

TRAUMA AS A CATALYST FOR SELF-DISCOVERY IN JIMÉNEZ'S *WHAT HAPPENED TO RUTHY RAMIREZ*

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Abstract

Trauma is a central thematic element in Claire Jiménez's What Happened to Ruthy Ramirez, and this study delves into its psychological underpinnings through the lens of Freudian psychoanalysis. Applying qualitative research methods, the study uncovers the deep and lasting impact of both childhood and adult trauma on the protagonist's psyche. Ruthy's trauma, stemming from early childhood experiences, is explored through the lens of Freud's theories of the unconscious, defense mechanisms, and the ways in which trauma manifests in adulthood. Through a detailed analysis of key narrative moments, the study reveals how Ruthy's emotional responses, sense of self-worth, and interactions with others are directly shaped by repressed traumatic memories. These traumas, including experiences of family violence, loss, and neglect, are explored in the context of both individual and collective psychological scars. The research underscores the ripple effect of trauma across Ruthy's relationships with family members, highlighting how trauma is not only an individual experience but also a shared familial legacy that influences multiple generations. Freud's framework illuminates the mechanisms of coping and defense that Ruthy employs to protect herself from confronting her trauma, and how these mechanisms paradoxically maintain the emotional pain they seek to avoid. The findings suggest that trauma, in its various forms, shapes the protagonist's emotional landscape and underscores the narrative's exploration of the long-term psychological consequences of unresolved pain. The study emphasizes the importance of acknowledging trauma in literary studies, as well as its relevance in real-world psychological healing and recovery processes.

Keywords: Emotional Pain, Family Violence, Childhood Trauma, Psychological Healing

1. Introduction:

Trauma plays a critical role in shaping an individual's psychological framework, affecting how they perceive the world, their identity, and their relationships. In Claire Jiménez's *What Happened to Ruthy Ramirez* (2023), trauma is central to the characters' emotional and psychological development, particularly within the Ramirez family. Through Freudian psychoanalytic theory, this study examines how trauma, particularly unresolved trauma, affects the characters' behaviors, decisions, and interactions. Freudian concepts of the unconscious mind and the defense mechanisms—such as repression, denial, and displacement—are applied to explore how trauma lingers beneath the surface of the characters' consciousness and manifests in their daily lives. The research seeks to identify how trauma shapes the identity and choices of Ruthy, her sisters Jessica and Nina, and their mother Dolores. By utilizing a psychoanalytic framework, this study aims to trace how trauma shapes the Ramirez family's emotional responses, relationships, and overall coping strategies. It will also analyze how the characters' trauma is not merely an individual experience but is interwoven into the larger family system, affecting the dynamics and overall cohesion of the family unit.

1.1 Background of the Study

Jiménez's *What Happened to Ruthy Ramirez* (2023) is centered around the disappearance of Ruthy, which becomes the emotional core of the family's unraveling. This traumatic event triggers a cascade of psychological responses in Ruthy's family, as each member struggles with the loss and attempts to manage their emotional pain. Dolores, Ruthy's mother, experiences an ongoing sense of guilt and responsibility over her daughter's disappearance,

which manifests in her actions and interactions with others. Nina, Ruthy's sister, attempts to avoid dealing with her trauma by distancing herself from the family, refusing to acknowledge the emotional pain of Ruthy's loss. Jessica, on the other hand, becomes hyper-vigilant and overcompensates by attempting to control situations around her, desperately trying to regain a sense of power in the wake of trauma. These responses exemplify different coping mechanisms for trauma, highlighting Freud's theory that trauma can manifest in various ways, such as repression, displacement, and sublimation. The traumatic experiences faced by Ruthy's family not only shape their individual psyches but also affect their collective family dynamics. The study will explore how the characters' individual responses to trauma—whether through avoidance, guilt, or overcompensation—ultimately lead to family discord and hinder healing. By analyzing these psychological responses through the lens of Freudian theory, the study aims to shed light on the long-term effects of trauma, providing a deeper understanding of its role in shaping identity and familial relationships.

1.2 Significance of the Study The research holds theoretical and practical significance for trauma studies in literary criticism. By focusing on the trauma faced by Ruthy Ramirez and her family, the study explores how traumatic experiences shape identity, influence psychological responses, and affect relationships. Theoretically, the research aims to deepen the understanding of trauma in the context of literary narratives, particularly using Freudian psychoanalytic theory to examine how trauma shapes the unconscious mind and emotional behaviors. Practically, the study offers insights into the long-term effects of trauma and the different coping mechanisms employed by individuals, making it a valuable resource for both literary scholars and those working in psychology and trauma therapy. The study will contribute to the ongoing conversation about the representation of trauma in literature and its relevance to real-world psychological healing and recovery processes.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

This research aims to examine the multifaceted psychological trauma experienced by Ruthy Ramirez and her family in Claire Jiménez's *What Happened to Ruthy Ramirez* (2023). The narrator presents a narrative saturated with traumatic events that shape the emotional and psychological states of the characters, particularly Ruthy and her family members. Ruthy's unexplained disappearance is the central traumatic event that ripples through the family, causing profound emotional distress and long-lasting psychological effects. By applying Freudian psychoanalysis, this study investigates how trauma manifests in the characters' behaviors, relationships, and mental health, with particular attention to its impact on identity and familial bonds. The trauma resulting from Ruthy's absence not only affects her directly but also ripples out, influencing her mother, Dolores, and her sisters, Jessica and Nina. The study aims to explore the specific traumatic experiences encountered by each character and how they cope with their pain in different ways. By uncovering the emotional and psychological layers of trauma, the research will provide insights into the long-term consequences of unresolved trauma on family dynamics and personal development, offering a deeper understanding of the interplay between trauma and identity.

1.4 Research Objectives

- To identify and analyze the specific traumatic experiences faced by the individual and family members.
- To explore the long-term psychological consequences of trauma on the family's dynamics and individual identities.
- To understand the interaction between trauma and coping mechanisms, focusing on the impact of Ruthy's disappearance on her family members.

2. Literature Review

The concept of trauma has evolved with the passage of time. It has also been shaped by various perspectives and understandings. Initially, early trauma-related disorders conceptions focused more on physical signs of distress. Later, the current views emphasize mental symptoms which are aroused by experiences of trauma. Now, trauma is understood through an evolutionary perspective. This means that our physical and psychological reactions to traumatic events aroused to help us survive. This evolutionary perspective shows that different defensive behaviors and reactions. These express how trauma come from basic survival mechanisms. These mechanisms are connected to show how we react to stress, such as danger or life-threatening situations (Caruth, C. 1995).

In healthcare, the development of trauma systems, has been important for treating injuries and improving recovery results. Trauma systems are very important because trauma is a leading cause of death among young people. This has created a need for specialized care and regional health systems to handle trauma in a proper way. The development of civilian trauma systems has faced many challenges. With the passage of time, it has resulted in lower death rates and new chances for large-scale research of trauma. Regionalized healthcare in trauma systems has become a model for other urgent medical areas such as stroke and heart attacks. This approach tells the need for ongoing improvements, strong infrastructure, public education, and integrated technology in trauma care.

Trauma is a psychological and emotional response to a distressing or life-threatening event that overwhelms an individual's ability to cope (Giller, 1999). The effects of trauma extend beyond the initial experience, often leading to long-term psychological consequences such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), dissociation, and emotional dysregulation (Yehuda, 1998). Researchers have found that trauma can significantly alter brain function, particularly in regions such as the amygdala, hippocampus, and prefrontal cortex, which are responsible for emotional regulation, memory processing, and cognitive control (Schimmenti, 2018). Trauma exposure is widespread, with studies suggesting that over 60% of people experience at least one traumatic event in their lifetime (Mills et al., 2011). However, the way individuals respond to trauma varies based on factors such as personal resilience, social support, and cultural influences.

Trauma is classified into three major types: acute, chronic, and complex trauma. Acute trauma results from a single distressing event, such as a car accident or natural disaster, which may cause intense anxiety, flashbacks, and hypervigilance (McNally, 2003). Chronic trauma arises from prolonged exposure to traumatic situations, such as domestic violence or war, leading to severe emotional and cognitive impairments (Putnam & Trickett, 1993). Complex trauma is particularly linked to childhood neglect and abuse, significantly disrupting emotional regulation, identity formation, and interpersonal relationships (Cook et al., 2005). The intergenerational transmission of trauma is another important aspect of trauma research, where the psychological distress experienced by one generation is passed down to the next. Bernstein (1998) found that unresolved trauma within families leads to patterns of emotional distress in future generations, and Thorson et al. (2012) explored how historical trauma, such as colonial oppression, impacts familial and communal relationships. Neuroscientific research has further revealed that trauma affects stress hormone regulation, leading to long-term emotional and cognitive disturbances (Blennow et al., 2012). Yehuda (1998) found that individuals with PTSD exhibit hyperactivity in the amygdala, which results in an exaggerated fear response. Additionally, trauma survivors often experience memory retrieval impairments due to structural changes in the hippocampus, which regulates emotional and episodic memory processing (Schimmenti, 2018). These

findings highlight the profound impact trauma has on both the brain and overall psychological well-being.

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is one of the most extensively studied consequences of trauma. It is characterized by four primary symptoms: intrusive thoughts, avoidance behaviors, negative changes in cognition and mood, and heightened arousal (Blake et al., 1995). PTSD significantly affects social relationships and daily functioning, often leading to isolation, difficulty maintaining trust, and emotional numbness (Shepherd & Wild, 2014). To address the impact of trauma, trauma-informed care (TIC) has emerged as a crucial framework that emphasizes safety, empowerment, and resilience-building (Bruce et al., 2018). Marshall and Kuijer (2017) further highlight that trauma has significant effects on interpersonal relationships, making survivors more prone to trust issues and social withdrawal.

Trauma has been a recurring theme in literature, offering insights into its psychological and societal impact. Berger (1997) argues that trauma literature plays a vital role in exploring the complexities of memory, identity, and resilience. Freud's psychoanalytic theory of trauma suggests that repression plays a critical role in shaping traumatic experiences, influencing how individuals process and recall distressing events (Erdelyi, 2006). Historical research on trauma also suggests that societies often repress collective traumatic events to maintain social stability. Mitscherlich & Mitscherlich (1967) argue that postwar Germany's inability to mourn Holocaust victims reflects collective repression and avoidance. Recent trauma studies continue to examine how collective memory, silence, and intergenerational trauma influence identity formation. Despite extensive research on trauma, significant gaps remain in understanding how trauma influences memory retrieval and identity development. One key area of research that requires further exploration is the role of repression in shaping traumatic memories over time. Additionally, there is limited research on how generational trauma affects familial relationships and personal identity. Literary narratives offer a unique perspective on trauma, yet there is a lack of scholarly work connecting trauma studies with contemporary literature. Jiménez's *What Happened to Ruthy Ramirez* (2023) presents an opportunity to bridge these gaps by examining how trauma impacts family dynamics, memory retention, and identity.

2.1 Previous Researches

Trauma has been widely studied in psychology, neuroscience, and literature, with significant research conducted on its psychological, emotional, and physiological effects. One of the earliest and most influential studies on trauma was conducted by Freud (1920), who introduced the concept of traumatic neurosis, emphasizing that unresolved trauma could manifest in symptoms such as anxiety, nightmares, and emotional repression. Freud's theories laid the foundation for modern trauma studies, particularly in understanding the unconscious processing of traumatic memories.

Since Freud, trauma research has expanded significantly. Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) became a recognized psychological condition following extensive studies on war veterans. Van der Kolk and Fisler (1995) examined how traumatic experiences impact memory processing, finding that individuals with PTSD often experience fragmented and intrusive recollections of traumatic events. Their research emphasized the role of the amygdala and hippocampus in shaping traumatic memories, leading to the development of trauma-focused therapies. Similarly, Williams (1994) conducted longitudinal studies on childhood trauma survivors, demonstrating that many individuals repress memories of abuse, only recalling them later in life.

The field of developmental trauma has also gained attention. Cook et al. (2005) examined complex trauma, which results from prolonged exposure to distressing experiences, such as

childhood neglect or repeated abuse. Their research highlighted how complex trauma affects emotional regulation, cognitive development, and interpersonal relationships. Putnam and Trickett (1993) explored the long-term effects of childhood sexual abuse, revealing its significant role in the development of dissociative disorders and emotional dysregulation.

Intergenerational trauma has also been a focus of contemporary research. Bernstein (1998) and Thorson et al. (2012) examined how trauma is transmitted across generations, particularly in marginalized and historically oppressed communities. Their studies showed that children of trauma survivors often exhibit psychological symptoms similar to those experienced by their parents, even if they did not directly experience the traumatic event themselves.

Neuroscientific studies have further expanded trauma research. Yehuda (1998) explored the neurobiological effects of trauma, finding that trauma survivors exhibit altered cortisol levels, contributing to heightened stress responses. Blennow et al. (2012) examined the structural changes in the brain associated with trauma, particularly in the prefrontal cortex, hippocampus, and amygdala. These findings have been instrumental in understanding PTSD and developing trauma-informed treatments.

Despite these significant studies, research gaps remain. Many studies have focused on individual trauma experiences, but fewer have examined the intersection of trauma and cultural narratives, particularly in literature. Additionally, more research is needed to explore how trauma affects identity formation and interpersonal relationships over time. The novel *What Happened to Ruthy Ramirez* provides an opportunity to explore these areas, particularly in relation to familial trauma, memory retention, and generational violence.

3. Theoretical Framework

In analyzing trauma within *What Happened to Ruthy Ramirez*, this study employs Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory to understand the long-lasting psychological effects of traumatic events, particularly Ruthy's disappearance. Freud's ideas about the unconscious mind, defense mechanisms, and the impact of unresolved psychological conflicts provide the foundation for exploring how trauma manifests in the characters' behaviors and relationships. Trauma, as defined by Freud, involves deeply upsetting experiences that create lasting emotional scars, often marked by extreme feelings of fear, helplessness, or terror. The study will investigate how Ruthy's family members—Dolores, Jessica, and Nina—each cope with the trauma of Ruthy's disappearance in different ways, and how this trauma shapes their emotional responses, behaviors, and identities. Freud's framework allows for a detailed exploration of the psychological responses to trauma, such as repression, avoidance, and overcompensation, and how these responses shape the characters' relationships with one another. By focusing on trauma through a psychoanalytic lens, this study aims to uncover the deep psychological wounds that each character carries and how these wounds influence their interactions and mental health. The theoretical framework helps guide the exploration of how trauma impacts individual psyches and familial dynamics, offering valuable insights into the psychological processes that shape the characters' lives.

4. Textual Analysis of Trauma Themes from the Text

The trauma faced by Ruthy Ramirez and her family can be illustrated by analyzing the following text lines:

Afterwards, sometimes, as a teenager I would stand at the bus stop where my sister went missing, concentrating on the deli down the block, the way the sign on its front door would blink the word open. I tell you I would stand there squinting for so long that time the bus would stop and mistake me for somebody waiting. I tried to picture it, 1996: thirteen-year-old



Ruthy is standing there outside after track practice, five o'clock, alone, book bag graffitied by Sharpies, her red hair knotted and wrapped into a bun. (Page1)

In the initial part of the excerpt which is narrated from Nina's point of view, the element of trauma can be identified in her revelation of the spot at the bus stop where her sister Nina went missing. For the audience, the passage depicts certain eeriness and fading traumatic feeling that Nina undergoes the attempt to imagine that place where Ruthy was once alive. The action that consists in 'standing at the bus stop' and 'concentrating on the deli down the block' implies that Nina is obsessed with the circumstances of the tragedy that had befallen Ruthy, as if she tries to somehow find something, some information on the scene of the catastrophe. To that extent, the behavior depicted in the film is indicative of how trauma puts paid to any change and the fact that the narrator is still pursuing the matter concerning her missing sister speaks volumes. Another way that it draws attention to the trauma of a scene is through the written picture painted of Ruthy: "Thirteen-year-old Ruthy is standing there outside after track practice, five o'clock, alone, book bag graphited by sharpies, her red hair knotted and wrapped into a bun." The level of detail which is depicted in this image gives the impression that this event is etched in the memory of Nina, a constant memory of the last time when she met her missing sister. The sociological aspect is also reflected in the helplessness of the narrator and the attempts to somehow influence the situation or at least prevent what is happening. In the sequence where Nina tries to imagine the event while standing at the bus stop, the author presents the reader with the aftermath of the girls' loss and how they could not save Ruthy anymore and how that has changed the family.

These lines can fit the elements of psychoanalysis by far, and more specifically in connection with repression, dissociation, and the Unconscious. Another proof to the fact that the main character tries to push the traumatic story of the sister's disappearance under the rug, one can call the act of the speaker standing close to the bus stop where the sister vanished, and the attempt at concentrating on the deli sign. But if the speaker focuses on the trivialities of the surrounding environment, it is an attempt to avoid the inevitable, sad truth.

Once Ma got her hands on the receiver, she dialed the school, but nobody was picking up. Then she called my father at work and started flipping out in Spanish. It was now approaching seven thirty and Ruthy wasn't home. No phone call. No nothing. (Page2)

Here the theme of trauma is well represented in the Ramirez family especially the sisters when Ruthy disappeared. In the morning when Ruthy does not come home from school and is not picking up her phone her mother gets worried and begins by calling the school and Ruthy's father at work. It gives a feeling that something is wrong and the family is scared as all hope is lost. These two time indications such as 'now approaching seven thirty', and the lack of communication from Ruthy make the story tension filled and raises concern for the well-being of the character. Mother reacts in a rather emotional manner, which can be interpreted as 'flipping out in Spanish' and seems to be overwhelmed by the events described. This outburst captures a struggle of not knowing the whereabouts of Ruthy's affairs and a possible life event that befalls her. [So do] the stigmatization of the case and the absence of details and information people can get to answer some of their questions, like Ruthy's family. The passage gives the gloomy emotion they experience during this passage as well as when they wake up from the operation and notice that something is wrong, yet they do not know what the problem is. These lines help envision the circumstances when everything that Ramirez family held as dear is suddenly upset by Ruthy's disappearance.

The relations of these lines can also be discussed in terms of psychoanalysis because various points if it is connected with anxiety, defense, and the unconscious. The mother's panic, which is evident from her phone calls to the school and to her husband at work or Use of

Spanish language which may be her first language, depicts a woman who is extremely worried and concerned by her daughter Ruthy's disappearance. It can be attributed to the mother's inability to reach Ruthy and at this time there is no response from the daughter. In psychoanalytic theory, anxiety is defined as a sign of danger that the ego employs in order to exert pressure on a particular entity with a purpose of ensuring that protection is mounted against risks that may cause further overwhelming feelings. That is why the mother is upset or literally flipping out: she develops a defense mechanism to deal with the anxiety that appears. The rationality, known by Freud as the unconscious mind, which contains the primitive wishes and the impulses, might be dealing with the traumatic event of Ruthy's disappearance.

Not once that I could remember. After she ran, Ruthy always arrived on time, six p.m. for dinner, hungry and eager to replace whatever energy she'd lost. (Page3)

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Ma made me and Jess put on a coat and loaded us into the car to drive out to IS 6. Then she told us to roll down the windows and call out for Ruthy, "Loud, girls, so she can hear you. (Page3)

In the given passage, one of the major theme is that of trauma, exemplified by Ramirez family's frantic search for their missing daughter, Ruthy. Another aspect of tension fruits with the manner in which the mother instructs the narrator and Jessica to shout the name of Ruthy from the car with its windows rolled down, it shows that the family is distressed and concerned in their efforts to find Ruthy. This is evident when the mother order everyone to shout as loud as they can most probably as a last ditch effort to get the attention of Ruthy. This scene depicts the confusion and post-traumatic stress the family undergoes as they suffer from the loss of Ruthy and more so the fear of the unknown. The act of driving around, of

calling out for Ruthy represents the desperate attempts of the family to find her [the missing person] and a strong desire to find them when one's loved one is missing or kidnapped. The theme of trauma is prevalent in the search for Ruthy and all the rollercoaster of emotions, mixed feeling as well as the state of fear that comes with someone's kid missing.

Therefore, their mother's actions of taking the speaker and their sister Jessica, putting appropriate coats on and driving to the school just to shout for Ruthy can be explained with the psychoanalytic perspective mainly regarding anxiety and defense mechanisms as well as the consideration of the unconscious. The nervousness of the mother, seen through her actions of loading the children into the car and telling them to shout Ruthy's name shows that she is anxious because of her daughter's disappearance. It seems that the unconscious mind, which Freud ascribes to be the source of primitive wishes and instincts, is probably dealing with the traumatic reality of Ruthy's disappearance. The actions of the mother are unconscious and are made with the aim to regain the control of the situation and thus – decrease her anxiety.

Sometimes it feels like the three of us are still stuck in that car.

Shouting out Ruthy's name into the unanswering dark.

For a straight month the cops rolled up and down the block asking everybody the same questions, whether or not Ruthy had a boyfriend? "Or maybe one of youse saw her after school walking back that night to the house? A skinny looking girl?"

Five foot one. Long red hair. A beauty mark beneath her left eye. (page3,4)

Thus, in these lines, the theme of/and trauma is masterfully embodied by the Ramirez family's unrelenting pursuit of Ruthy and the number of questions surrounding her disappearance. This is because the traumatized family never comes out of the terrible event whenever the narrator says, 'Sometimes it feels like the three of us are still stuck in that car.' Shouting out Ruthy's name into the unanswering dark'. The movement emphasized the pain of not knowing where Ruthy was and how everyone tried so hard to find her. The repetition of the police coming to the neighborhood and grilling them, the questions of the whereabouts of Ruthy's boyfriend or whether anyone saw her walking home from school also brings out the lack of information and how the family is struggling to put together what really happened to their daughter. The physical detail used in this case includes; "Five foot one. Long red hair. A beauty mark beneath her left eye," is a way of reminding the readers of the identity of the girl who was traumatized and the intensity of efforts made by the family to find her. This accounts for the narrative which the police replicate: the uncertainty of a missing family member's whereabouts, and the family's continued pursuit for the truth.

These lines, "Sometimes it feels like the three of us are still stuck in that car / Shouting out Ruthy's name into the answering dark" depict more of a psychological point of view and desire. The use of the phrase, 'stuck in that car' by the speaker is therefore symptomatic of the workings of the unconscious of the mind in a traumatic mode. Shouting out Ruthy's name into the darkness symbolizes the workings of the unconscious to deal with the loss of Ruthy. This behavior can be attributed to the psychoanalytical way of thinking where the ego isolates the stream of thoughts of which leads to anxiety. These questions of the police about Ruthy's boyfriend and if someone saw her after school, reiterated that even the subconscious desires answers no matter how much the answers may hurt.

For years I argued with Jessica about whether Ruthy'd run away or whether somebody had taken her. For me it was clear that Ruthy had simply left. The morning she disappeared, Ma had yelled at her for the fifteen time for not bothering properly to properly clean the bottom of the caldero when it was her turn to do the dishes, and Ruthy had shaken her head and muttered underneath her breath, "I can't wait to get out of here." (page4)

From the provided excerpt, it is seen that the aspect of trauma plays the role of pain in the family relationships and in the emotions that are involved with Ruthy going missing. Thus internal debate with Jessica to believe whether Ruthy run away or has been taken, demonstrated how much the traumatic event has affected their senses and comprehension of the situation. The fact that the narrator never thinks of Ruthy being taken, but rather just left it shows a coping mechanism that comes from denial or from trying to fit things in the easiest box possible. This is one of the reasons that the idea of going missing is so dreadful: people may not be ready to accept a terrible reality, in this case, a relative vanishing, so they try to invent a version of events which is better suited to their psychological perspective. That a frustrated Ruthy once spoke something that she wanted – to leave under her breath after arguing with their mother – also contributes to the aspect of trauma. Opinion lies within the statement by one of the characters, Ruthy, who says: “I can’t wait to get out of here” which suggests there are some problems within the family and within Ruthy herself.

The lines depict a dialogue between the narrator and Jessica concerning Ruthy’s absence with the former saying that Ruthy went away of her own free will. This particular series can be best discussed using the psychoanalytic approach based on the concept of id, ego and superego. Ruthy’s words, saying that she wants to leave, correspond to the id’s unconscious drive, which is an urge for the immediate pleasure and an attempt to run away from the unwanted situation, as it is related to the pleasure principle. The fact that the narrator is convinced that Ruthy left voluntarily is the ego trying to compromise between the id and its desire and the actuality of the situation, whereas, Jessica’s view that Ruthy was taken is the superego’s moral values.

I kept flipping through the channels until bam: there was this woman who looked exactly like Ruthy, except ten years older, with same brown beauty mark beneath her left eye.

“No way.” The blood underneath my skin started to itch, and for a second I thought I might vomit. (page16)

As depicted in the excerpt, one of the themes that can be deduced is that of trauma from how the narrator feels a sickening nausea rush at the pit of his stomach when he sees a woman, who he believes is Ruthy, but older, on television. The fact that the blood underneath their skin starts to itch and the narrator feels nauseous — though he doesn’t get sick — demonstrates that the death of the girl, Ruthy, and the lack of information about the case leave an indelible impression on the protagonist. The narrator’s actual reaction when he sees a woman that looks like Ruthy but older is physical show how traumatized they are and how deep the emotion that comes along with the occurrence shocks them. The particular reaction of the narrator seems to comprise elements of disbelief, horror and concern on the news that there is a girl who looks like the narrator’s missing sister Ruthy; this show how deep down the incident related to Ruthy touch the narrator. The trauma continues with the narrator though internal conflict and discomfort; the itching blood and potential nausea. Such physical symptoms show how much the terrible events that have happened affected the narrator’s psychological state and overall well-being, thus demonstrating how Ruthy’s disappearance remains an unsolved tragedy for the family.

The lines show a time when the narrator stumbles across a woman who looks like Ruthy, a girl who disappeared some time back. This scene could be explained in the light of psychoanalytical approach more specifically with regard to the notions of the unconscious and the id The narrator feels itching blood and threatens to vomit as a result of seeing Ruthy’s double, an extremely unconscious reaction. This reaction is usually due to the id as it works in accordance with the pleasure principle and is ever ready to satisfy every desire that comes along.

I turned off the TV. I thought, it is very likely that the Ruby on television is not our Ruthy from real life. True, there was a likeness and the beauty mark on her face, but there was plenty of loud redheaded and freckled Puerto Rican girls, a ton of them in West Brighton alone.

Most likely our Ruthy was dead. (page18)

These two lines can be linked with post-traumatic stress disorder because the narrator of the story is tormented with the thought that the woman who looks like the sisters' missing sibling, Ruth, on a reality show is really an imposter named Ruby. The thread of nervousness and a feeling of fear can be traced in the narrator's thoughts which are connected with the fact of Ruthy's disappearance and the fact that people still cannot accept that she may be dead. Erasing uncertainty and the possibility that Ruthy could somehow be alive yet in a worse state is the narrator's effort to sit down and explain to him that the woman on TV cannot be Ruthy just because she looks so much like Ruthy, and they share the same mole on the lip. In so far as the recognition of the likeness of the girl in question to another is concerned, denying that the girl is Puerto Rican and is a frequent visitor in their neighborhood, is, in effect, a form of denial, which can be used to avoid touch with the reality of the situation and its implications. But the last contemplation of the narrator "Most likely our Ruthy was dead" also evokes the feeling of post-traumatic stress and mourning with regard to the question about Ruthy's destiny. Perhaps this is something the narrator needed to come to terms with, albeit with a certain bitterness, the fact that his wife is missing and probably won't come home again, rather than having her alive but in a situation which is dubious to say the least.

These lines are portraying the author's gesture, when being impressed by the woman on television, who looks like Ruthy, the girl, who disappeared several years ago. It is possible to use psychoanalytic perspective in relation to this scenario, with designating the unconscious and id as primary principles Psychoanalytic perspective. By using the anonymous tips about the woman, the narrator tries to calm her monetary desire down which illustrates the ego's functioning.

Dear Ruthy. This is Jessica and Nina. (Your sisters.) Who love and miss you dearly. If you would like to talk to us, just say the word, and we'll figure something out. (page21,22)

When analyzing the conversation attached to the message to Ruthy, one can notice that the theme of trauma plays a role when the sisters try to contact the lost sibling. The first line of the statement means 'Dear Ruthy. This is Jessica and Nina. (Your sisters.)' making the overall tone of the message urgent and using italic font in brackets to indicate the fact that the two women are Ruthy's sisters, thus expressing the fact with which their sister's disappearance has affected their lives. The term 'who love and miss you dearly' at the end of the extract also underlines that both Jessica and Nina in particular have been traumatized and grieved by the loss of Ruthy. The verb tense of the phrase "love and miss" shows that the emotions concerning Ruthy have not faded over the years and the sisters still remember about her. This implies that the trauma was not easily shed off and the sisters still had deep affection for the missing member of their family. As for the final words of the message, 'If you would like to talk to us, just say the word, and we'll figure something out', they prove the sisters' desire to overcome all barriers and get back to Ruthy. This offer shows that they are in a desperate attempt of trying to come up with a way of closing the gap that Ruthy has left behind and try and pass a message to her regardless of the odds.

These lines show a products of a message where Jessica and Nina are calling out Ruthy saying how much they love her and have missed her. From the psychoanalytic theory perspective, the given scenario can be discussed out using the following concepts of the ego, id, the superego and what they entail. Evaluating the message, it is possible to state that it represents the ego that struggles to connect the id's demands with love and the superego's

concern with relationships. The id attractions can be seen in the sisters' words saying that they "Love and miss you dearly." while the ego will negotiate with the superego and can be seen in their words saying that if Ruth wants to talk they will "figure something out."

I told him, "without a doubt. I'm telling you it was fucking Ruthy. And I know you're awake because you snore much louder than that in real life. You're not fooling anybody." (page23)

In the given excerpt, the theme of trauma can be seen where Kramer undergoes a thorough emotional response and belief of the woman similar to Ruthy in a reality show. This is because the power of the narrator to stand for the truth countering Lou's mere dismissal of the woman on television as Ruthy tells of deep-seated trauma and emotional turmoil resulting from Ruthy's disappearance. It means that even though the character is about to leave at the end, the narrator insists she is Ruthy even when there is no realistic logical explanation – the show, her determination evokes the main theme of missing the sister. Such confidence further proves that Ruthy's disappearance has left an indelible mark on the narrator as well as their desire to get closure or information on the latter's whereabouts. The remark about Lou's snoring in real life brings to the mind of the reader the rather painful truth of the narrator's growing paranoia and hypersensitivity in connection with Ruthy's disappearance. The contrast of the real sound of Lou's snoring and the lack of loud sound when she was watching the TV show contributes to building the emotional attachment of the narrator to the search for Ruthy and the personal trauma that still affects him/her.

The lines depict dialogue in which the narrator is bent on the fact that the person on television is Ruthy, a girl who disappeared some time back. These events can be explained using psychoanalysis theory especially in terms of the ego, id and superego. The conviction of the narrator that it is Ruthy exemplifies the work of the ego in a bid to balance between the id that seeks to attain love and the superego that seeks to maintain relationships.

5. Findings and Conclusion

There are many traumatic incidents in Ruthy Ramirez's and her family's lives. All these experiences in one way or another affect the lives of the struggling students. In the novel, the central type of trauma is a personal one: Ruthy's kidnapping by people she believed were her protectors at thirteen while practicing for the track team. This event makes the family experience shock and desolation. From this perspective, it has long term impact on the family. The family is driving a car all around Staten Island and that is when little Ruthy vanishes, and they are all in the car. They keep on calling the name Ruthy but she is not responding. This event leaves *the family shocked and that they* are completely at loss as to what to do next. Ruthy's mother is continuously seeking for her daughter, whose name is also Dolores, known as Ruth. The police are looking for her. They put their efforts to the extreme to look for Ruthy but to no avail. Since violence is rife in Ruthy's family, her disappearance is heartbreaking especially for the family. This occurs especially because of Ruthy's mother, Dolores. I noticed that she can turn into a traumatic figure. Exploring the glimpse of the life of the main character, Dolores, one can reveal that she is a dominant woman in the novel. She stresses on absencing from noise and shroud in the family. This makes it to where Ruthy has to stifle and bottled in her feelings and emotions. The social issues that the Ramirez family experiences are the Puerto Rican family living in Staten Island. Further, Ruthy deals with issues with the teachers and students from school. Such issues make her become angry and frustrated most of the time. She had those feelings in her heart with her, unspoken of. Sometimes she comes home, tired from work, goes straight to the bedroom, and plies her trade—she does not tell anyone. That is why repression is applied and helps Ruthy to hide stress and trauma from others. This assists her to deal with a number of tough situations. This is because it also prevents her from speaking and therefore, from being able to communicate and interpersonal with other beings. The strain the family goes through is compounded by the



pressure they get from society as is evident in Ruthy's case. Ruthy is most of the time insulted and treated wrongfully by both her teachers and fellow students. This makes her feel unimportant in the society and more to that the entire world. Most of the members of the Ramirez family have some sort of violence in them, and the resulting pressure that comes with life after Ruthy's disappearance. All these things also contribute greatly in the modelling of the behaviors of the Ramirez family. It also depicts how the issue of trauma can affect more than one generation in the family. I was able to note that most of the patients and their families' lives have been significantly altered by the referral traumatic events. This is evident with Ruthy and her family members' experience. It constantly makes depictions on families. The findings from Jiménez's *What Happened to Ruthy Ramirez* (2023) illustrates how trauma has a profound and long-lasting impact on individuals and families. The central traumatic event in the novel—Ruthy's kidnapping at the age of thirteen—leaves her family in a state of shock, grief, and helplessness. The psychological and emotional toll of her disappearance affects each family member differently, leading to patterns of distress, repression, and emotional isolation. Ruthy's mother, Dolores, becomes an overwhelming and dominant figure who enforces silence and emotional suppression in the family. This environment compels Ruthy to stifle her emotions, repress her distress, and struggle with her sense of self-worth.

Ruthy's disappearance, the novel explores other layers of trauma that affect the Ramirez family. They experience societal marginalization as a Puerto Rican family living in Staten Island, facing discrimination and exclusion. Ruthy herself endures mistreatment at school from both teachers and students, further reinforcing her sense of isolation and anger. These social pressures, combined with the pre-existing violence within the family, contribute to the intergenerational transmission of trauma. The family's experience highlights how trauma extends beyond a single individual—it spreads across generations, shaping behaviors, emotional responses, and interpersonal relationships. A key takeaway from the novel is how trauma manifests in different ways. Ruthy suppresses her emotions and copes with her distress through repression, which prevents her from forming meaningful connections with others. Dolores, on the other hand, internalizes her trauma and channels it into controlling behaviors, demanding silence within the family. The novel ultimately serves as a powerful case study on how trauma can alter family dynamics, create emotional isolation, and hinder healing when it is not properly addressed. It also demonstrates how the pressures of society, coupled with unresolved trauma, can contribute to feelings of unworthiness, helplessness, and emotional numbness.

To break this cycle, trauma must be acknowledged, processed, and healed in a way that allows individuals to reclaim their emotional well-being. The following recommendations outline strategies to address trauma, both at an individual and societal level.

5. Recommendations

One of the biggest obstacles in trauma recovery is the suppression of emotions, as seen in Ruthy and her family. Families and communities should create safe spaces where individuals can openly discuss their experiences without fear of judgment or punishment. By normalizing conversations about trauma, individuals are better equipped to process their emotions and seek support. Access to mental health resources is critical for trauma survivors. Therapy, counseling, and trauma-informed care should be made available and accessible to individuals dealing with the effects of trauma. Schools, workplaces, and community centers should offer mental health services that cater to individuals from diverse backgrounds, particularly those who may be facing societal marginalization. Ruthy's experiences at school illustrate the need for trauma-informed education. Teachers and school staff should be trained

to recognize the signs of trauma and understand how it affects students' behavior and learning. Educators should adopt trauma-sensitive approaches that provide students with emotional support rather than reinforcing negative behaviors through punishment or exclusion. Since trauma can be passed down through generations, it is crucial to break the cycle by fostering healing and emotional resilience. Family therapy and support groups can help families process shared trauma and develop healthier ways of coping. Parents and caregivers should be educated on the impact of trauma on children and taught strategies to provide emotional security and validation. The Ramirez family's struggles are compounded by their experiences as a Puerto Rican family living in a racially and socially stratified society. Policies and programs that address discrimination, social exclusion, and economic hardship should be developed to support marginalized communities. Community-based support groups can also provide a sense of belonging and solidarity for individuals who feel alienated due to societal pressures. Violence, whether within families or communities, has long-term psychological effects. Programs that focus on reducing domestic violence, bullying, and social aggression should be implemented to prevent the perpetuation of trauma. Educational campaigns should also raise awareness about the impact of trauma and the importance of seeking help rather than resorting to harmful behaviors. Literature, films, and media play a crucial role in shaping public perceptions of trauma. Stories like *What Happened to Ruthy Ramirez* highlight the complexities of trauma and its effects on individuals and families. Encouraging diverse representation of trauma in literature and media can help create awareness, foster empathy, and reduce the stigma surrounding mental health.

There is still much to be learned about trauma, particularly its long-term effects on memory, relationships, and identity. Future research should explore the psychological and sociocultural aspects of trauma, focusing on how different coping mechanisms influence emotional well-being. Additionally, studies should examine how literature can serve as a tool for healing and emotional expression. By implementing these recommendations, individuals and communities can work toward breaking the cycle of trauma and fostering an environment of emotional resilience and healing. Recognizing and addressing trauma early can prevent its long-term effects and empower individuals to build healthier, more fulfilling lives.

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