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TRAUMATIC MEMORIES, LOSS AND ABANDONMENT IN SCOTT FRANK'S THE QUEEN'S GAMBIT (2020)

الذكريات الصدمية والفقد والهجر في "مناورة الملكة" (2020) للمخرج سكوت فرانك

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ملخص:

يقدم مسلسل "مناورة الملكة" لمخرج سكوت فرانك تصويرًا فريدًا لآثار الصدمة النفسية من خلال حياة بطلة المسلسل، بيث هارمون.حيث يستخدم هذا المقال إطارا تحليليا مزدوجا يربط بين نقد التقنيات السينمائية ونظريات التحليل النفسي والصدمة النفسية بدءاً من فرويد وصولاً إلى كاروث وهيرمان. وتسعى الدراسة موضوع المقال إلى تفكيك الصدمة النفسية المبكرة في حياة البطلة "بيث هارمون" الناجمة عن فاجعة فقد أمها والنبذ المؤسساتي الذي عانت منه ؛ حيث تُفسر مظاهر إدمانها وعلاقاتها المأزومة وحالاتها الانفصالية بوصفها أعراضاً سريرية ونفسية مباشرة لصدمة غياب السند وهجرانه. وعلى الصعيد السينيماتوغرافي، يتقصى المقال كيفية نجاح المخرج في تجسيد تلك الصراعات النفسية الداخلية وتحويلها إلى تضاريس مرئية، مستعيناً بالموتيفات المتكررة والتشذيب الإيقاعي والاستخدام الاستراتيجي للألوان والتصميم الإنتاجي. من خلال الجمع بين التحليل السينيماتوغرافي ونظرية التحليل النفسي والصدمة النفسية، يسلط هذا المقال الضوء على رحلة "بيث" نحو النضج والبراعة كتجسيد لعملية حداد تدريجية ومؤلمة، استطاعت من خلالها التكيف مع فجيعة فقد الأم وتقبّلها، وهو ما تحقق عبر مسارين متوازيين تمثلا في مد جسور التواصل الإنساني مع الآخر، والتمكن الحاذق من رقعة الشطرنج ذاتها.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التصوير السينمائي؛ الذكريات الصدمية؛ الهجر؛ فاجعة الفقد؛ مناورة الملكة.

Abstract:

Scott Frank's The Queen's Gambit (2020) offers a unique representation of the effects of trauma through the protagonist`s life Beth Harmon. This article employs a dual-framework study that analyses how the TV series demonstrates the main character's, Beth Harmon, early trauma of maternal loss and institutional abandonment. It draws on psychoanalytical concepts from Freud, to Caruth to Herman, to interpret Beth's addiction, dissociative states, and relationships as symptoms of trauma of loss and abandonment. As far as cinematography is concerned, the article investigates how the director translates the heroine's internal psychological conflicts into visual form through recurring motifs, the rhythmic editing and the strategic use of colour and production design to map the protagonist's psychological landscape. By combining cinematography analysis with psychoanalytic and trauma theory, this article highlights Beth's journey to proficiency as a successful achievement to gradual, painful process of grieving, accepting, and then coping with lost maternal parent, accomplished through both human connection with the other and the competent mastery of chess gaming itself.

Keywords: *Abandonment; Cinematography; Loss; The Queen's Gambit; Traumatic Memories*

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1. INTRODUCTION

Anyone who has experienced traumatic events during childhood cannot escape from their powerful impact that appears later in their lives. The trauma experienced at a young age is not assimilated by the traumatized infant; instead, they are stored in the mind's unconsciousness. That is why traumatic memories find always a way to come up to the surface and hunt the traumatized constantly until the trauma is worked-through (or not). Despite the fact that the subject of Trauma has interested many experts, little has been devoted to Trauma of loss and abandonment as far as childhood is concerned. A recurring feature to focus solely on sexual/child abuse whereas little attention was attributed to the study of psychological effects of trauma of loss and abandonment on children.

The Queen's Gambit written and directed by Scott Frank, was first premiered on October 23rd, 2020, on Netflix platform. The mini-series is composed of seven episodes in which the audience follows the realistic portrayal of the protagonist's battle against trauma of loss, abandonment and addiction. The story is based on the Walter Tevis novel (1983) of the same name. It follows the life of a traumatized orphan girl named Elizabeth Harmon, played by Anya Taylor-Joy, who after the loss of her mother in a car accident is placed at the orphanage Methuen Home for Girls where she shows a great interest and talent for chess. Beth starts the show as an orphan, then becomes a young chess prodigy and ends up reaching global success and international recognition. At its heart, this show is about how the protagonist battles with her traumatic past and traumatic memories and why she is compelled to overcome many obstacles in her life.

In this article, the metamorphosis of Elizabeth's journey from childhood trauma to recovery is studied through a psychoanalytic approach that unveils her traumatic memories and the process through which she works them through. The objective is to show how the director conveys traumatic memories through cinematic techniques. In other words, this article revisits the manifestations of traumatic memories, alienated social behaviour, substance abuse and alcohol consumption, through the study of flashbacks and visualization.

To reach the research objective, the analysis is based on the study of selected scenes from the media work. It starts with Beth's visualization of the chess board on the ceiling of the institute's bedroom. Then, it moves to the cinematography analysis of discovering Mr Shaibel's wall. After that, the research examines the flashback of the suicidal car accident of Beth's mother in the last episode. The choice of the three

scenes is founded on their significance in depicting the trauma of loss and abandonment in relation to the character's development from suffering to recovery.

1.1.The Theoretical Framework:

Before providing an in-depth analysis of *The Queen's Gambit* and its main character Elizabeth Harmon, it is of a pivotal importance to refer to the approach, the theoretical framework, and the methodology which shape this study. This article has driven its research inspirations from clinical literature on trauma, attachment theory, and narrative analysis.

Concerning the theoretical foundations, this paper basically relies on the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV,2022) to understand symptomatology of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and other disorders. PTSD can be defined as a reaction to a traumatic event experienced directly or witnessed by the individual. Two diagnostic criteria for PTSD are demonstrably relevant to Harmon's intrusive flashbacks, her escalating addiction to alcohol and sedatives, and the insomnia portrayed in the first scenes at the orphanage are examined through the clinical psychological dimensions that provide a clear diagnostic lens to analyse the character.

Prevailing, unwilling and intruding childhood memories manifest, involuntary, through flashbacks which in their simplest meaning are images from the past which interrupt the present. Turim's following definition, of flashbacks in films and television, is used to anlayze the selected scenes

> The flashback is introduced when the image in the present dissolves to an image in the past, understood either as a story-being-told or a subjective memory. Dialogue, voice-over, or intertitles that mark anteriority through language often reinforce the visual cues representing a return to the past (Turim01).

Besides the clinical psychoanalytical analysis, studying trauma through cinematography has been profoundly influenced by Cathy Caruth's (1996) work in *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*. It enables the researcher to interpret Beth's flashbacks related to her mother's death and her abandonment not simply as plot devices but as foundational components of her unresolved grief.

The trauma of orphanhood is a topic that is developed by Judith Herman in *Trauma and Recovery* (1992), which is a foundational cornerstone in understanding the Relational underpinnings of psychological damage. Beth`s experience of orphanhood can be seen through Herman's concept of the disruption of attachment bonds as a core component of complex trauma.

Concerning literary and film criticism, E. Ann Kaplan has contributed in exploring the gendered prospects of trauma in cinema. Her work *Trauma Culture: The Politics of Terror and Loss in Media and Literature (2005)* is a cornerstone of the discipline because it deals with how cinematic techniques such as mise-en-scène and temporal disjunctions can reflect the fragmentation of subjective experience in traumatized individuals who endure symptoms of PTSD. The production is a rich source that provides methodological strategies to approach Frank's directorial choices and techniques of cinematography.

1.2.Review of the Literature:

Despite the fact that many contributions have to a significant extent explored the theme of trauma, there are very few studies focusing on Trauma of Loss and Abandonment and there are even fewer works dealing with the manifestations of traumatic memories on children. It is important to mention that existing scholarship on *The Queen's Gambit* has largely focused on its feminist dimension in how a woman achieves success in a male-dominated space as far as chess is concerned. It has also examined Beth Harmon's development through social, psychological, audiovisual and identity-based perspectives.

For instance, Prasetyaningrum & Ahdiani (2024) argue that Beth's identity is affected and even shaped by several factors of gender discrimination using theories of intersectionality and Erik Erikson stages of psychosocial development, while Cheema & Wilkinson's article (2022) examine Beth's substance abuse and how it is linked to shame, anxiety and social isolation; their analysis is significant in demonstrating the role of social relationships in the heroine's recovery.

Other scholarship contributes to the understanding of Beth's psychological development through the series' visual and audiovisual construction. Mainly, Klein's chapter (2024) which studies how cinematic techniques, narrative and soundtrack construct Harmon's identity and subjectivity. He argues that Rivera's music in *The Queen's Gambit* does not simply accompany the chess games but it transforms chess into something cinematic, dramatic and physically exciting which changes the spectator's perception of what is happening on screen. According to the author, the music also contributes to the sexualized construction of the heroine. Klein concludes that the three fantasies of image, narrative and sound contribute to create an "impossible story" that is nevertheless rendered credible and compelling to the audience.

However, a clear gap remains unexplored by researchers which is regarding the work as a structured case study of childhood loss and abandonment and its long-term psychological effects. This article aims to address that gap by relating clinical frameworks of Judith Herman`s work with trauma theory, introduced Cathy Caruth, and film analysis, presented by Kaplan, to analyze the narrative's case of the gradual nonlinear processing of Beth Harmon trauma which is manifested through flashbacks, chess and addiction.

2. Elizabeth Harmon: Flashbacks of Loss and Abandonment

The different scenes of *The Queen's Gambit* (2020) uncover the trauma that the protagonist experiences from early childhood through flashbacks. During this phase, Beth lives in a dysfunctional house where she misses the father figure as she is raised by and lives only with her mother in a trailer in a remote location. Beth remains consistently in her mother's company, Alice Harmon (played by Close Pirrie) who is portrayed as being mentally unstable.

In an early flashback (in episode 03- 'Double Pawns'), Beth is sitting on the river where her mother swims but suddenly disappears for a moment, close up shots of the worried little girl shows how Beth is afraid and distressed when she does not see her mother while she disappears in the water, but is relieved after her mother shows up from a distant place. Like all children, Beth is afraid to lose her mother and needs to be assured that she will not be abandoned. As a child, we never see Beth interact with the outside environment, the only voice she has within her is that of her mother.

In another flashback in Episode 05, Alice tells four year old Beth that she must not be afraid of anything especially loneliness, she insists that "[…]The strongest person is the person who isn't scared to be alone. […] Someday, you're gonna be all alone, so you need to figure out how to take care of yourself" (Episode 05). Through this quote we understand that Alice is paranoid and she installs in her daughter a fear of people; that's why Beth does not socialize easily, she does not trust people and she is most of the time lonely; in fact, chess is her only safe place. This can be argued, through having Jolene as her only friend while she is in the orphanage, at the high school she does not make new friends, and later on all the friends she makes as a young adult through the game. She is though conditioned to use Chess as to win affection because the more success she has the more people are attracted to her. Chess which starts as a coping mechanism to her trauma of loss and abandonment becomes her only salvation as an adolescent and a young adult.

Trauma of abandonment is first experienced by Beth through her father rejecting her and this is demonstrated through her flashback in the last Episode 'End game' when Alice, Beth's mother, seeks his help but he refuses and dismisses his daughter outright and never looks after her. Also, she again experiences abandonment and loss through her mother's decision. Alice decides to commit suicide and kill both herself and her daughter by crashing her car, because she was feeling that she is letting her daughter down. The feeling of loss is reinforced again in the flashback presented in episode five 'Fork', just before Beth arrives home after Mrs Wehatley dies in Mexico, and her game loss against Borgov for the first time. Alice's words are very relevant in Beth`s situation. Her echoed advice makes sense since Beth becomes an orphan for the second time, after Mrs Weatley passed on, now. Beth experiences again the feeling of loss, abandonment and loneliness which are demonstrated through the different shots of the empty house, with Alma's cup of coffee with her red lipstick, the painting of the lonely horse by Rosa Bonheur which reinforces these feelings on screen. Beth is left alone to face the challenges that await for her, that of loss, addiction to pills and later on alcohol.

Flashback is a cinematic device that can be used by the film maker for different purposes, as Turim suggests: "Some flashbacks directly involve a quest for the answer to an enigma posed in the beginning of a narrative through a return to the past'' (Turim, p.11). This is the case with the opening of the first episode of *The Queen's Gambit* (2020), the scene takes us back to Paris in 1967 when Beth Harmon is playing against Borgov, then the scene shifts directly to another sequence where young Beth is standing alone and behind her someone lying dead on the ground. Turim continues to write,

> The frame-tale which opens with a consequence [like Beth loss against Borgov in the tournament held in Paris] and then flashes back to tell how or why this event came to be, is one example. Another is the narrative which employs a flashback just prior to the climatic revelation of the enigma, to provide a missing aspect of the enigma. Other narratives use a series of flashbacks to develop an enigma and delay its resolution before reaching the final flashback of the revelation (Turim, p.11-12).

The final flashback, 'End Game', explains the opening scenes of *The Queen's Gambit* and indicates how Beth's values and perception have changed from the first to the last episode, from being an orphan little girl to being an internationally recognized female chess player. As she re-visualizes the day of the accident where

she lost her mother after visiting her father seeking help but was faced with rejection and abandonment. The scene goes back to Beth in her room as she watches the pills, pensively. Beth's mother asks her to close her eyes but she does not. Thus, Beth witnesses the whole scene of the accident and we can imagine how her mother died on the spot.

3. Visualizing the Ceiling as a Chess Board

In the first episode of *The Queen's Gambit*, at night, when all girls are asleep, Beth Harmon seems to suffer from insomnia which leads her to look to the dark shadow of the trees in the ceiling. This view makes her recall her painful memories with her mentally disturbed mother and deserted father. According to the sequences of the scene, this state seems to be a recurrent psychological issue experienced by the protagonist. Insomnia, nightmares, flashbacks of the past endured by Beth are not separate problems in the words of Herman's work because they are a unified trauma symptoms that are used by her unconsciousness as a coping system. This is why during another night, after being interested in playing chess, instead of recalling flashbacks of the past, she starts imagining the ceiling as a chess board which is a brilliant adaptive way of dealing with her painful impact of trauma. Transforming a state of helplessness out of trauma of orphanhood and parenthood abandonment into proficiency in visualizing chess playing reflects her power of the need of successful surviving**.** Even though this means spending sleepless nights as an endeavour to escape the painful past and not developing a self that exists out of the chessboard vision.

This moves the analysis to discuss the motives behind this visualization which is evidently the unclaimed traumatic experience. According to Caruth, this kind of experience is never fully owned or integrated; it remains "unclaimed" by consciousness, existing as a foreign body in the psyche that demands expression without direct access (141). This is why Beth finds in chess an activity that absorbs the powerful unexpressed psychological pain. In other words, she has a trauma problem for which chess is the perfect, tragic, and beautiful solution that can be referred to as a coping mechanism that manifests as chess on the ceiling. Caruth`s work explains this act as the protagonist`s mind creation of a way to process overwhelming past events through the structured, repetitive logic of chess. This is unlike the heroine`s reality which is chaotic and punishing such as her early traumatic events of abandonment, the car accident, and even the Methuen orphanage`s treatment that create a profound urge for control and mental escape.

The unclaimed traumatic experience appears constantly as painful memories and flashbacks fuelling the visualization of the chess board in the ceiling. Chess is based on logical structure and predictable outcomes which is the universe that she wants to have instead of her reality.

In fact, the ceiling works as a projection space to her high visual imaginative capacity that appears in the episode before taking the pills because she already can see patterns and observe unusual characteristics. She seems to find relief in creating order as she suffers from isolation and fear of the present, past, and unknown future. However, visualizing games on the ceiling at night is more developed after learning chess from Mr. Shaibel, which leads her to consume more green pills because they take the visualization experience to a better level. The ceiling chessboard becomes vivid and moveable in the scene as if it becomes real. In one of the episodes, she mentions that she needs the pills to play at her best, they do not create vision, but they remove distraction and emotional disturbance which enable her to experience visualization with heightened intensity which leads her to master playing chess.

3.1. The Ceiling Chess Board as Traumatic Wound and Voice

In the studied miniseries, Beth`s voice is the visualization of the ceiling chess board that is created out of the wound which is her experienced trauma (Caruth 2.3). Caruth explains, "[…] the speaking wound constitutes, in other words, not only a parable of trauma and of its uncanny repetition but, more generally, a parable of psychoanalytic theory itself as it listens to a voice that it cannot fully know but to which it nonetheless bears witness" (9). As it may be noticed from the theoretical approach of Caruth to trauma, it is a phenomenon that does not happen, appear, or can be healed in silence; it rather speaks and demands to be heard in a way or another.

Beth's imagination of chessboards in the ceiling is the voice of her buried wound in the past which is her mother's death, the car accident, abandonment, and the institutional coldness of Methuen. The voice is the chess vision with its pieces moving on the ceiling, the patterns resolving into ordered combat. As it is evident to the audience and the researcher, Beth cannot explicitly narrate or even consciously access the horror of her early traumatizing experiences. They are blocked in her memory because of its enormous painful effect. However, they cry out through the overwhelming repetitive visualization of chess games. The episodes show that each night, the wound speaks through insomnia and the visualization of chess boards.

3.2. Cinematography Analysis of the Ceiling Chess Board

The audience is introduced to a scene that transcends the usual visual storytelling which shows young Beth Harmon lying in her orphanage bed, staring at the ceiling visualizing the chess board after taking the green tranquilizer pills to optimize the experience (Frank "Openings"2020). The shadow of the outside trees in the ceiling transform to a massive, glowing chessboard that materializes above her. This scene is not merely a hallucination; it is the visual thesis of the entire series. This analytical statement may be supported by Blain Brown`s explanation of the concept of '*Visual Language*', that is based on the idea that the frame, the angle, and the movement must serve the internal psychology of the character (Brown,302). In this scene, the cinematography shifts from creating the effect of only observing the frame to indulging in the subjective side of the heroine and the whole story.

Before Beth's visualization, the camera shows the ceiling as a simple unexciting flat plastered space. Then, the lighting is changed signalling a shift in the scene. According to Brown, the language of the lens changes to introduce a sort of alteration in the narrative, and in this case, it presents a break with reality. The camera angle slowly moves from Beth`s position to capture the ceiling placing the audience in her line of sight. Here, one can notice the contrast between diegetic and non-diegetic space, reflecting the chessboard as a ghostly, semi-transparent view of light and shadow. This aligns with Brown`s discussion of how cinematographers create distinction between the physical concrete set and the character`s internal mind (17). Though the board exists in the same space of the girls' dormitory ceiling, it is lit with colder and harsher light presenting mental space. This is done on purpose in order to be compared to the soft warmer light and shadow of the orphanage. This achieved visual contrast separates Beth`s traumatic reality from her visual intellectual capacity.

Lighting is used by cinematographers as a psychological tool which is employed in this scene to create an illusionary visual space (Brown, 48). The cinematographer Steven Meizler depends on the effect of strong contrasts between light and dark to film powerful visualization at night, in a time when the girl should sleep. When the cinematographer chooses not to employ colours in this from the visualization, he signals to the audience that this is pure logic and mathematics that are not related to the emotional and colourful turmoil of the outside world. Meizler also uses the window blinds as a source of light reflected on the ceiling as a screen that presents the invisible mind of Beth. The effect of trauma sneaks from her unconscious mind, presented as blinds of a window, to be reflected as visualization

of playing chess. As it is known, chess is an internal game that is played first in the mind of the player, where the trauma is repressed. As the cinematographic storytelling shows Beth's brilliant intelligence is an internal light that breaks through the darkness of her traumatized psyche.

The main chosen camera's angle is the protagonist's perspective as she lays down on bed. This enables the audience to feel that the chessboard is seen in a forced prospect. The chess pieces that are close to her head are reflected in the viewer's foreground as huge and imposing masses while those at the far end of the ceiling are shown in small size. This perspective shows the chessboard as an architectural ceiling pressing down on her. This conveys the emotional weight of trauma as well as the game as her only limited obsession. In this sequence of the scene, Meizler creates a special relationship between the camera and the actor through choosing a lens that reflects an intimate feeling. He uses God's-eye view or extreme high angle not just looking down at Beth from the ceiling, but looking up at her too. Concerning the camera movement, the film maker depends on slow and invisible moves which are not separated by cuts. It often drifts as it is seen when Beth's eyes move across the ceiling, the camera performs a subtle pan or tilt. Coverage is another way used in moving the camera that tells the story in an influencing efficient way to the audience. It is evident in filming the act of Beth`s breathing while watching the ceiling.

4. Introduction to the "Green Pills" through the Orphanage as a Site of Institutional Trauma

The narrative`s protagonist starts taking green pills when she becomes one of the girls of the Methuen Home for Orphans. This dehumanizing environment obliges the orphan girls to take the pills as tranquilizers to calm their temper, control, and regulate their bodies and minds creating docile subjects. Based on trauma theory perspective, the orphanage as an institution represents another traumatic space where Beth's original traumatic event, the car crash that killed her mother, remains unclaimed, unprocessed, and unhealed (Caruth, 43)**.** No psychological care is provided in this institution that should treat any neurosis or psychosis of the orphan girls**.**

Herman describes analytically the pills or "double edged sword" because they provide temporary relief from hyperarousal which are nightmares, startle responses, difficulty of sleeping while creating a new rhythm for dissociation and reliance at the same time (25). The institution's policy of obliging orphans to take tranquilization every day is a strategy to maintain order rather than processing psychological issues. Medicating orphaned children is considered as an institutional crime because it is a

system that is supposed to be designed to care for abandoned children instead of neglecting them and harming their physical, nervous, psychological health with chemical medications.

4.1. Beth Harmon's Individualist Way of Green Pills Addiction

Beth' stealing of the green pills is a destruction to the power of the orphanage as an institution by transforming their way of control into a tool of self-empowerment and cognitive development. The urge behind this act is the effect of the pills on the heroin as a source that provides high intense focus unlike its effect on the other girls, which is creating docile bodies. For the protagonist, the pills become a dangerous strategy of development. According to Caruth, the traumatic voice emerges in states where usual consciousness is suspended, and this happens in dreams, flashbacks, or hypnotic states. The tranquilizers lower the ability of consciousness if not turning it off. This allows her traumatic wound to be expressed in a sort of visualizations. This is the reason behind Beth`s repeated statement 'I need the pills to play'. Such medication removes the psychological barriers that maintain the traumatic voice silenced. In the case of this narrative, the pills enable Beth to make her unconscious pain speak in a way of chessboard visualization in its most realistic image.

4.2. Beth Harmon's Addictive Transition to Alcohol

After being addicted to tranquilizers, Beth becomes addicted to alcohol, another dangerous way to stop her consciousness. According to Herman's criteria, this transition is predictable because she has not dealt with her trauma and has not stopped taking the green pills. Indeed, Beth`s alcohol use rapidly increases in the story. In fact, it is first introduced to her through her adoptive mother, Alma, who is herself a high-functioning alcoholic**.** The reason behind Alma` addiction is well demonstrated through the story in her enduring pain from experiencing abandoned marriage. Unfortunately, alcohol leads to her death by creating severe health problems that are mainly hepatitis.

Through the Hermanian lens, Alma is considered as a non-successful experience of attachment that could have helped Beth in overcoming her trauma of abandonment and loss. The adoptive mother Alma as a flat character gathered several characteristics that are constructive for the healing process from Beth`s traumatic experience such as being loving, supportive, and tender. However, her addiction to alcohol makes her self-destructive and unavailable, ending her life, and thus creating a new experience of loss for Beth. Alma reflects a failed example of handling psychological issues such as abandonment and adopts alcohol addiction as a coping mechanism rather than facing her psychological problems**.** This has affected

Beth addiction through taking it to another level, alcohol, and empowering the need of sources that numb the consciousness functioning as a way to avoid facing the trauma.

In Beth`s case, alcohol is seen now as a coping mechanism as well that may be a way of escaping from loss, loneliness, disappointment, and the pressures of performing chess, as she becomes an internationally acclaimed chess player. The protagonist is portrayed drinking alcohol in several scenes of chess tournaments, and even more when she is alone. In fact, Hermanian studies of alcohol addiction have shown that solitary consumption is more dangerous than social drinking (Herman,36). Another characteristic from the theorist' studies are found in the case of this protagonist is withdrawal that is represented in Beth's direct consumption of green pills and alcohol right after Alma`s death (36-37). This denotes her physiological dependence and avoidance of facing the sources of her psychological pain.

Actually, the heroine re-experiences or repeats the feeling of parental abandonment for another time. When Beth is living her most successful life phases of being a universal chess player, and being surrounded by a loving adoptive mother, Alma, she loses this other parent once again. She finds her dead in a hotel room in Mexico City. The cinematographer uses the narrative technique of foreshadowing, showing Alma looking into a circular mirror referring to the 'All Is Vanity' illustration; a woman whose reflection forms a skull. This signifies the end of Alma as a failure addicted woman and a lost parent for Beth. This powerful visual symbolism of the skull mirror reinforces the theme of death and loss in the narrative creating a sense of insecurity. In Caruth work, this incident represents the concept of 'double temporality' as a manifestation of trauma that happens when a traumatizing past event is repeated in the present time of the traumatized person. The heroine lost her biological mother, and then this incident crashes into her past making her an orphan again by losing her adoptive mother.

Several episodes show her unsuccessful attempts to stop alcohol addiction; however, not healing from trauma is the reason behind the failure that complicates the situation creating persistent desire for solitary substance consumption. The latter creates a tendency of alienation which is a dangerous manifested symptom of trauma and addiction as well. This is shown in the heroine's way of alienating Henry Beltik, isolating herself from the supportive chess environment that ultimately has led to missing a tournament. The British Journal of Psychiatry as well as Judith Herman`s clinical studies explain the protagonist`s feeling of shame, anxiety, and alienation as

both symptoms of trauma and triggers for substance consumption. This is why herself-valuation is strongly linked to the narcissist's desire to win chess games, making defeat a profound narcissistic injury threatening her self-worth and identity instead of being a learning experience. This is reflected in Beth`s loss against Borgov in The Paris Invitational where her alcohol drinking increases and she gives up social activities rejecting Benny Watts' help and traveling alone**.**

Beth`s addiction to alcohol may be seen through an existential approach that regards it as an imprisonment by the past. Caruth's framework may explain this as a way of keeping trauma in a paralyzed state fearing that her genius ability of playing chess would be affected. The idea of integrating her traumatic experience of losing her mother in a suicidal car accident is the equivalent of living the whole experience again with its painful effect that was numbed at the beginning. In Beth's perception, this may destruct her talent or ability to continue living the same lifestyle. This is why reliance on substance consumption as a way of suspending the confrontation with the unresolved past traumatic events is a strategy of a coping mechanism, but in the same time a self-destructive way. Caruth refers to the substances as a shield against the real, a paradoxical protector that ultimately becomes the source of new destruction (24).

5. Beth Harmon's Trauma Confrontation Through Discovering Mr. Shaibel's Wall



Figure 02: Discovering Mr. Shaibel`s Wall

In the seventh Episode "End Game", Beth lives unprecedented events that lead to personal reactions making her reclaim the unclaimed past childhood experience. In her most dark and lowest phases of her life, the death of Mr. Shaibel's has deeply affected the protagonist because he was the caring mentor who introduced her to chess and opened a wide door for her personal success. His death pushes her to attend the funeral and pass by Methuen orphanage Home to visit the place where they used to play chess. This reaction changes the protagonist 'attitude of suspending the past events and starting to retrieve what is frozen in her memory at moments of

strong pain. This is when her unclaimed past is projected in a full narrative not in a short sequence of flashbacks. The reason behind this climax of confronting her past traumatic experience is finding in the basement a wall covered with newspaper clippings tracking every one of her successful achievements. This is evidence of care and love that makes her feel that she was valuable in the eyes of her mentor and not abandoned by him as she was thinking in her alienated state. The realization of being loved and cared by an important person in her childhood reverses the childhood psychological issue of being abandoned by parents and regarded as unworthy by the community where she has grown up in the orphanage. As a result, Beth experiences an emotional catharsis of seeing her life's achievements transformed to a visual proof of being loved since her childhood. This incident may by regarded as the climax of the narrative that leads to her recovery from her traumatic experience of loss and abandonment.

The cinematographer uses a wide lens at the beginning of the scene when she walks down the familiar stairs of the basement creating a deep space as if the audience is having full access to her past. This lens is a normal standard one, when she discovers the wall. The camera captures Beth standing in front of the wall in the same level reflecting a confrontation moment. The traumatised protagonist is now not separated, distanced, or hidden from her painful past; on the contrary, she seems facing it with all its powerful emotions. Concerning the reflected colour palette, it projects the emotional state of the heroin through cold degradation of blue and black reflecting her alienation. Then, when Beth looks at the wall, the light changes showing her photographs, articles, written about her success. The cinematographer uses natural sunlight, simulated sunlight or practical lamps, to create warm golden cinematic emotional moments in the narrative. This kind of colours signify the advancement of the development of the character in Brown`s words (12). The discovery of the wall changes the colour palette of the scene of the basement. Lighting here works as a visual metaphor because the lighted wall is a selected space denoting Mr. Shaibel`s care and love for Beth; he was watching over her long path after she left. It is not clear that the light doesn't come from a window; nevertheless, it seems from a natural source. In Brown's terms, this kind of light functions as a visual metaphor for memory and guardianship as if a sacred product comes from a dark space (13).

For the camera movement, Meizler employs a specific movement pattern to switch Beth's emotional state from observer to participant involving the audience. This is achieved through slow push-in to an extreme close-up of Beth's eyes. As Beth reads the clippings, the camera slowly pushes in toward her face. This cinematography technique physically makes the audience closer to the character`s emotional state. The Audience stops looking at the wall and starts looking at her reaction to the wall. Brown states that the close-up is the most powerful tool in the hands of the cameraman. The camera finally lands on an extreme close-up of Beth's face when the tears appear in her eyes. The wall is no longer the focused subject; it is her grief and gratitude which are the subject. In other words, the audience witnesses the traumatized heroine's confrontation with her buried traumatic painful experience of loss and abandonment.

6. Integrating the Past through Reliving the Car Crash



Figure 03: Close your Eyes

Projecting the complete scene of the traumatic car crash flashback in the final episode of *The Queen's Gambit* "End Game" is not just a plot device but a powerful choice taken by the series makers. This is a visual manifestation of Beth's repressed childhood trauma of abandonment and loss that is confronted in the last episode. The cinematographer succeeds in filming an influencing scene by using the camera as a subjective technique as if the audience witnesses the accident from the character`s eyes. Lighting is also used to create contrast reflecting Beth`s psychological state besides the colour palette that signifies the emotional memory of painful flashbacks crushing her present moment. All these mentioned cinematography techniques are used in a way to make the audience re-live the traumatic childhood experience of loss and psychological collapse. This is the originating wound when Beth survives a car crash that kills her mother, Alice, who deliberately drove into an oncoming car.

At the beginning of the scene, Meizler chooses a normal lens to capture the view of the taxi where Beth is reflected as a dissociated element, while her surroundings seem in stable state. This technique is switched to a wide-angle lens when the car is shown from inside, making it seem as a large space capturing all the emotional details and the facial expressions of Beth and Alice before the latter rushes into another vehicle intentionally. This creates an influential subjective moment in

the view of the audience. This technique of wide angle imitates the effect of trauma in destroying the coherent normal space of the traumatized. The heroine does not just see the crash, but she witnesses all her world breaking apart. This is where the technique of colour interferes in adding another dimension to the scene where the cinematographer chooses to use specific hues that trigger the audience's reception of watching emotional flashbacks without a cutaway. Cold blue light is chosen to be a color of her most impactful past memories. It is used in reflecting the car accident and the orphanage basement. It functions as a visual echo of her childhood abandonment. Brown argues that camera movement is often more powerful than editing in conveying psychological states (8). In the crash scene, the cinematographer uses two specific movements to manifest childhood loss. The first one is through medium close-up that shows Beth's face, revealing a mix of confusion about what her mother says, and fear of what might happen after she ordered her to 'close her eyes' that denotes the suicidal act. The second movement is by using a handheld whip that enables capturing a violent fast crash that symbolizes Beth`s nervous system being crushed down. The camera's sudden, unmotivated movement mirrors how childhood abandonment feels as an inexplicable and violent act, and how losing another person`s life does not announce itself, but it just strikes without warning.

7. Conclusion

This article has examined how Scott Frank's *The Queen's Gambit* (2020) projects the psychological wounds of childhood trauma of loss and abandonment in a narrative and visual language. By employing psychoanalytic concepts with cinematographic analysis, the study has demonstrated that Beth Harmon's journey is not just a success story of chess genius but a profound long anguish of unclaimed past trauma.

Through this article, the researcher attempted to show the struggle of Elizabeth Harmon in handling her traumatic memories from childhood as they interfere in her life through the study of flashbacks that showed her incapacity to make sense of her sufferings as a child. As a result of her trauma of loss and abandonment, the heroine found refuge in chess, substance abuse and alcohol addiction. She finally finds peace when her trauma is worked through as the analysis has shown.

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