Annotated Bibliography:

“Breaking the Silence: Voicing Testimony of Rape Trauma in Djuna Barnes’ *The Antiphon*”


Alcoff and Gray-Rosendale’s well-known essay in the field of rhetoric develops an understanding of speech within the context of the trauma survivor. Building on Foucault’s concept of discourse, Alcoff and Gray-Rosendale reason that the “survivor strategy must continue to develop and explore ways in which we can gain autonomy within (not over) the conditions of our discourse” (287). Their essay presents the challenges the rape survivor must face in attempting to break the silence of her trauma.


Altman’s essay concentrates on how *The Antiphon* takes issue with the notions of speech and silence. Her essay sets close-readings of the play against the autobiographical edge of the play. She suggests that the play presents a “difficulty in finding a language in which the truth can be told” (283). In this way, her reading evokes rhetorical theory as well as theories of trauma.

Barnes’ play, first published in 1958, serves as the foundational text for this paper. The play captures Barnes’ signature avant-garde aesthetics. Its dealings with rape and incest are often viewed within an “autobiographical context,” as biographer Philip Herring states in *Djuna: The Life and Works of Djuna Barnes* (267). I would argue that Barnes’ text serves as a discursive site of survival within the trauma of rape.

Bernard-Donals, Michael. "The Rhetoric of Disaster and the Imperative of Writing."


Bernard-Donals essay looks at the limitations imposed upon rhetoric by trauma. He discusses the uncanny nature of the traumatic event to belatedly register with the survivor and how this makes for a “limit to knowledge;” Writing the event is “founded on a displacement of knowledge rather than its production” (74). Utilizing the well-known Caruth model of trauma, Bernard-Donals offers interesting questions about how the rhetoric of disaster complicates ethics. In turn, these questions might be further complicated when a rhetoric of disaster manifests itself in a creative work that is at once semi-autobiographical and intended for an outside audience such as *The Antiphon*.


The Gorgias’ *Encomium of Helen* in Bizzell and Herzberg offers a piece of classical rhetoric that helps historically ground a discussion on the power and limitations of speech. It is particularly relevant in its dealings with the rape of Helen. Intriguingly, it also conjures currents theories of the phenomenon of trauma (I’m not sure if anyone has
written on this connection): “It had happened that people, after having seen frightening sights, have also lost presence of mind for the present moment; in this way fear extinguishes and excludes thought” (46). How (and when) does thought then re-enter in the face of fear?


Butler’s text helps frame the feminist angle of my project. In her discussion of the discursive construction of bodies, Butler evokes questions of normative conceptions of gender and sex. Her concepts imply that the rape of the female body enacts a traumatic event that takes place not only in the physical locale (the actual body) but also the discursive site of the female body (how the female body is constructed through discourse). I believe this notion is particularly interesting in its application to close-readings of Barnes’ text.


Caruth’s *Unclaimed Experience* is a seminal text in trauma studies (particularly as it applies to literature). Heavily pulling from the work of Freud, Caruth sets up a model for understanding the traumatic event as one that fails to register with the psyche at the time of its occurrence. In turn, the plight of the trauma victim is a ceaseless attempt to experience a moment that was never claimed by the psyche (hence, the title of Caruth’s book). How does the trauma victim then come to bear witness to that which she never lived? This question is at the heart of Caruth’s work. It informs my project by raising
more questions about what Barnes is doing by writing out the trauma of the rape and incest she suffered as a young girl in a play. Can rhetoric enact witnessing?


The sister work to Unclaimed Experiences, this text compiles the work of several pioneering thinkers in trauma. The Introduction by Caruth speaks of the psychological effects of trauma (PTSD). Reclaiming the past and attempting to make sense of traumatic memories is a process that takes place within language. As traumatic memories locate themselves within discursive structures they conjure a collective. In other words, how the individual deals with trauma is always embedded within a historical and collective discourse. For the nature of this paper, this text helps to inform how the rape victim’s attending to her trauma is indebted to a long standing historical and collective struggle of the horror and violence of sexism. Caruth’s ideas about the collective aid in exploring how Barnes text speaks to a collective female voice.


Caselli offers a counter-argument to reading The Antiphon within a biographical context. Pointing to Barnes’ letters, she offers evidence that the writer rejected the idea of reducing literature to cathartic self-expression. Caselli pays close attention to the aesthetics of Barnes’ work and draws claims to suggest how these aesthetics inform a project which is aiming to do much more than rid a writer of her personal childhood trauma.

DeSalvo presents the argument with which Caselli mainly takes issue. He reads *The Antiphon* through a biographical lens. Though close-readings of the play, he looks to its language to understand it as not only speaking out against the trauma of rape and incest suffered by Barnes but also suffered by a broader female collective: “*The Antiphon* is Barnes’ antiphon to...every...patriarchal text in which the drama of submission of daughters to fathers is celebrated rather than condemned” (315).


Freud’s work, mainly in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, is the basis of Caruth’s understanding of trauma. In this text, Freud lays out the concept of repression and remembering. Not able to reconstruct the traumatic event in the present, the trauma victim is forced to hopelessly repeat the move from repression to remembering. Freud’s theories along with Caruth’s, in essence, challenge the idea of survival. If the trauma victim cannot come to terms with the traumatic event, then how does she survive? If Barnes’ work represents a mode of survival, as I am suggesting, then how is it functioning?


Herman is a psychiatrist whose work on trauma has served as a unifying force between the literary realm of trauma and its interdisciplinary counterpart of neuroscience. Reviewing her clinical work with victims of domestic and sexual abuse, Herman
understands testimony as an important step in the recovery of trauma. I look to her work to explore the notion of the literary text as a site of testimony.


Herring’s work is the only comprehensive biography of Barnes. His work will provide the biographical information about the rape and incest suffered by Barnes as a young girl.


Hesford’s essay brings up the intriguing concept of retraumatization. Looking at the autobiographical documentary *Rape Stories* by Margie Strosser, Hesford poses the challenges of the female rape victim/artist in finding a recuperative voice in the midst of testifying to trauma within the realm of public art. Hesford’s essay is useful in the way it questions the positive and negative sides of bearing witness to trauma.


In this work, Longman looks at the longstanding connection between rhetoric and drama. Longman primarily understands this relationship to be based on the concept of audience. Both rhetoric and drama, Longman claims are “founded on the notion of society, any audience being a compendium of its society” (5). His text informs a fundamental understanding of drama as being inextricably tied to rhetoric.

Rashkin is a psychoanalytic literary theorist as well as a clinical psychoanalyst. (She was also the moderator of my Rape Trauma panel at the GWU Trauma Conference.)

In *Unspeakable Secrets*, Rashkin makes an intriguing claims about the power of the speaking in the healing process of trauma. As both literary theorist and clinical psychoanalyst, Rashkin’s work attempts to link the act of close reading in literary text to that of listening to patients. Her work helps to connect the dots, so to speak, between how a literary close-reading and an analysis of rhetoric can inform of an understanding of what it means to bear witness to trauma.