic question about war experiences, violence, depression, repression, alienation, frustrations are the common working field of trauma theory. Reading the text, *The Humbling* this research aims to find post-traumatic-stress-disorder like, repression, alienation, frustration and physical and mental disorder in the protagonists of the novel Simon Axler and Sybil Van Buren.

Robin Mookerjee reads *The Humbling* as Prospero's staff. In *The Humbling*, Simon Axler's great theatrical career, arrested by inexplicable bouts of self-consciousness, bears immediate comparison to Roth's own literary theatrics. Nor need its main character be examined for Zuckerman like similarities with the author, since there are few coinciding features. A great actor specializing in Shakespeare, Axler always felt that he walked a treacherous line between clownish artificiality and transcendent inventiveness. When his talent disappears, other elements of his life rapidly fall away, leaving him in a Lear like state of reliance on what little he has left. Like Lear, he has one remaining true friend, who tries to bring him to his senses, his agent Jerry Oppenheim:

Look, you took a tumble in Washington. That happens to practically everyone sooner or later. There is no ironclad security in any art.

People run in to an obstacle for reasons none knows. But the obstacle is a temporary impediment. The obstacle disappears and you go on.

There is not a first rate actor who has not felt discouraged and that his career was over and that he was unable to come out of the bad period he was in. there is not an actor who has not gone up in the middle of a

speech and not known where he was. But every time you go out on the stage there is a new chance. Actors can recover their talent. You don't lose the skills if you have been out there for forty years. (27- 28)

It is the most Rothian moment in the book the dramatic uselessness of reason in the face of "the facts." It is also a moment in which we identify Axler with Roth, not only due to the comparison of actor and writer, but because Roth's career has been marked by the same perversity that defines his characters, the same refusal to do what is in one's interest.

He feels guilty of not making things real. There was always a sly voice inside me saying: 'there is no teacup.' Well, that sly voice has now taken over, no matter how I prepare and what I attempted to do, once I am on the stage there that sly voice all the time there is no teacup: "I can no longer make a play real for people. I cannot make a role real for myself" (38). The novel's fundamental questions of authentic and invented roles here are brought in to full dramatic play. Pegeen as a lifelong homosexual has taken on the role of a heterosexual woman. Axler, lacking a well-established identity outside his profession, relies heavily on his new role as lover. In this role, he is inexperienced and doomed to failure; however, Roth himself the ultimate Prospero of the book remains controlled and relentlessly self-conscious.

Elaine B. Safer searches loneliness and mortality in the later works of Philip Roth. In *The Humbling*, he writes Axler is out of a job from which he gained his identity. Unable to act on stage, he feels that his life is bereft of a plot. For Axler life becomes meaningless; he becomes so depressed that even his caring wife cannot bear to live with him. For this renowned actor, the only act left is suicide. Moreover, frightened by this possibility, Axler calls a psychiatrist and he admitted to a mental hospital.

The pain of losing one's prowess is voiced most poignantly in the novel not by Axler but by Carol Stapleford, mother of Pegeen, Carol and Asa Stapleford are more chagrined over their daughter's having an affair with a man twenty-five years her senior than they had been twenty three years earlier when she announced that she was a lesbian. Carol tells to Pegeen:

What am I afraid of?

I am afraid of the fact that he is growing older by the day. That's the way it works. You are sixty-five and then you are sixty-six and then you are sixty seven, and so on. In a few years, he will be seventy. You will be with a seventy-year-old man. And it won't stop there . . . after that he will become seventy five years old man. It never stops. It goes on. He will begin to have problems such as the elderly have, and may be things even worse, and you are going to be the person responsible for him. (75-76)

For Axler, Pegeen is a lifeline. Having sex with her invigorates him and causes him to regain a plot in his life. Axler believes that their affair has awakened heterosexual urges in Pegeen, she has been changed into the woman who can love a man instead of another woman. Axler becomes so deluded in the role of her lover that he considers having a child with her. He becomes a tragicomic figure as he expands on this grand illusion, seeking the advice of a doctor with regard to the possibility his fathering a healthy offspring at the age of sixty-five. He becomes a comic figure who cannot see himself as others see him.

Roth in *The Humbling* exposes the brutal reality about mortality and loneliness: the brutal fact that life ends gradually, and that it is indescribably hard to come to term with this or, if not indescribable, at least describable only by a great artist.

In this way, Elaine B. Safer concludes *The Humbling* of being the mirror reflection of mortality and loneliness of the characters. Safer just finds loneliness and mortality explicitly presented in *The Humbling* but he does not explore the outcomes of that loneliness. He finds mortality and suicidal thinking of the characters but he does not analyze the suicidal urges and the causes of that thinking in the characters. The loneliness of Simon Axler has empowered the negative aspects of traumatic psyche. Emotional and psychological trauma can be caused by single blow, onetime events such as a horrible accident, a natural disaster, or a violent attack. Trauma can also stem from ongoing relentless stress such as living in a crime-ridden neighborhood or struggling with cancer. Commonly overlooked sources of emotional and psychological trauma are fall, sports injuries, surgery (especially in the first three years of life), the sudden death of someone close, an automobile crash, the breakup of a significant relationship, the discovery of life threatening illness or disabling condition.

Simon Baker in 'Just the bare bones' writes; conclusion from reading *The Humbling* could be that when you can write with simple beauty, say painfully wise things about mortality and create a plausible enough main characters, however the problem with this book is that the novella's shortness. Just as Shakespeare compresses weeks or even years into moments, Roth squeezes the Axler's breakup into a statement: "Simon Axler in his mid-sixties lost his spontaneity, and the thought of acting terrifies him" (46).

Simon Baker finds the shortness of the novella more interesting which is able to show the mortality of the characters in Shakespearian compressive style but he is not able to see the shortest narrativization of the traumatic psyche in *The Humbling*. Where Simon Axler has breakdown and institutionalizes himself in a mental hospital for a month. There he is able to ebb his suicidal urge.

Ben Jeffery reads *The Humbling* as Philip Roth in age. In *The Humbling*, he writes, after Simon Axler's first breakdown, the actor moves into a psychiatric hospital in an attempt to stave off suicide. His condition improves but he could not believe that his improvement had anything to do with pills or with psychiatrist consultations or group therapy or art therapy. All of which felt like empty exercises. What continued to frighten him as the day of his discharge approached was that nothing that was happening to him seemed to have to do with anything else. As he had told Dr. Farr and further convinced himself by having tried to the best of his ability to search for a cause during their session- he had lost magic as an actor for no good reason and it was just arbitrarily that the desire to end his life began to ebb, at least for the time being. Nothing has good reason for happening. You lose you gain- it is all caprice, the omnipotence of caprice, the likelihood of reversal and its power (16-17).

Jason Cowley in *New Statesman* writes *The Humbling* shares most of the preoccupations of Roth's recent fiction: The sorrows and loneliness of the old age, illness, the poignancy of lingering sexual desires and so on. It clearly wants to be read as a companion piece to his impressive late works about the inescapable senselessness of death. The central character Simon Axler is humbled by the loss of impulse and talency of magical action. He retreats from the world like Nathan Zuckerman in previous Roth's novels and we first encounter him living alone in rural isolation, in upstate New York. Abandoned by his wife, he inhabits a strange sad twilight of yearning and regret. He thinks continuously of suicide, as did Mickey Sabbath, another broken-down and dispossessed old man of the theatre created by Roth.

From these aforementioned critics' and reviewers' review this researcher knows that *The Humbling* is about the performance anxiety, musing upon depression and alienation faced by the ageing person, mortality, suicide, death and satirizing the



art. In addition, claims that the present research is different from the previous reading of *The Humbling* in the sense, it is the research of the traumatic psyche of the characters.

Simon Axler the protagonist of *The Humbling* gets traumatic shocks several times over the course of this novella. Old age is part of it: old age is getting to him, wearing down his body . . . His back gives him considerable pain but old age is not the cause of all things. It is the loss of “his magic” that really hits him hard.

The narrator says, before Pegeen’s arrival, he was sure that he was finished: “finished with acting, with women, with people, finished forever with happiness” (45). He had been in serious physical distress for over a year, barely able to walk any distance or to stand or sit for very long because of the spinal pain that he had put up with all his adult life but whose debilitating progress had accelerated with age and so he was sure he was finished.

So, throughout his whole ordeal Axler is repeatedly drawn to suicide. He is forsaken by his acting company, his beloved and lives alone being physically and mentally traumatized. Because of his spinal injury he is physically traumatized and because of his physical trauma one of his legs would intermittently goes dead so that he couldn’t raise it properly while walking and he misses a step or a curbs and falls. It is very difficult to live him with physical trauma.

Pegeen comes to his life for about thirteen months and he transforms her not only does she go hetero; he buys her pretty clothes and gets her hair styled. But fundamentally pegeen is not so easy to change. Of course, in the end there is a humbling coming to Axler. It does not happen when Pegeen straps on the dildo, or even when she seduces another woman to join them in bed. No, it’s the much more mundane and simpler and when Axler believes for a moment that he can again find a hold against death and obscurity. That Pegeen is lost or she leaves him and he falls to

the state of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Pegeen's parents are not far away from the trauma. At first before seventeen years, when they knew that their daughter went homo, caused them more pain and now they are more traumatized to know about their daughter having affair with person twenty five years senior of her: "There was a lot of trauma in that home for a long time after Pegeen told them what she was (lesbian)"(60).

In this way, most of the characters are one way or other traumatized. Simon tries to acting out, self-winding to hospital is the way of acting out of trauma that he tried. Taking the help of imagination and fantasy is another way of 'working through.' When he is with Pegeen he imagines a healthy baby fathered by him, returning back on the stage and playing James Tyrone. At that time, he leaves his tormented world and lands himself in the world of fantasy.

Pegeen helps him to forget his languishing, possibly dead acting career and the excruciating spinal condition. She revitalizes him then he believes that "life can begin again" (134). Axler drags a shotgun around his empty house, even putting it inside his mouth. But still he hesitates. What unlock his enchained will are two things; the first is the example of Sybil Van Buren, a diminutive, conventional suburban housewife he had befriended in the mental hospital. The other facilitator is Chekhov; it occurred to him to pretend that he was committing suicide in a play by Chekhov. It is his last serious turn at acting. A play that had marked Axler's first big New York success, *The Seagull*, ends with the suicide of the sensitive young writer. Axler appropriates it as his own farewell.

Sybil Van Buren has not only been the benchmark for the suicide of Axler she herself is suffering from the traumatic psyche. Sybil is determined to have her rich and powerful second husband killed after witnessing him having sex with her eight-year-old daughter, his stepdaughter and subsequently lying his way out of it. She says:

“I need someone to kill this man” (24). She is extremely shocked when she saw her dear Allison being raped by her stepfather (second husband). Determined to kill her husband she is able which the encouraging formula for Axler becomes: “If she could do that I can do this” (139).

The nature of trauma varies according to time and place. Simon Axler and his wife Victoria face trauma when they become failure in their acting and dancing career. Victoria is doubly traumatized: on the one hand she couldn't dance because of her physical injury so she has to be depended upon Axler for the living. After the death of her son and the breakdown of Axler at Kennedy Centre, she is all alone to cope with her traumatic psyche.

Sybil Van Buren, on the contrary, is psychologically and emotionally traumatized when she witnesses her eight years old daughter Alison being sexually exploited by her second husband. The event becomes completely traumatic for her so she loses her psychological balance and determines to kill her bitch like husband.

Finally, to prove the claim of this research, the researcher has divided the thesis into different chapters with different purpose to be achieved. The first chapter ‘introduction’ deals with introducing what the research is, what is the main argument of this project and how worth is it to search in this text. Moreover, it further clears how the researcher has taken help of trauma theory to strengthen the claim of this research. Reviews and comments of different critics on the text are included in this part of the research to show how the field of this research departs from their approach to the novel. Moreover, chapter second, ‘textual analysis’ makes the research strong substantiating with the evidences from the text. The concluding chapter wraps up the research with its findings.

## **II. Narrativizing Trauma as a Form of Critiquing Patriarchal and Capitalist Ideologies in *The Humbling***

The research explores Roth's *The Humbling* as a narration of trauma caused by the violence underpinned by the oppressive capitalist and patriarchal norms and values. The novel narrates the traumatic experiences vividly through the representative characters Simon Axler and Sybil Van Buren. Axler gets traumatized out of his repeated failures in his career of stage performance, while Buren gets shocked by witnessing a raping incident of her daughter by the stepfather. As a result, they not only remain haunted by the traumatic memories, but also prone to involve in violence in turn.

Simon Axler, a wellknown stage actor, unexpectedly loses his magical actions. He frequently failed while playing the role of Prospero and Macbeth at the Kennedy Center in front of the large mass of audiences. This failure in front of the large mass of the audience haunts him regularly. When he confronts with the group of people, he feels as if they are the same audiences who have watched his failure. He is haunted time and again from that event. So, psychologically he is traumatized. His traumatic emotional response to the overwhelming event that has disrupted previous ideas of his sense of self and the standards by which he evaluated the society which becomes so frightening and shattering experience that leaves him affected, vulnerable, withdrawn and finally leads him to commit suicide. Sybil Van Buren on the other hand gets mentally disturbed by seeing the unexpected sexual exploitation in her own family. Her second husband rapes his own step-daughter who causes ineradicable damage to her family. The event is the extreme kind of gender violence that becomes the cause of Buren's trauma. She is not only haunted by this event but also involves in the violent action. As a result, she kills her second husband.

Through these representative traumatic characters, Simon Axler and Sybil Van Buren, Roth on the one hand, shows the commodification of arts and artists and on the other hand, gender violence in the novel to criticize the capitalistic and patriarchal ideologies in the capitalist society.

Modern capitalism produces everything to be used and thrown. Nothing has the permanent and proper value. Not only the things of industrial productions but also the human beings are judged from the utilitarian perspective. Axler, after his misfortune is not given any support from the society. Not only his audience, company, relatives but also even his caring wife left him. So that modern consumer culture is one of the causes to experience the psychological trauma by the characters. Thus Roth criticizes the modern consumerism.

Axler is living in the traumatized life. So throughout his suffering he is repeatedly drawn to suicide because he is forsaken by his acting company, his beloved and lives alone being physically and mentally traumatized. Because of his spinal injury he is physically traumatized and because of his physical trauma one of his legs would intermittently goes dead so that he couldn't raise it properly while walking and he misses a step or and falls. It is very difficult to live him with physical trauma. Emotional and psychological trauma is the result of extraordinarily stressful events that shatter his sense of security, making him feel helpless and vulnerable in the dangerous world. It is not the objective facts that determine whether an event is traumatic but his subjective emotional experience of the event. The more frightened and helpless he feels, the more likely he is to be traumatized.

Simon Axler, whose failure in his career because of the loss of his talent and magical actions becomes the most traumatic event in his life. Those losses haunt him time and again. He cannot go further on the stage though he was the greatest actor of his generation as it is narrated in the novel. There is the conflict in his mentality; on

the one hand, he has the blissful past, professional identity, and romantic life as an actor but on the other hand tormented psyche, forsaken state, loneliness and identity less life. Therefore, the gap between his present and past life is the cause of his psychological trauma:

Axler did not drink, and so he collapsed instead. His break down was colossal. The worst of it was that he saw through his breakdown the same way he could see through his acting. After the Kennedy center debacle and his unexpected collapse Victoria fell apart and fled to California to be close to her son. All at once Axler was alone in the house in the country and terrified to killing himself. Now there was nothing stopping him. (9)

A stressful event is most likely to be traumatic if it happened unexpectedly, he is unprepared for it, he feels powerless to prevent it, it happens repeatedly, and it is intentionally cruel. In this regard, Cathy Caruth in "Introduction of Trauma," argues trauma as the response to an unexpected or overwhelming violent event or events that are not fully grasped as they occur, but return later in repeated flashbacks, nightmares and other repetitive phenomena. Traumatic experience, beyond the psychological dimension of suffering it involves, suggests a certain paradox that the most direct seeing of a violent event may occur as an absolute inability to know it, that immediacy, paradoxically may take the form of belatedness. The repetitions of the traumatic event which remain unavailable to consciousness but intrude repeatedly on sight thus suggest a larger relation to the event which extends beyond what can simply be seen or what can be known and is inextricably tied up with the belatedness and incomprehensibility that remain at the heart of the repetitive seeing. Some of the actors have the drinking habit before being onstage to arouse the confidence. Simon had lost his confidence due to the repeated failure. It was unexpected event for him.

The event that his 'breakdown', was incomprehensible for himself, why it happened and how it happened, he was completely unknown to it.

His failure on the stage gives him more pain that is psychological. Before his breakdown as an actor, he used to play the role of somebody, which had an organization and order. Now he is playing the role of his own demise that is something else, something awash with terror and fear. Now he is terrified of killing himself:

Axler did not know how he was going to get from one minute to the next, his mind felt as though it were melting. He was terrified to be alone. He could not sleep more than two or three hours a night. He scarcely ate. He thought everyday of killing himself with the gun in the attic- a Remington at 870 pump action shot gun that he kept in the isolated farm house for self defense- and still the whole thing seemed to be in act, a bad act, when you are playing the role of somebody coming apart it has an organization and order; when you are observing yourself coming apart, playing the role of your own demise that something else something awash with terror and fear. (5)

After experiencing the psychological trauma, he feels helpless and hopeless. For him coping and confronting with that traumatic event is very hard. Axler does not know how to spend every minute of his life because he feels as if his mind is melting. He is terrified to be alone. He is hopeless. He cannot sleep more than two or three hours a night, he scarcely eats because of his tormented, terrified and depressed psyche. In this regard Anne Kaplan in "Why Trauma Now: Freud and Trauma Studies" taking reference of Freud argues that: "trauma results from a breach in a protective shield that the mental apparatus sets up toward against over violent stimuli" (31). Not all potentially traumatic events lead to lasting emotional and psychological damage.

Some people rebound quickly from even the most tragic and shocking experiences others are devastated by experiences that, on the surface appear to be less upsetting. Axler has been suffered from the series of losses. So, he is devastated by the traumatic experience.

Because of the traumatic shocks Axler hardly sleeps more than three or four hours a night. Awakening in the mid night was no more extraordinary thing for his traumatic psyche. He screams loudly because he used to find himself locked inside the role. He has the psychological trauma of failure in his theatrical career, so he hid himself from the role of a character on the stage but unfortunately, his life has become a role of a man deprived of his talent:

Axler screamed aloud when he awakened in the night and found himself still locked inside the role of the man deprived of himself, his talent, and his place in the world, a loathsome man, who was nothing more than the inventory of his defects. In the morning he hid in bed for hours, but instead of hiding from the role he was merely playing the role. And when finally he got up all he could think about were suicide and not its simulation either a man who wanted to live playing a man who wanted to die. (67)

Role of the characters that he played on the stage frequently haunt him and gives him the traumatic shocks so that after his breakdown he tried every time to escape from the role but the role never left him. When he gets up all he thinks about is suicide. Suicidal thinking is the symptom of his Post Traumatic Stress Disorder: “The only role available to him was the role of someone playing a role. A sane man playing an insane man, a stable man playing a broken man, a self controlled man playing out of control” (6). Trauma produces emotion terror, fear, shock but perhaps above all disruption of the normal feeling of comfort. He is just thinking about the man and his



role. In the past he had the feeling of comfort when he used to play a role of others but now he himself is playing a role of his own which is more terrific and devastating.

His previous role would be the role of Prospero, Macbeth, and James Tyrone but now the only role available to him is the role of someone playing a role.

According to the narrator, his roles of masterpieces of great classical plays have been reduced to the roles of his own life. In *The Humbling* after Simon Axler's first breakdown, the actor moves in to a psychiatric hospital in an attempt to stave off suicide. For Axler his co-patients are the audiences no more different from the audiences of the Kennedy center. In front of the large mass of audience, he is giving the lecture about the suicide. For him even suicide is the role that he is going to play. It is the role he says "written by one self" (15), to inhabit it and to enact it. For Axler suicide is only a performance. His traumatic psyche has reduced everything as a role.

This researcher claims that he is haunted by the performances that he had failed so that his breakdown repeatedly haunts him. His condition in the mental hospital improves but he could not believe that his improvement had anything to do with pills or with psychiatrist consultations or group therapy or art therapy. All of which felt like empty exercises. What continued to frighten him as the day of his discharge approached was that nothing that was happening to him seemed to have to do with anything else. As he had told, doctor Farr- and further convinced him-self by having tried to the best of his ability to search for a cause during their session:

He had lost his magic as an actor for no good reason and it was just arbitrarily that the desire to end his life began to ebb, at least for the time being. 'Nothing has good reason for happening' he said to the doctor that day. 'You lose you gain- it's all caprice, the omnipotence of caprice, the likelihood of reversal, and its power.' (16-17)

The actor remains there in the mental hospital to find out the cause of his misfortune and to live away from the suicidal urge. There his condition somehow improves and temporarily ebbs his suicidal urge.

There are several behavioral responses common towards stressors including the proactive, reactive and passive responses. Proactive responses include attempts to address and correct a stressor before it has noticeable effects on life style. Reactive responses occur after the stress and possible traumas have occurred, and are aimed more at correcting or minimizing the damage of a stressful event. A passive response is often characterized by an emotional numbness. Those who are able to be proactive can often overcome domination and are more likely to be able to cope well with unexpected situation. On the other hand, those who are more reactive will often experience more noticeable affects from an unexpected stressor. In the case of those who are passive victims of a stressful event are more likely to suffer from long term traumatic effects and often enact no intentional coping action. These observations may suggest that the level of trauma associated with a victim is related to such independent coping abilities.

After the hospital internment, Jerry Oppenheim, Axler's agent phones him every week from New York to see how he is going. Jerry unexpectedly visits Axler. Jerry who is over eighty and walks cautiously; negotiates the stone path to the front door, but when they sit down to lunch in the kitchen with the flowers in a vase between them, Axler is unable to eat:

He saw himself stepping out on the stage to play James Tyrone and the audience bursting in to laughter. The anxiety and fear were as naked as that people would laugh at him because it was him. 'What do you do with the days'? Jerry asked. Walk, sleep, stare in to space, try to read, and try to forget myself at least one minute each hour. (30-31)

Because of the frequent mishappens in the stage performance Axler gets mentally tortured. So going on stage badly haunts him. He cannot eat properly but sees himself stepping on the stage to play James Tyrone. In this regard Cathy Caruth argues that the repetitions of the traumatic event- which remain unavailable to consciousness but intrude repeatedly on sight- thus suggest a larger relation to the event which extends beyond what can simply be seen or what can be known and is inextricably tied up with the belatedness. In this extract, Axler can't properly eat because of his depressed mentality. His anxiety to play any role on the stage is heightened because of the failure that he had faced at the Kennedy centre. Therefore, he fears even to think about the role. His present role of James Tyrone is more enough to give him flashback of Prospero and Macbeth in which he had been failed and large mass of audience were laughing at his ludicrous Macbeth which is the most tormented part of his life which repeatedly haunts him.

When Jerry asks what you do with the days he replies that he walks, he sleeps, he stares in to space, he tries to read and he tries to forget himself at least one minute each hour. His past identity as one of the superstar actor gives him more pain because now he has lost his talent and magical action. He wants to forget himself and he wants to forget his past identity at least one minute each hour. Jerry and Axler have conversation, Axler says: "You were kind to come all the way out here Jerry, but I cannot do the play at the Guthrie. I'm finished with all that" (31). The coming of Jerry to meet axler has the haunting capacity because Jerry is one of the agents of Axler.

Jerry requests him to play at the Guthrie but Axler says that he cannot. Now neither he has talent, magical action nor confidence. He cannot play because his talent, confidence have been snatched from him so he has been finished with acting. However, Jerry tells him that: "you are not, you are scared of failing. That is behind you. You don't realize how one sided and monomaniacal your perspective has

become . . . it's a momentary loss of confidence" (31). According to Jerry, Axler is scared of failing again. For Jerry present condition is because of the momentary loss of confidence after sometimes it is recovered so that he should not leave acting. But for Axler talent, confidence etc, he had lost permanently they never recover to him so he is scared of failing. The healing process after a traumatic event takes time; especially if one has the experience of a personal loss it is helpful to allow oneself time to grieve. It is helpful to talk to friends and family members about how you feel. Ask for support from people you trust.

Axler goes in to his study room and he finds his copy of *Long Day's Journey in to Night*. He tries to read it but the effort is unbearable. Here he experiences physical and psychical trauma, "at the Kennedy centre it was as though he had never acted before and now it was as though he had never read a play before, the sentences unfolded without meaning" (38). In this regard Cathy Caruth puts; "In arguing that trauma is a special form of memories in which the event has effects only not meaning which produces emotions, terror, fear and shock" (34).

Axler cannot read now because he cannot grasp meaning from reading. Reading the script of drama is not a simple reading it is not for entertainment. His meaning making factor namely 'cerebral cortex' has been shut down so he cannot get meaning by reading script. In this regard, Cathy Caruth taking the reference of Freud says:

Trauma produces emotion terror, fear, shock but perhaps above all disruption of the normal feeling of comfort. Only the sensation sector of the brain- the 'Amygdale' is active during the trauma the meaning making one namely the cerebral cortex remains shut down because the affect is too much to be registered cognitively in the brain. Caruth taking these theories for granted argued that just because the traumatic

experience has not been given meaning the subject is continually haunted by it in dreams, flashbacks and hallucinations. (34)

Actor should remember all the part of his/her role with proper understanding but there is memory problem in him so that he cannot memorize all what he reads. He does not have confidence due to trauma.

Axler tries to remember plays in which there are characters who commit suicide. He remembers as many plays as he can. But the question arises why he tries to remember the characters in the play that are committed suicide. It is because his tormented psyche has been reduced to take suicide as a role. He finds similarities between his thought of committing suicide and the play in which there is a character who commits suicide:

Hedda in *Hedda Gabler*, Julie in *Miss Julie*, Phaedra in *Hippolytus*, Jocasta in *Oedipus the King*, almost everyone in *Antigone*, Willie Loman in *Death of a Salesman*, Joe Keller in *All My Sons*, Don Parritt in *The Iceman Cometh*, Simon Stimson in *Our Town*, Ophelia in *Hamlet*, Othello in *Othello*, Cassius and Brutus in *Julius Caesar*, Goneril in *King Lear*, Antony, Cleopatra Enobarbus and Charmain in *Antony and Cleopatra*, the grandfather in *Awake and Sing!*, Ivanov in *Ivanov* and Konstantin in *The Seagull*. (38-39)

And this astonishing list is only of plays in which he has at one time performed. There are more many more what is remarkable is the frequency with which suicide enters into drama, as though it were a formula fundamental to the drama. His contemplation upon suicide is the result of his alienation; physically he has no one to talk with, he is unable even to eat, and mentally he has lost his confidence. Now he has been finished from everything. So his traumatic psyche wants to get redeem by committing suicide.

In this regard National Depressive and Manic Depressive Association says: “after experiencing a traumatic event some people may have thought of suicide” (6).

Hoffman’s response also provides evidence of certain non-empathic emotions:

Feelings of hopelessness, incompetence, being weighed down by the burden of patients only hope. This can be intensely painful because such emotions threaten the individual’s professional identity and self-concept. He or she may have cynical. Paranoid- like feelings about the world due to frequent exposure to absurd and tortured patients, fear of patient’s harming oneself or someone else or of becoming involved in litigation. (11-15)

Axler also fears of harming himself and goes to the mental hospital. His professional identity as an actor is challenged so he is traumatized. Hoffman further describes that empathic over arousal not only produces nightmares, flashbacks and psychic numbing but also physical symptoms such as heavy breathing, gasping for air, heart rate acceleration, body shaking, dizziness, fatigue, neck tautness, hairs on back of neck standing up, stomach pain and tears. It can also hinder treatment by interfering with clinicians’ cognitive functioning. Simon Axler’s psychic numbness, spinal pain, fatigue, dizziness and body shaking are the production of his traumatic experience.

In the mental hospital, Axler is befriended with one of the traumatized characters in the novel, Sybil Van Buren. Buren gets mentally shocked when she saw her daughter being raped by her rich and powerful second husband. After seeing this incident, Buren not only gets shocked and haunted, but also prone to involve in the violent action. Therefore, her traumatic psyche compulsively wants to kill that child sexual abuser. She says her traumatic story as:

In the living room, the golf game was still going on, but my eight years old daughter, my little Alison, was sitting up on the sofa without her

underpants and “my reach and powerful second husband” was kneeling on the floor, his head between her plump little legs.

What was he doing there?

What men do there? . . . There I lay for four days unable to speak or eat barely able to drag myself to the bathroom. (22)

When we witness or experience traumatic events such as an act of violence or a natural disaster, we are affected mentally and emotionally whether we are personally involved in the incident, have family or friends who are injured or killed. Her stepfather mercilessly exploits Buren’s eight-year-old daughter Alison. How much the child is traumatized is unimaginable. Neither she can object nor can she tell it to her mother because of the fear. Father is a morally and ethically responsible figure in a family. However, ironically in *The Humbling* father figure is not responsible in the family rather he has become a child sexual abuser. Modern capitalism has destroyed the ethical and relational values of human beings. Thus, Roth criticizes the consumer culture through the means of father character. According to Jeffrey Alexander; trauma is not a naturally existing phenomenon rather it is constructed by society. It needs to be constructed by morally responsible members of society so that people are not left to suffer alone. However constructing the trauma often contradicts the truth. Primo Levi Strauss expands on the central conundrum of trauma representation and construction:

We can construct a comprehensible story of the past only by a decision to give up one or more of the domains of facts offering themselves for inclusion in our accounts. Our explanations of historical structures and processes are thus determined more by what we leave out of our representation than by what we put in. for it is in this brutal capacity to exclude certain facts in the interest of constituting others as

components of comprehensible stories that the historian displays his fact as well as his understanding.(14)

By seeing what happened in the living room, Sybil Van Buren could not speak. She was barely able to drag herself to the bathroom. Psychologically she was damaged because she used to love her daughter unlike her husband:

‘I was paralyzed,’ she says that she did nothing that she should have done. She should have rushed the child to the doctor. She should have called the police that was the criminal act there are laws against such immoral things. Instead she did nothing but he said nothing had happened. He says that I m hysterical, that I m deluded, that I m mad, but I m not. I swear to you Simon I m not mad, ‘I saw him doing it.’  
(23-24)

Unexpectedly Buren encountered with the event so she was paralyzed. Her rich and powerful second husband charges her to be hysterical and mad but she was not actually mad as she says, “I swear to you Simon I m not mad”. In this context, Freud has said “Hysterical women suffered from memory of sexual abuses did match the traumatic phenomenon of soldiers, namely that they too suffered from memories of an overwhelming event that they had been unable to cognitively register at the time it happened” (30).

Victoria is one of the minor characters who also gets traumatic shock in the novel. Victoria, a well dancer who cries seeing Simon at the kitchen table, his head in his hands and he is unable to eat the meal that she has prepared. ‘Crying’ is the expression of trauma or extreme depression. Axler is out of a job, a job from which he gained his identity. Unable to act on stage, he feels that his life is bereft of a plot. For Axler, life becomes meaningless; he becomes so depressed that even his caring wife cannot bear to live with him. For this renowned actor, the only act left is suicide:



Victoria, Axler's wife, would cry whenever she saw him at the kitchen table, his head in his hands, unable to eat the meal she had prepared 'try something,' she begged but he ate nothing, said nothing, and soon Victoria began to panic. She had never seen him give way like this before, not even eight years earlier when his elderly parents had died in automobile crash. (7-8)

Simon Axler is the only person on whom she is depended. He is the only support for her life. Now because of his condition she is terrified enough as the holocaust documentary films caused secondary trauma on the viewer, Victoria was traumatized vicariously seeing the plight of her husband Simon Axler.

In the 1950s, Victoria powers had been Balanchine's youngest favorite. Then she hurt her knee, had an operation and by the time she was rehabilitated the second time round, someone else was Balanchine's youngest favorite. Then she never recovered her place. There was a marriage, the son, a divorce and then she met and fell in love with Simon Axler. "There was always a drug drama with her errant son. There was the permanent hardship of aging and the end of her career. So much disappointment, but he was there and she could bear it. Traumatic experience of Axler is related with the traumatic shocks received by her because now that the man on whom she had depended was gone" (8).

In the past, Victoria was physically traumatized. But now she is mentally and emotionally disturbed. This researcher claims that the traumatic experience of Victoria as National Depressive and Manic Depressive Association in 'coping with unexpected events: depression and trauma presents:

When we witness or experience a traumatic events such as an act of violence or a natural disaster, we are affected mentally and emotionally whether we are personally involved in the incident, have family or

friends who are injured or killed, are a rescue worker or health care provider or even if we learn about the event through the news, we will experience some sort of emotional response. Each of us react differently and there is no right or wrong way to feel. The emotional response each person has is a normal part of healing process. (3)

Though everyone is affected differently at different times, one may experience emotional numbness, feelings of disconnectedness, changing emotions such as shock, denial, guilt or self blame, extreme sadness and crying. Furthermore, traumatic events cause physical symptoms such as unexplained aches and pains, nausea, fatigue, loss of energy. Recurring memories and bad dreams about the events and change in eating habits or sleeping patterns are also the symptoms of physical and psychological trauma.

The doctor in the mental hospital describes ‘a universal nightmare.’ By this, he means that the actor’s misfortune in the theatre- going out the stage and finding himself unable to perform, the shock of that loss is the content of troubling dreams any number of people have about themselves. People who unlike Simon Axler aren’t professional actors, going out on the stage and being unable to perform are among the stock set of dreams that most every patient report at one time or another. According to the doctor, the actor’s misfortune in the theatre is the content of troubling dreams as most of the patients report it.

In the ‘Transformation’, second chapter of *The Humbling*, Simon Axler has a relation with pegeen, the daughter of his old acting friends. After sudden arrival of pegeen in his life, he has been somehow optimistic. Before her arrival, he is alone in his home. He is forsaken by his audience, divorced by his wife. He has been living alone in the depressed mentality. He does not have even a drop of happiness:

Yet before her arrival, he had been sure he was finished: with acting, with women, with people, finished forever with happiness. He had been in serious physical distress for over a year barely able to walk any distance or to stand or sit for very long because of the spinal pain that he had put up with all his adult life but whose debilitating progress had accelerated and so he was sure he was finished with everything.

(45)

He thinks that he is finished from everything. His career is finished. His relation with people and women is finished with career so he wants to finish himself. Almost all the time there is suicide in his mind but after Pegeen's arrival in his life, postpones the suicidal thought for time being. From this point this researcher claims that love, help and family support are the fundamental things to save and make change in, the life of traumatic patients as National Depressive and Manic Depressive Association says to give supports and companionship. This involves understanding, patience, and encouragement.

Before Pegeen's arrival Axler's best friend dies. The name of his friend has not been mentioned in the novel. They used to share bed, eat meal, and talk about their problems and happiness together:

only the few months earlier his best and only local friend an eighty years old judge who had retired some years back, had died of cancer; as a result . . . he didn't have anyone with whom to talk or to eat a meal, let alone share a bed and he was thinking again about killing himself as often he had been before being hospitalized a year earlier. (45)

When he leaves Axler alone in this bizarre world then his thinking of killing himself comes ahead. His repeated thinking of killing himself, state of depression, his

disabilities even to walk, eat are the results of his traumatic psyche. Before Pegeen's arrival his condition was worsening day by day, he thinks that he is finished.

But Pegeen's transformation of sex, homo to hetero makes him really contented. She begins her affair by offering him a glass of water which is more enough for his loneliness of long time and a person always thinking of being finished from everything, thinking of killing himself. He starts thinking to drag his life which is inventory of his self defects:

In Pegeen's company he had begun to be rejuvenated because he had done everything in his power to get himself to believe that she who had begun by offering him a glass of water- only to go from there, to pulling off the feat of feats, the sex change act could indeed make contentment real with him. (118)

The couple of Pegeen and Axler were satisfied but pegeen's parents were not happy to know their relation so it caused them more pain. "There was a lot of trauma in that home for a long time after Pegeen told them what she was." Once Pegeen's parents were more troubled when they knew their daughter of being lesbian but there is more trouble in their house because again their daughter changed her sexual behavior and began love affair with a man twenty-five years of her senior who is unable to act now. He is an aging person of the same age of her parents that is more traumatic for her parents.

Dominick LaCapra in "Trauma, Absence, and Loss" says that historical losses can conceivably avoided or, when they occur, at least in part compensated for, worked through, and even to some extent overcome. Absence along with the anxiety it brings, could be worked through only in the sense that one may learn better to live with it and not convert it in to a loss or lack that one believes could be made good, notably through the elimination or victimization of those to whom blame is imputed (710):

Simon Axler had lost his magic. The impulse was spent . . . instead of the certainty that he was going to be wonderful, he knew he was going to fail, it happened three times in a row, and by the last time nobody was interested, nobody came. He could not get over his audience. His talent was dead . . . he detested his tears but he was all at once crying again, crying from the shame and loss and the rage all tangled together.

(136)

Simon Axler's individual loss of his career as a vibrant actor, talent is the fundamental cause of his emotional, physical and psychological trauma. His unexpected collapse due to the loss of his talent he loses his theatrical career as well as his identity as the last of the best of the classical American stage actors. His losses are not simple but colossal. Some losses may be traumatic while others are not and there variations in the intensity or devastating impact of trauma. There are also particular losses in all societies and cultures, indeed in all lives, but the ways in which they might be confronted differ from the responses more suited to absence. Dominick LaCapra further says by contrast to absence, loss is situated on a historical level and is the consequence of particular events. The nature of losses varies with the nature of events and responses to them.

The losses in the life of Simon Axler really do have the traumatic effects. He is experiencing trauma because of those losses. He responds them; loss of talent, loss of acting, loss of friend, loss of wife, loss of identity, very badly because of those losses his life has become very precarious. He does not feel strength that it has stopped his hopes of living. He has the experience of marital misery that is always painful and harsh for him as he says:

My life has been very precarious over the past few years. I do not feel the strength that it would take having my hopes dashed. I have had my

share of marital misery and before that my share of breakups with women. It is always painful, it is always harsh and I do not want to court it at this stage of life . . . it was now more like an athlete who has been injured and sidelined and is waiting to heal. (72)

Simon Axler's breakup with acting, women, audience, social life and thinking of breakup with himself (suicide) are always painful for him. There is the harsh reality that he has to cope seriously with them. Pegeen compares him as an athlete who has been sidelined from the playing because of physical injury as he is sidelined from the acting and she is hopeful in that his losses are not permanent so he will be recovered soon as an athlete waiting to heal. In this extract, Simon speaks himself unlike in other extracts as they are narrated only. So from this extract, this researcher points out the poignant traumatic reality from his own voice.

In *The Humbling*, Roth criticizes the modern capitalism which has created the cultural chaos through the characters like Louise Renner and Pegeen. Sex change act, lesbianism, and deceptions are the outcomes of modern capitalism. Louise Renner, the dean of a college gets traumatic shocks when her lesbian partner Pegeen deceives her within three weeks who meets Axler and says: "be forewarned, Mr. famous; she is desirable, she is audacious, and she is utterly ruthless, utterly cold hearted, incomparably selfish and completely amoral" (82). These words are revealed from the corner of her traumatic psyche. In these words, Pegeen's character is revealed that she is immoral. She deceives her lesbian partner because she promised to be together forever and three weeks later, she left. Pegeen is selfish in the sense that she makes relation to get job. After getting job, she leaves the dean. The dean further says, "She turned her Montana lover in to a man; she has turned me into a beggar and who knows "what she is turning you in to." Pegeen has not only changed the dean in to a beggar in the three weeks but also leaves her being traumatized as Jennifer Freyd puts:

when a parent or other powerful figure violates a fundamental ethic in human relationship, victims may need to remain unaware of the trauma not to reduce suffering but rather to promote survival". In *The Humbling* the Dean is unaware of the trauma not to reduce her suffering but to promote her survival. A well-known dean has been reduced to a beggar because of Pegeen's selfishness and immoral behavior. The dean can conceal her misery no longer and bursts in to tear.

The third and the last part of the novel 'The Last Act' begins with the patient sexual role of Simon Axler. Physically he cannot take active role even in the sexuality, which makes him more traumatic because his role has been changed from active to passive. Axler experiences physical and psychological trauma even in the course of sexual intercourse:

The pain from the spinal condition made it impossible for him to fuck her from above or even from the side, and so he lay on his back and she mounted him, supporting herself on her knees and her hands so as not to lower her weight on to his pelvis. (91)

Axler is suffering from the spinal pain from which he gets repeatedly shocked from not only physical traumas but also mental miseries. Axler is suffering from unexplained aches and pains. He has lost his bodily and mental energy. As Paula J. Clayton says, everyone is affected differently at different times; one may experience physical symptoms such as unexplained aches and pains, fatigue and the loss of energy. Because of the loss of energy and excruciating pain, Simon cannot fuck Pegeen from the above so he lies down passively.

Accurate representation of trauma can never be achieved without recreating the event since, trauma lies beyond the bounds of normal 'conception.' Since acting out from the traumatic experience is totally impossible therefore one who gets traumatic shocks is to create counterforce to mitigate the suffering and work through

the losses. Dominick La Capra in “Trauma, Absence, and Loss” talks about ‘acting out’ and ‘working through’ the traumatic memory experience.

Acting out from the losses is very hard so a traumatic victim acts through the memory. Acting out and working through which are interrelated modes of responding to loss or historical trauma. As I have intimated if the concepts of acting out and working through are to be applied to absence . . . I have argued elsewhere that mourning might be seen as a form of working through and melancholia as a form of acting out. (713)

Simon Axler is recreating his past in the company of Pegeen. He is working through his traumatic losses. Axler goes to the mental hospital. He tries to make love affair. While being with Pegeen he creates imaginative world. These are the some ways walked by Axler to mitigate the impacts of traumatic losses:

It was in the middle of the next week that he got around to reading the previous Friday’s country’s newspaper and the front-page story about the murder that had taken place in a well-to-do suburban town some twenty-five miles away, a man in his forties a successful plastic surgeon had been shot dead by his estranged wife. The wife was Sybil Van Buren. (100)

Axler reads this news repeatedly. From this event, he collects some courage to unlock his enchained thoughts of killing himself. Axler repeats himself for days afterward, “the suffering that’s going to be Alison’s” (105). It is probably the very thought that has driven to Sybil to murder her husband – thereby enlarging Alison’s suffering forever.

Sybil writes to Axler about the cause to kill her husband: “The monster that I was married to has done ineradicable damage to my family. The disaster was worse



than I knew when I was hospitalized. Terrible things had been going on for a long time without my knowing, anything about them, tragic things involving my little girl” (41). Sybil Van Buren experiences secondary trauma by witnessing the tragic things happened to her little daughter. More than that Allison has been more traumatized being sexually exploited by her bitch like stepfather. Neither she can resist nor can she speak to her mother about this exploitation. In this regard, Jennifer freyd puts:

Betrayal trauma theory suggests that psychogenic amnesia is an adaptive response to childhood abuse. When parent or other powerful figure violates a fundamental ethic of human relationships, victims may need to remain unaware of the trauma not to reduce suffering but rather to promote survival. Amnesia enables the child to maintain an attachment with a figure vital to survival, development, and thriving. Analysis of evolutionary pressures, mental modules, social cognitions, and developmental needs suggests that the degree to which the most fundamental human ethics are violated can influence the nature, form and process of trauma and responses to trauma. (49)

Sybil gets teary about not seeing the children otherwise she is unnervingly calm.

‘Does she talk about the murder’? He asks. She says: “It had to be done, you would think it was her fiftieth not her first. She is very in a strange state” (102-3). Trauma makes one very estrange and it has the compulsive nature. These words show compulsive nature of trauma so Buren violently determines to kill her husband.

In this novel Axler’s self winding to the mental hospital, making love affair with a lesbian, twenty-five years junior of him, his trying to live in the world of imagination and his thinking life as a role and trying to play according to it are some of the ways of working through and the responses to the traumatic losses. After the Kennedy centre debacle, he goes to the mental hospital for the cure of his physical

and mental problems. As the trauma is not totally cured, he searches some outlets and at least tries to act through the losses. Not only this but also he makes love affair with a lesbian and succeeds to transform her in to hetero for short time. This love takes spring in his life; he forgets all his traumatic past and lives in the present. Pegeen begins her love by offering him a glass of water and bandages his cuts. This friendship and support really plays a vital role to suppress his 'thanatos' (death drive) because he has done everything in his power to get himself to believe that she who begins by offering him a glass of water – the sex-change act indeed makes contentment real with him. As Dominick La Capra in 'Trauma Studies: Its critics and Vicissitudes' argues:

Working through trauma does not imply the possibility of attaining total integration of the self-including the retrospective feat of putting together seamlessly the riven experience of the past trauma. Any such retrospective "suturing" would itself be phantasmatic or illusory.

Working through means work on post traumatic symptoms in order to mitigate the effects of trauma by generating counter-force to compulsive repetition, thereby enabling a more viable articulation of affects or cognition or representation, as well as ethical and sociopolitical agency in the present and future. (119)

Axler tries to live in the world of imagination. He works on his post-traumatic symptoms by imagining as if he is a perfect man. His imaginations are germinated with the company of Pegeen as the narrator says. 'I want to have a child.' He imagined her telling him when she came in to the kitchen after the shower, 'I want to have a child.' 'With whom?' he imagined himself asking her. 'With you, you are the choice of my life.' I am closing in on seventy, when the child is ten, I will be seventy-five, seventy six. By then I may not be your choice. I will be in the wheel chair with

this spine of mine, if not already dead. ‘Forget about my family,’ he imagined her saying ‘I want you to be the father of my child.’ (116)

It does not matter whether the things that he imagines happen in his real life or not, but he fulfills his desires at least in his imagination which leads him to the temporary satisfaction. Axler creates counterforce to reduce the traumatic effects not only by making love affair with Pegeen but also imagining the least likely things. Dominick La Capra further says: “In so far as trauma is trans-historical we can learn how to live better with its attendant anxiety and not mystifyingly attribute it to an event as its putative cause or project responsibility for it on to a discrete group of scapegoats” (119). He imagines Pegeen replying: “It’s the next step if we are to continue. I want three things. I want you to have back surgery. I want you to resume your career. I want you to impregnate me” (117). He imagines his career being resumed after the surgery of his back and being able to impregnate her.

Not only this but also he imagines Pegeen having a healthy baby the very month that he opens at the Guthrie theatre in the role of James Tyrone. He finds Vincent Daniel’s card where he had left it as a bookmark in the copy of *Long Day’s Journey*. All those things that he imagines are related to his love for life. These things elongate his desire to live even being traumatized. His death drive is passive now. He not only imagines of being an active man but also he starts to feel as the narrator tells: “He felt that the stretch of bad luck was over. The self-inflicted torment was over. He had recovered his confidence, the grief was displaced, the abominable fear was dispelled and everything that had fled him was back where it belonged” (119). He imagines very deeply that he is able to feel his confidence. He feels everything that he has lost being back where they belong.

As trauma is trans-historical, we can learn how to live better with its attendant anxiety. In this context, Dominick LaCapra in “Trauma Studies: its Critics and

Vicissitudes,” argues that traumatic memory may involve belated temporality and a period of latency between a real or fantasized early event and a latter one that somehow recalls it and triggers renewed repression, dissociation or foreclosure and intrusive behavior but when the past is uncontrollably relived, it is as if there were no difference between it and the present whether or not the past is reenacted or repeated in its precise literality, one experientially feels as if one were back there reliving the event, and distance between here and there, then and now collapses. (119)

Simon’s rejuvenation, imagination of all positive things and feelings of being confident are the result of his company with Pegeen but ironically Pegeen shows her real nature of being completely ruthless. At the climax of the novel she breaks her relation with Axler saying: “This is the end, she says to Axler at the breakfast table . . . ‘end of what?’ he asks. It’s not what I want” (126). This is the very antithesis of his expectations when he goes to see doctor Wan. Everything he wants, she is preventing him from having.

He does not want the relation to be ended but Pegeen says that the relation ends. Not only she prevents him to impregnate her, resume his career but also to recover his confidence and talent. He gets only temporary relief from imagination. The situation that is very like the way he had felt in Washington the last time he had tried to go out on a stage to perform. His present condition gives him the flashback of the failure that he made on the stage. Extremely depressed Simon Axler says:

‘You cannot nullify everything’, he shouts angrily and Pegeen the mightier of the two opens the door. ‘I tried to be perfect for you’ he says. Take the tools of your trade and go. Now your parent can sleep at night, you are no longer with an old man. Now there is no interloper between you and your father. You are unburdened of your impediment. (129)

Ironically, at the height of his joy in securing a lasting relationship with Pegeen, he is devastated when she tells him that she wishes to end the affair. His dream is shattered and his plot is over. He has lost his role in the play of imagination. Axler, bewildered and angry, tells Pegeen: "I was idiot enough to think you were doing what you wanted to do" (128). People with the traumatic psyche are not only haunted but also involve in the violent action. From here onward his compulsive nature of violent action rises.

Axler carries the gun in to Pegeen's study room and stood there looking at the room that she has striped of Victoria's wallpapers. He cannot pull the trigger even after he has gone so far as to place the barrel of the gun inside his mouth. What unlock his enchained will are two things; the first is the example of Sybil Van Buren, a diminutive, conventional suburban housewife he had befriended in the mental hospital. The other facilitator is Chekhov; it occurred to him to pretend that he was committing suicide in a play by Chekhov. It is his last serious turn at acting. For Axler, being an actor is a metaphor for being vigorously alive.

A play that had marked Axler's first big New York success, *The Seagull*, ends with the suicide of the sensitive young writer. Axler appropriates it as his own farewell. Sybil Van Buren has not only been the benchmark for the suicide of Axler she herself is suffering from the traumatic pathos. He challenged himself to remember tiny Sybil Van Buren, that conventional suburban housewife weighing less than a hundred pounds who took on the gruesome role of a murder and succeeded at it.

Before Pegeen's arrival he is about to be finished. Thirteen months' affair with her is fruitful for him. He could suppress his urge to kill himself only even for thirteen months but again her departure, he has nothing to live for. Now only role available to him is to die committing suicide. He tries several times to kill himself but cannot until and unless he remembers the action made by another patient Sybil Van Buren:

Sybil became the benchmark of the courage. He repeated to himself the inspiring formula to action, as though a simple word or two could get him to accomplish the most unreal of the things: “if she could do that, I can do this. If she could do that . . . until finally it occurred to him to pretend that he was committing suicide in a play” (139).

To make the imagined real he pretends that the attic is theatre and that he is Konstantin Gavrilovich Treplev in the concluding scene of *Seagull*. As in the *Seagull* Konstantin Gavrilovich Treplev killed himself, Axler made his imagination real. However, it was his attic where he really commits suicide. Axler cannot work through the losses thus violently kills himself.

A play that had marked Axler's first big New York success, *The Seagull*, ends with the suicide of the sensitive young writer. Axler appropriates it as his own farewell leaving the note of eight words: “the fact is konstantin Gavrilovich has shot himself”. The well-established stage star, once so widely heralded for his force as an actor, whom in his heyday people would flock to the theatre to see ‘*The Seagull*’. Ironically, the same play made him famous as a star and helped him to commit suicide.

In this way, Philip Roth's thirtieth novel *The Humbling* projects the traumatic psyche of the characters such as Simon Axler, Victoria, Sybil Van Buren, Pegeen's parents. Every character is one way or other traumatized in the novel though most of the narration revolves around the traumatic psyche of Simon Axler. He is traumatized because of the failure in the acting career and the losses; he lost his magical action, talent, audience, wife, beloved, and friend. This researcher shows how stage actors are being mentally traumatized and commit suicide. Thus, this project shows traumatic experience of the characters in *The Humbling*.

### III. Narrativizing Trauma and Roles of Capitalism and Patriarchy in *The Humbling*

Philip Roth in *The Humbling* narrativizes the traumatic psyche of the characters. Representative traumatic characters in this novel Simon Axler and Sybil Van Buren are the victims of modern capitalism. Roth as a critique of modern capitalistic ideology presents two iconic characters being suffered from the evils of capitalism. Axler is the representative of the artists who have been commodified in the consumer culture of capitalism and Buren is the representative of those females who have been victimized in the patriarchal society. Patriarchal ideology always tries to suppress female beings.

Axler even being renowned in his youth is mercilessly neglected in his old age. According to the narrator everybody used to know as a 'superstar' in his heyday of acting but now in his deplorable conditions nobody knows and cares of him. So that mentally and physically he is alienated. The alienation caused him to take part in the violent action of committing suicide. Buren gets traumatic shocks from seeing the raping incident of her little daughter by her step husband. He as an agent of modern capitalistic culture not only rapes her daughter but also makes an ineradicable damage to the familial relationship as a result Buren falls into mental illness. Gradually and rapidly human values have been damaged in the capitalism. Thus, Roth in this novel not only talks about the commodification of arts and artists but also talks about the gender violence to criticize the capitalist and patriarchal ideologies.

Protagonist of *The Humbling*, Simon Axler falls in the mental illness after his first breakdown on the stage performance at the Kennedy Centre. Then he is repeatedly drawn to the suicide. After that his misfortune every time he thinks of committing suicide. It is because of the compulsive nature of trauma that encourages the violent actions. His Emotional and psychological trauma is the result of

extraordinarily stressful events which make him hopeless and helpless. The more frightened and helpless he feels, the more likely he is to be traumatized. Buren becomes traumatized because of gender trauma. Her daughter is raped by her own step husband. In the capitalist and patriarchal ideology even basic human and ethical values have no places.

Thus, *The Humbling* narrativises not only the traumatic experiences of the characters as it is in the novel, but also claims 'capitalism' and 'patriarchy' as the main causes of psychological and gender trauma. He also shows the possible consequences of such trauma if not resolved properly through the Axler's suicide and Buren's murder to her own husband.



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