

## Child Maltreatment and Survival in Jane Rowan's *The River of Forgetting*: A Memoir of Healing from Sexual Abuse

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**Abstract:** In the twenty-first century, child maltreatment has broadened our perception of the relationship between child sexual abuse, survival and the healing process from psychological trauma. Trauma narratives are considered personalized responses to the awareness of the drastic effects of sexual assaults on children. Memoirs illustrate the effect of child sexual abuse on memory and identity. This research paper aims at applying Jennifer Freyd's trauma theory that involves child maltreatment and emotional neglect to Jane Rowan's *The River of Forgetting* (2010). It deals with the concept of betrayal trauma, its symptoms and some of the defensive surviving strategies such as dissociative amnesia and dissociative identity disorder (DID) as adaptive responses to childhood sexual abuse. Rowan's memoir is considered a personal account of her psychological suffering due to her repressed memory of being sexually abused by her father during her early childhood. It examines how the protagonist struggles to survive among persistent traumatic memories that are repressed during forty years of her life. Finally, the textual analysis clarifies the process of recovery from psychological trauma by using psychotherapy, dance therapy, art therapy and scriptotherapy.

**Keywords:** art therapy, betrayal trauma, dissociative identity disorder, Jane Rowan, *The River of Forgetting*

### I. Introduction

In the twenty-first century, the study of child maltreatment has enlarged our perception of the relationship between child sexual abuse, survival and the healing process from psychological trauma. Child maltreatment occurs at alarmingly high rates. According to Hillis, Mercy, Amobi and Kress, it is estimated that up to 1 billion children aged 2-17 years, have experienced physical, sexual, or emotional violence or neglect in the past year all over the world (2016). Unfortunately, "The United States has one of the worst records among industrialized nations: an average of between four and seven children suffer from child abuse and neglect every day" (Romirez 2016: 147).

Trauma narratives, especially memoirs, have developed as personalized responses to the awareness of the drastic effects on the individual psyche of sexual assaults. The trauma story is a psychiatric tool that helps trauma survivors to come to terms with their painful experiences and memories. Without treatment, traumatic

memories might feel like an uncontrollable flood of painful emotions. The account of a traumatic incident will be continuously told through verbal, writing, or artistic ways after a trauma narrative is finished. The traumatic person can organize his/her memories, making them easier to manage and lessening the terrible emotions they retain, by sharing and developing a trauma narrative.

Among the memoirs which tackle child maltreatment is Jane Rowan's *The River of Forgetting: A Memoir of Healing from Sexual Abuse* (2010). Rowan is a writer and a professor who has taught Organic Chemistry in a private college for over thirty years. As a survivor of incest trauma, she is grateful to find joy and freedom through psychotherapy and scriptotherapy. Her memoir deals with child maltreatment that leads to betrayal trauma which she has suffered from throughout her life. Rowan shows how the child's exposure to betrayal trauma has a drastic effect on his/her psyche. This memoir is valuable as it serves as a guide to traumatic people in dealing with survival, transformation and healing. It is a journey of self-understanding.

This research paper aims at applying psychological trauma theory of Jennifer Freyd that involves child maltreatment and emotional neglect to Jane Rowan's *The River of Forgetting* (2010). It deals with Jennifer Freyd's concept of betrayal trauma, its symptoms and some of the defensive surviving strategies such as dissociative amnesia and dissociative identity disorder as adaptive responses to childhood sexual abuse. Rowan's memoir is considered a personal account of her psychological suffering due to her repressed memory of being sexually abused by her father during her early childhood. It examines how the protagonist struggles to survive among persistent traumatic memories that are repressed during forty years of her life. Finally, the textual analysis clarifies the process of recovery from psychological trauma by using different kinds of therapies such as psychotherapy, dance therapy, art therapy and scriptotherapy.

## **II. Child maltreatment**

Although child maltreatment and child abuse are sometimes used interchangeably, child maltreatment is considered an umbrella term that includes both child abuse and emotional neglect (Robinson and Breaux 2019: 1). Child abuse is a universal problem that is defined as "all forms of physical and/or emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect or negligent treatment or commercial or other exploitation, resulting in actual or potential harm to the child's health, survival, development or dignity in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust or power" (Butchart, Harvey, Mian, Furniss and Kahane 2006: 9). Moreover, child maltreatment describes the standard of care given to a child by those in charge of him. By failing to exercise the bare minimum of care in providing the child with any of the following: food, clothing, shelter, education, or medical care when financially able to do so, a parent or other person legally responsible for the care of a child harms the child or puts him/her in immediate danger of harm. A child's desertion or a lack of proper monitoring can lead to maltreatment. Excessive drug or alcohol usage by a parent that impairs the ability to properly oversee the child may constitute maltreatment of the child. Hence the term abuse or maltreatment comprises the

severe injuries committed against children. An abused child is one who suffers from serious physical harm or is subjected to sex abuse by a parent or caregiver.

According to Sneddon (2003: 236-250) the characteristics of child maltreatment are as follows: sexual abuse occurs when adults, teenagers, or children participate in sexual behaviours that they may not comprehend. As for emotional abuse, it involves marginalizing, terrifying and detaching children from others. When children are intentionally neglected or subjected to bodily harm or injury, this is referred to as physical abuse. When an adult consistently neglects to take care of a child or fails to safeguard him or her from any risk, it is said to be neglect. It could involve giving the child insufficient emotional support and attention, as well as not providing enough encouragement, clothing, food, housing, sanitation, nutrition, supervision, or medical or educational care, all of which put the child at risk for harm.

Child maltreatment can lead to a child's development of insecure attachment relationships, disturbances in his self-development, ineffective peer relationships, fear of his caregivers and other adults, and an inability to manage stress. It also leads to psychological trauma which Kai Erikson (1978: 153) describes as “a blow to the psyche that breaks through one’s defences so suddenly and with such brutal force that one cannot react to it effectively”. Trauma “has become a complex term that is connected to the mind, soul and identity, which cannot be easily healed as physical wound” (Muhi 2020: 135). Moreover, Gilligan (2002: 6) asserts:

Trauma is the shock to the psyche that leads to dissociation: our ability to separate ourselves from parts of ourselves, to create a split within ourselves.... It is our ability.... to hold parts of our experience not as a secret from others but as a “foreign body” within ourselves.

Psychological trauma is transformed into betrayal trauma if the attacker is a family member or a caregiver. Jennifer Freyd (2008: 76) maintains: “Betrayal trauma occurs when the people or institutions on which a person depends for survival significantly violate that person’s trust or well-being: childhood physical, emotional, or sexual abuse perpetrated by a caregiver are examples of betrayal trauma”. Similarly, Jenny Edkins (2003: 4) maintains, “trauma takes place when the very powers that we are convinced will protect us and give us security become our tormentors: when our family is no longer a source of refuge but a site of danger”.

### **III. Betrayal trauma theory and survival**

Betrayal trauma theory was first introduced by Jennifer Freyd in 1996. She describes it as “the violation of implicit or explicit trust. The closer and more necessary the relationship, the greater the degree of betrayal. Extensive betrayal is traumatic. Much of what is traumatic to human beings involves some degree of betrayal” (1996: 9). Accordingly, there exists a state of “betrayal blindness” in which the person who has been betrayed is unaware of the betrayal or has no memory of it. The idea behind betrayal trauma, a theory of psychological reaction to trauma, is that the degree to which a traumatic event involves betrayal by another person has a significant impact on how the traumatized person will encode the event

in his memory, how easily he will become aware of it, and how he will react psychologically. It is “a theory that predicts that the degree to which a negative event represents a betrayal by a trusted needed other will influence the way in which that events are processed and remembered” (Freyd, 2002: 169). It aims to comprehend how a person will grasp betrayal and remember it. According to this hypothesis, it is more likely that a person will be "unaware" or "blind" to this betrayal because of the importance of the betrayer in his life.

According to betrayal trauma theory, one can consider *The River of Forgetting* by Jane Rowan a trauma narrative in which she uses psychological trauma as a powerful indicator of child sexual abuse and emotional neglect. Rowan is a survivor of betrayal trauma and is passionate about sharing her healing journey with others. Rowan “expands [her] readers’ awareness of trauma by engaging them with personalized, experientially, oriented means of narration that highlight the painful ambivalence that characterizes traumatic memory and warns [them] that trauma reproduces itself if left unattended”(Waites 1993: 3). As a result, Rowan discusses her experience with healing from childhood sexual assault in this bold and affecting memoir. She did not remember anything about this sexual abuse until foggy memories start to invade her mind after the death of her father. Some fragmented memories of her traumatic experience start to haunt her. Moreover, some other vivid body memories sweep through Rowan’s body without a clear reason. She says: “Overwhelming emotions of sadness, confusion, and later, anger, physical sensations intruded on me. Any time I thought about the suspected abuse, I got an ache in my lower belly, right above my pubic bone” (*The River*, Ch.2, Para.6). These memories shake Rowan’s stable family image and normal childhood that she believes she had one day. Although, all the time she feels that there is something odd and unusual about her family. When Rowan is abused at ages three to six, she doesn’t have words for what happened. But after forty years, she realizes that she suffers from foggy memories that haunt her. Her therapist, Sarah, helps her to narrate her painful child incest. Rowan writes poems within the narrative text to express her feelings. She says:

What are the details of a fog?  
 Memories that had to go far away,  
 Stripped down, fragmented.....  
 This fog is my fog

This lack of detail is the tale I must tell (*The River*, Prologue).

These foggy memories bring back Rowan’s psychological trauma which she tries to repress all the time. Rowan suffers from child sexual abuse from her father. She tells Sarah in one of the therapy sessions: “I remembered this time...I know I was three or four.... I am sitting on the toilet and it hurts when I pee. It stings. I know it is supposed to be that I slipped on the bathtub over there and hurt myself on the rim, but that isn’t true. It’s not!” (*The River*, Ch.2, Para.2). All the time Rowan feels that she has a little crying girl inside her. She spends a lot of time in the evenings trying to bring back past memories. She tries to ask her younger self, Little Jane, to tell her more about this child abuse. She begins to remember a conversation between her parents when her father tells her mother that what happened to her was

not rape. Her mother's response is that she is too young to remember and she doesn't understand. However, her mother uses boric acid to take away the sting and comfort her. Consequently, after this realization, she begins mourning for a healthy and safe relationship with her parents. She begins to wonder if she was "crazy, or a victim, or a non-functional, abnormal person?" (*The River*, Ch.2, Para.4). Rowan thinks that this realization resembles an infection to be fought with her whole body.

Danya Glaser (2002: 697) asserts that "emotional abuse and neglect is an under-recognized, but actually common, form of child abuse". Similarly, Grossman, Spinazzola, Zucker and Hopper (2017: 86) confirm that psychological maltreatment is "the most challenging and prevalent form of child abuse and neglect". Furthermore, they peculiarly point out that any abusive behaviour that isn't physical is considered emotional abuse, which can include verbal aggression, humiliation and intimidation. It typically takes the form of a pattern of behaviour that develops over time with the goal of undermining another person's sense of identity and self-worth. It frequently causes stress and anxiety. Child maltreatment has major negative effects as Glaser (2002: 698) maintains: "it is now increasingly accepted that emotional abuse and neglect cause significant harm to the child's development and that this harm extends into adult life". She also thinks that psychological maltreatment is "more strongly predictive of subsequent impairments in the children's development than the severity of physical abuse. Beyond the physical injury that can result from the various forms of child abuse . . . all forms of abuse and neglect affect the child's psychological, emotional, and behavioural development" (2002: 698-699).

In *The River of Forgetting* emotional neglect is obvious when Rowan's parents order her to keep silent towards any painful incident. This is clearly manifested when Rowan is separated from her elder sister, Suzie, who suffers from Down Syndrome and who is sent to a sheltered home in New York. When Rowan starts school, her mother tells her when her schoolmates ask about having brothers or sisters, she must deny that she has a retarded sister who lives away from home. Moreover, her parents don't want to hear her true feelings and sadness towards Suzie's absence. Rowan feels lonely and sad because her mentally retarded sister is her playmate. Rowan misses her a lot. Thus, she suffers from emotional neglect from her mother after the separation from Suzie. Rowan tells her therapist: "They didn't want me to be sad about it. Somehow, I know that. My mother especially. She was sad herself, but she didn't know how to comfort me. She tried to make me cheer up. I was only two!" (*The River*, Ch.1, Para. 27). Sarah comments by saying: "Just when you needed their help. That's exactly how the child learns not to have feelings. It's how a young part of you gets split off" (*The River*, Ch.1, Para.28). Sarah explains that the little girl inside Rowan, Little Jane, her alter ego, is not allowed to express her feelings and emotions to her parents which leads to being stuck back there inside her psyche. Hence Sarah has to get in touch with this little girl and bring her back into Rowan's life. With the help of Sarah who gives her care and support, she manages to recollect and awake some repressed and hidden memories of her subconscious related to her childhood emotional neglect. The second incident in which Rowan experiences emotional neglect is when she tries to

tell her mother about being sexually abused by her father. Myra, Rowan's mother, advises her to ignore and forget that experience. She feels sad, neglected and unprotected. Her mother believes that time is a great healer and that Rowan is going to forget that abuse because she is still a small kid. She also thinks that "so many things are solved by not thinking about them" (*The River*, Ch. 30, Para. 68). When telling these feelings to Sarah, the therapist, Rowan feels relaxed as Sarah affirms that may be Myra suffers from some unhappy childhood memories and prefers to be silent in order to survive.

The damaging impact of child maltreatment on the traumatized psyche is that "survivor's intimate relationships are driven by the hunger for protection and care and by fear of abandonment and exploitation (Herman 1992: 80). Hence empowerment, loss and social isolation are at the heart of psychological distress. Betrayal trauma offers logical, fact-based responses to these psychological effects. According to Freyd, forgetting helps the child to keep in contact with his/her family, which is vital to survival. The more intimate the relationship, the more crucial it is to forget the abuse to maintain this troubled relationship (2002: 169).

Survivors of child maltreatment may suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) which is mostly shocking and painful. The American Psychiatric Association defines the concept of 'Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder' as "Shell-Shock, Combat Stress, Delayed Stress Syndrome and Traumatic Neurosis" (Caruth 1996: 3). Four distinct types of symptoms are linked to individuals of PTSD namely: reliving or re-experiencing the traumatic event through nightmares, distressing thoughts, psychological distress and flashbacks; avoiding reminders of the traumatic event (thoughts, emotions, people, places, and conversations that may activate memories of the traumatic event); feeling emotionally numb or having reduced emotional experiences, detachment or alienation from others, and being less interested in previous experiences; and constantly being on guard, having difficulty in concentrating and feeling nervous or easily startled (Briere and Scott 2015: 75-90).

#### **IV. Analysis**

To read *The River of Forgetting: A Memoir of Healing from Sexual Abuse* within the framework of trauma studies, it is important to perceive the characteristics of child maltreatment and the defence mechanisms that the protagonist uses to adapt with betrayal trauma. Rowan's betrayal trauma not only affects her life as a child, but also causes her severe psychological damage as an adult. This can be seen through the traumatic symptoms that Rowan suffers from that leads her to be a victim of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Sarah asks her to be patient with this mental illness because people often don't remember things--they block out memories in order to survive.

The symptoms of PTSD in Rowan's case are asserted through self-blame, nightmares and sleep disorder, fragmented memories and flashbacks, dissociation and traumatic amnesia, and having problems in communicating with others. One of the symptoms of PTSD that Rowan suffers from is self-blame. She blames herself for this sexual abuse and keeps questioning herself for its reason. Self-

blaming is very harmful to victims of betrayal trauma. Blaming should be placed on the abusers only in case of child abuse. During a meeting with her women's group, Rowan confesses being abused and molested by her father. She tells them that she feels shameful and distressed.

Rowan's feeling of shame is very clear because she feels that she is partly responsible for what has happened. She blames herself for being there 'in the flesh' and being the temptation. She feels that she was part of what her father did to her. She didn't run away nor did she scream. She always has a terrible feeling of being a participant in the family system and of complicity (*The River*, Ch.17, Para.4). Rowan compares herself to the Pandora's Box where all the evil things are hidden. She blames herself for not being able to stop her father from violating her boundaries. Although the reality is that she is the victim and she was too young to understand what her father did to her. She was unable to defend herself from being molested. Her sense of shame also appears when she is harassed by another man who is sending her disturbing cards at work. She tells her friend Marianne, "I feel like my reputation is being raped.... I feel shamed even though I didn't do anything" (*The River*, Ch. 25, Para. 22). To get rid of this feeling, she goes to the dance studio and participates in the Authentic Movement sessions. She drums loudly on the wall with her palms and feels satisfied and powerful. After that, she begins her art work with clay. She kneads the clay and makes a shape of a sea monster. As a result, she feels comfortable and calms down.

Rowan's feeling of anger is linked to her sense of shame. Haviland (2023: xi) confirms that the feeling of shame "compels victims to conceal the harm done to them, drives perpetrators to seek forbidden satisfactions, and allows witnesses to turn away from the spectacle of injury". After Little Jane becomes angry, Rowan is shameful. Anger was unspoken in her family. She is always afraid of losing people if she gets angry. Rowan's parents don't pay attention to her anger. This leads to her feeling of emotional neglect. During her Authentic Movement sessions, she imagines talking to her mother and blaming her for this neglect. She asserts in an angry tone: "You are not listening! You don't want to hear. You tell me the hurt must have happened by my fault on the bathtub. That is awful! It is wrong to mess with my mind like that" (*The River*, Ch. 28, Para. 26).

Another symptom of PTSD that Rowan suffers from is having nightmares and sleep disorder. After a traumatic experience it is common to have nightmares and annoying dreams. Dreams provide insight into the unconscious mind. According to the Freudian theory, dreams shield sleep by enclosing the uneasiness brought on by suppressed desires. Dreams give people the opportunity to return and try to heal from psychological trauma. It is common to view nightmares as the inability to overcome trauma. During the nightmare, the mind converts the shame connected to the traumatic event into fear. Traumatic events are better assimilated into long-term memory with the aid of dreams. They are an expression of the body's coping mechanism following the traumatic event. They can also incite frightening situations while the traumatized person is asleep, which can help lower anxiety and fear levels and improve the ability to make sensible decisions. The body's

incapacity to process the traumatic event is symbolized by nightmares. They can make the sleeper very irritated when he wakes up (Dumitrescu 2019: 144-152).

In *The River of Forgetting* Rowan has a vivid dream in which an incredibly tiny black child is sitting naked and sad. She realizes that she has to protect this little angry child within her. This dream reflects her own traumatic experience for being abused sexually by her father. She feels unprotected and vulnerable to any danger. This dream turns into a nightmare where she sees a massive strong dragon. She narrates:

I saw a dragon's hind legs-massive, scaled blue-green- and huge tail....I began to cry.... The dragon of my vision was so strong and huge that it did not need to be aggressive; it could just breathe and people had to show respect. I could hunch alongside it and be protected utterly (The River, Ch.16, Para. 15).

Rowan's dreams are very effective and insightful. They reveal her feelings towards her traumatic experience. Her dream of the dragon symbolizes her longing for protection. She looks for a giant creature which is capable of her trust other than her parents. This dream is considered an outlet of her repressed desire for inner peace, safety and protection.

The third symptom of PTSD that Rowan suffers from is having fragmented memories and flashbacks. Rowan suffers from a very painful mouth memory. She feels that Little Jane, is angry and distressed. Therefore, she resorts to Authentic Movement sessions in the dance studio to relieve herself. While spiraling, she suddenly crawls into a place near Sarah and draws an image. "At the center, a black hole of a mouth, the shadows of two eyes above, two black outlines of hands trying to block the face, fingers spread to fend off. Through it all, a spiral of purple, circling dizzily inward to the mouth (The River, Ch.24, Para. 2). Little Jane speaks within Rowan murmuring: "The mouth, That's so hard for me to be with. Him doing that to my mouth, it stops me from speaking, breathing. It's the worst"(The River, Ch.24, Para. 3). Sarah comforts her by saying that she was very young to have these body-feelings. She asserts that her father made unforgivable mistake when he sexually abused her. It was his fault to force this painful and fearful event on her. She covers her mouth the whole time trying to protect it. She declares that it is the place of hurt during her childhood. After that, Rowan goes back on the floor, lying on her back and experiencing a strong image of being under water. She perceives the ripples of the surface above her. Her fingertips trace the surface. She is inside the river dreaming and breathing under water. Sarah is watching her pain and confusion and trying to comfort her unlike her mother who always neglects her suffering. She feels shame and disgust but is grateful that Sarah keeps beside her comforting Little Jane. Rowan writes about this traumatic experience in her notebook in the form of fragmented piece of writing that must be hidden in her safe Pandora's box.

In order to tolerate the traumatic experience of child sexual abuse, dissociation becomes the body's defence mechanism against the recollection of a horrific past, which is thereby reflected in the victim's sense of isolation and lack of communication with the outside world. Adult survivors of child sexual abuse



who are sexually assaulted by their caregivers tend to disassociate and repress their painful memories of the abuse. Dissociation is considered “a self-protective survival technique in which a child slips into dissociative state” in order to escape psychological trauma (Tull 2019: 1). Freyd differentiates between three overlapping terms: memory repression, traumatic amnesia, and dissociation. According to Freyd, memory repression is the failure to recall consciously something that is both significant and for which the inability to recall is apparently motivated. That motivation may be conscious or unconscious, and it may be internally or externally driven (1996: 15). She adds by defining “Traumatic Amnesia” (the lack of conscious memory for a traumatic experience or part of a traumatic experience) as the result of memory repression. Mostly, repression can be defined as not only the failure to recall something from the past, but also the failure to be aware of current thoughts and feelings. She asserts that this definition of repression is consistent with Sigmund Freud’s suggestion that “the essence of repression lies simply in the function of rejecting and keeping something out of consciousness” (1963: 105). Hence “Dissociation” (the lack of normal integration of thoughts, feelings, and experiences into the stream of consciousness and memory) can be associated with repression, a notion that includes not only memories but also current emotions and thoughts (1996: 15). Similarly, Elizabeth Loftus (1993: 518) describes memory repression as “one of the most haunting concepts in psychology. Something shocking happens, and the mind pushes it into some inaccessible corner of the unconscious. Later, the memory may emerge into consciousness”.

Freyd claims that psychogenic amnesia is a natural defence to not only relieve or even block pain, but also to keep the relationship with the caregiver. She also asserts that “betrayal trauma suggests that psychogenic amnesia is an adaptive response to childhood abuse. When a parent or other powerful figure violates a fundamental ethics of human relationship, victims may need to remain unaware of the trauma not to reduce suffering but rather to promote survival. Amnesia enables the child to maintain an attachment with a figure vital to survival, development, and thriving” (1994: 307). Psychogenic amnesia allows the child to move through life without constant reminders of distressing and annoying traumatic events. It is about experiencing multiple personalities within the same individual, such as having two or more persistent personality states. This form of dissociation has certain symptoms such as identity confusion, alternating identities and personalization. There is a link between post-traumatic stress disorder and dissociation. Tull asserts that “ongoing trauma, especially childhood physical, sexual, or emotional abuse and/or neglect is a very significant risk factor for the development of dissociative disorders” (2019: 1). They are correlated with the highest rate of child maltreatment and emotional neglect of all psychiatric mental disorders.

In *The River of Forgetting* Rowan has dissociative amnesia that helps her to survive with her parents who abused her sexually and emotionally. Rowan forgets all about her child abuse and begins to have foggy memories and flashbacks after the death of her father who died at the age of eighty-three with Parkinson disease. Rowan is fifty-two years old when she begins to remember her traumatic

experience. Hence she identifies herself with Pandora, the young girl in the fairy tale of Pandora's Box. This girl is ordered by her parents to never open a little box. One day when she is left alone, she opens it and "all manners of evil things fly out of it and into the world: Pestilence, War, Poverty, and Meanness. Last of all, Hope flies out to keep humans going" (*The River*, Ch.1, Para. 32). As a result, she is blamed for opening the box and releasing all these evil manners. She feels sad and scared. At that time, Rowan begins to have a fleeting image of sitting on the toilet in the bathroom in the old house. She feels dizzy as a cloud took over her consciousness. She feels fog and blurriness coming up for a while. She is blinded by gray or coloured fog. Sometimes she feels lost for long periods of time during the therapy sessions. Sarah tells her that she is suffering from 'dissociative amnesia'. Over time, she begins to notice fog creeping in when she will get close to something that her defences refuse to reveal. Dissociation is a psychological response to the traumatic experience in which the traumatized person detaches himself from reality in order to survive.

There are three types of dissociation: dissociative amnesia, depersonalization or de-realization disorder and dissociative identity disorder (Multiple Identity Disorder). According to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5), Dissociative Identity Disorder (DID) is conceptualized as "an identity disruption indicated by the presence of two or more distinct personality states (experienced as possession in some cultures), with discontinuity in sense of self and agency, and with variations in affect, behaviour, consciousness, memory, perception, cognition, or sensory-motor functioning" (2013). Putnam states that DID is a complex, posttraumatic developmental disorder. He asserts that there is a close relationship between dissociative disorder and psychological trauma that resulted from child abuse. The symptoms of DID are always related to mood disturbance, eating disorder, anxiety and psychosis (1997).

Rowan suffers from two types of dissociation which are dissociative amnesia and dissociative identity disorder as a reaction to her experience of child sexual abuse. The dissociative amnesia of Rowan was mainly in forgetting the sexual abuse by her father and anything related to it. As for the dissociative identity disorder, it refers to a type of dissociative disorder most often develops during early childhood in children who are experiencing long-term trauma. This involves emotional, physical, and/or sexual abuse, neglect and highly unpredictable interactions with caregivers.

Rowan displays dissociative identity disorder (multiple personality disorder) through the multiple inner child characters inside her. During the psychotherapy sessions she has more than one character/personality in her mind: the Silent Girl, the Angry Girl, the Good Girl and the Lost Girl. These multiple personalities control Rowan's thoughts and feelings. Rowan has to deal with the inner child personalities to relieve herself from stress. These multiple personalities are kept hidden in Rowan's mind but sometimes appear during the therapy sessions. Each of these personalities reflects hidden desires and demands of her alter ego as an abused child who is emotionally neglected by her mother. For example, when she talks to Little Jane every morning before going to work to take care of her feelings. The Little girl

says: “My face needs contact. It is hard to admit the depths of my need. I want to be babied. I’m so afraid that if I reveal it, I will be rejected, unloved, repulsed” (*The River*, Ch.7, Para. 15). Rowan’s mother has strict rules of living. She wants her child to be strong, not to rely on anyone, to be dependable and loyal. This makes Rowan feels discontented and sad. Myra always asks Rowan to do house chores without talking to her. She never lets her speak about her emotions and feelings although she realizes her sadness either from Suzie’s absence or from her father’s abuse.

In order to deal with these multiple personalities in a professional way, Sarah suggests to bring all these little girls together to relive the stress that Rowan suffers from. Rowan has the Good Girl inside her who did so well in school in getting good grades, being obedient and trying to stay connected to Myra and Jack. She also has the Silent Girl who keeps her mouth shut and hides all her painful memories of the child abuse in a safe dark box. She narrates: “There are a lot of reasons why little girls need to be silent. To keep secrets in order to survive. Because of the unbearable, unspeakable things happening in their mouths. Stubbornly, to resist being forced to speak. I have so much need to be silent” (*The River*, Ch.31, Para. 35). Rowan also has the sad Little Jane who feels abused and wronged all the time. One day Sarah asks her to invite all these little girls to speak freely about their anger. Rowan feels relaxed after this dialogue with her inner selves and shows Sarah fragments of her memoir that she decides to write.

The last symptom of PTSD is the difficulty in communicating with people. Judith Herman states that “the child trapped in an abusive environment is faced with formidable tasks of adaptation. She must find a way to preserve a sense of trust in people who are untrustworthy, safety in a situation that is unsafe, control in a situation that is terrifyingly unpredictable, power in a situation of helplessness” (Herman 1992: 96). Child abuse can lead to having difficulty in maintaining relationships for fear of being controlled or abused. Difficulty in trusting others is one of the traumatic symptoms that Rowan reflects in her memoir when she is facing difficulty in giving her therapist the complete trust at the beginning of the psychotherapy. Rowan keeps the real acts of sexual abuse secret from Sarah and refuses to share them with other people during the group therapy. Little Jane doesn’t trust anybody even the adult Rowan. This difficulty in trusting others leads to unstable relationships in Rowan’s life. She got divorced after being married to a man with whom she has a reliable and understanding son, William, who cares about her emotions and suffering psyche. All through her life Rowan couldn’t build a strong relationship with her sisters and couldn’t have a stable and normal relationship with her parents. There is always a huge gap between them. Rowan doesn’t have a good relationship with her colleagues at the college either. She is not appointed as the Head of the Department of Organic Chemistry because she is enraged at people who trampled her boundaries. She is too pushy and assertive about ideas and principles. Rowan finds close relations impossible.

According to Susanne Dillmann (2010), traumatic people often have problems in communicating with others, whether expressing self or listening actively to other people. Both requires deep concentration that can be difficult in

the presence of hypervigilance which is the elevated state of constantly assessing potential threats as a result of trauma. The concentration level of trauma survivors declines and their hypervigilance increases which makes listening ability very difficult. Moreover, their sense of shame prohibits them from communicating with others or expressing themselves openly. In fact, the traumatized person wants to avoid certain reactions from listeners such as being disbelieved by others or by being weak, overreacting or going crazy. This can be easily seen in Rowan's case through her inability to cope with others in the group therapy.

Within the context of trauma theory, it is hard for trauma survivors to heal their psychological wounds and emotional scars easily. It is believed that traumatic memories remain intact and can be experienced if provoked. However, healing from betrayal trauma is not impossible as the traumatic person may be able to recover if he goes through different kinds of therapies. Heller asserts that trauma victims can heal their psychological and emotional wounds as there are “many paths that offer a blueprint for emotional recovery”(2015:32). Nowadays there are different types of therapies that help the traumatized people in coming out of their anxiety and stress. Shoab, Iqbal and Shaukat mention that this includes psychodynamic therapy, cognitive behavioral therapy, dance therapy, music therapy, art therapy, massage therapy, martial arts therapy, adjunctive therapy (2021: 148).

In *The River of Forgetting*, Rowan refers to many kinds of therapies; for instance, psychodynamic therapy, dance therapy, art therapy and scriptotherapy. When Rowan suffers from communication problems with her colleagues at work, she goes to Sarah who tells her: “When you started with me in 1989, it was about four years after your divorce. The divorce didn't seem to be on your mind that much. You came in with distress about some conflicts at work, I remember” (*The River*, Ch. 1, Para. 46). Rowan tries to deal with relationships at work while receiving therapy from Sarah. She wants to make close relations with her colleagues and to attract people. The result of seeking psychotherapy leads to her healing from betrayal trauma and emotional neglect that she suffers from.

During one of the psychotherapy sessions, Sarah asks Rowan to imagine a meeting between her parents and a powerful policeman who can blame them for the sexual abuse and the emotional neglect that Little Jane suffers from. Rowan imagines that the policeman accuses Jack of sexually abusing Little Jane by touching her private areas which hurts and scars her physically and emotionally. She imagines Jack trying to deny it by saying it didn't really hurt her. It is not like she was raped. As a result, the policeman orders him not to do these painful and shameful acts any more or he will be punished. Then she imagines the policeman talking to her mother and blaming her for her emotional neglect towards Little Jane by keeping silent and not protecting her against her husband all the time. Then the policeman accuses them of being irresponsible and merciless. He assures Little Jane that he comes to protect her against any abuse. Rowan feels relaxed, secured and protected. This imaginative meeting occurs after the death of her mother at the age of eighty-seven who had suffered from Colon Cancer.

Woolf and Nochajski (2013: 15) assert that survivors with dissociative amnesia suffer from depression and anxiety more than others who have continuous memory of their child abuse. Accordingly, those who have experienced trauma might heal by engaging in a variety of constructive and creative pursuits, such as dancing, drawing, and writing.

Consequently, art therapy is considered one of the best treatments to heal the suffering soul from stress and pressure. People who experience trauma can transform their lives by participating in art-making, artwork, or through creative engagements. Some objectives of art therapy are to actuate emotions, rebuild trust, and reduce a feeling of “isolation and separation” (Wertheim-Cahen, Dijk, Schouten, Roozen and Drozdek 2004: 426). Similarly, Shoaib et al. assert that people often retreat into silence after encountering traumatic events, but they can convey their messages through their art. They can also express their suppressed emotions through their art projects. The victims do not need to be very artistic or creatively talented to take part in art therapy. People who do not know anything about art can even participate in this type of therapy. The process of art-making can be called the process of recovery and discovery. It makes people contemplate, meditate and think about their own selves. Through this meditation, victims can bring positive changes into their lives (2021: 149).

The concept of art as medicine, developed by Shaun McNiff, shows that the therapy of imagination and soul is accessible through expressive art such as drawing. McNiff states that when a traumatized survivor draws an image, it becomes an order through which “the creative mind treats itself, heals itself and then reuses its vigorous energy back to the daily living”(1992: 36). Moreover, he argues that these artistic drawings reveal the depressed and isolated self of the traumatized person and thus can heal him from his psychic illness. This artistic drawing becomes “an angel of transformation” through formation and meditation (McNiff 1992: 41). During the drawing process, the artist puts his ego aside and engages in a direct dialogue with the image. As he concentrates and contemplates, transformation begins to take place in the tormented soul. McNiff’s phrase “conversation with the image” implies that the artist begins to imagine stories about his work and what it represents and begins to focus on past traumatic events. This leads to understand the chaotic and puzzled inner world and to improve the mental health of the traumatized person.

In *The River of Forgetting* Rowan always mingles two kinds of therapies: dancing and art therapies. She always expresses her pain and suffering from loneliness through dancing and drawing. When her alter ego, Little Jane, feels lonely and depressed, Rowan tries to comfort her by going on Authentic Movement sessions. In the studio she tries to protect Little Jane from this sense of alienation and frustration. Similarly, when Rowan is spending Christmas with her mother, Myra, she invites Little Jane to draw whatever she wants. “First she drew in bright pastels, a funny squiggly creature with a girl’s face. Then a dark, dark picture, scribbles of black and dark blue oil pastels, with a few red and yellow slashes, the picture dense on the entire page. Little Jane asked, “Is it good?” (The River, Ch. 20, Para. 24). Whenever Rowan looks at this drawing, she feels painful and sad. She

remembers that her parents don't want to see the darkness and they don't value her drawings and their meanings. This leads to her feeling of emotional neglect from both of them. Hence drawing therapy is considered a way of discovering herself and of creating a strong girl inside her who is capable of rebelling and expressing her fear and anger. After that Rowan talks to her mother about the weather and Christmas presents and feels that her other alter ego, Good Girl, is taking charge and behaves well. Then when being alone, she draws "a grainy yet monotonous field—gray, brown and white like dirty snow with her brush and oil pastels. It is detailed but featureless. Then it changed in her sight to a "snow, a frozen river, abstract, concrete. Solid but untrustworthy. Blurry, specific, bleak, and lonely" (*The River*, Ch.20, Para. 27). The drawing reflects Rowan's hidden pain and loneliness. She feels that no one can ever imagine her inner feelings of betrayal and neglect. No one bothers to listen or hear the truth of her child abuse. Despite all that negative feelings towards her mother, Rowan has a good relationship with her only son, William, who is twenty-one years old. She tells him that she is having hard time with her mother. He is very considerate and understanding. He tells her that it is better to talk than keeping silent when feeling lonely and distressed. However, she doesn't tell him anything because she couldn't speak about her betrayal trauma with him. Drawing therapy is very effective because it enables Rowan to understand non-verbal images that she could express in silence and without feeling unprotected and unsafe.

After the death of Rowan's mother and the imaginative meeting with her multiple personalities and the policeman, Rowan feels comfortable. Sarah encourages her to talk to Big Jane in one of the therapy sessions to know her feelings. Although the pain of betrayal is unbearable for Little Jane, Big Jane is able to flee from all that burden. Big Jane's heart is ripped open and it takes a long time to integrate "this soul-knowledge". After a year later, Rowan draws a vivid image in which "dark vague gray clouds covered the right side of the page where Silent and Lost Girls lived. An ordinary square house on the left for Good Girl". But she perceives something new. "In the jagged red split between, there is a ray of light beaming off into outer space" (*The River*, Ch.32, Para. 16). Sarah tells her that this is the loving and innocent open girl who whirls away like an invisible particle leaving her heart. Rowan cannot believe that the miracle happens and that she begins to be healed from her betrayal trauma. She feels happy and energetic. She thinks that this new girl represents light and love. She narrates: "My incredulous heart. I get to have all this. Love, belief, welcome, joy, fun. Wonder. Unknown, unbounded, loving, amazing grace. Inner work, writing heart, connection" (*The River*, Ch.32, Para. 24). She feels that she resembles a butterfly which is fragile but sturdy. She accepts her multiple personalities and is satisfied by going into this process of healing. She feels happy for the first time in her life after reconciling all these contradicted selves. It is quite obvious that this sudden change takes place due to the therapeutic power of art. It succeeds in transforming her from being a traumatized person into a loving one who accepts life with its calamities. For Rowan, art has been a forbidden area as her mother always makes fun of it. Myra thinks that Rowan is not an artist. However, Rowan uses art to heal from her trauma.

She feels released when she holds the black crayon and transfers its soul onto the page, adding jagged red, brown, and purple slashes. She states: “Art was a place beyond judgement ... I assured myself *This is just for me, not for anyone to judge*”. (*The River*, Ch. 32, Para. 32). She loves “solitude and connection” that the creative process has brought her.

Another effective therapy in Rowan’s journey towards recovery is the writing therapy, scriptotherapy, and the telling of her trauma’s story in a memoir. As a traumatized victim, Rowan can release her wrath and frustration while expressing her repressed feelings on paper. This therapy aids in her healing process and provides a haven from trauma, despair, and worry. Child maltreatment leaves the traumatized person in a state of confusion and uncertainty. As a form of self-protection, they alienate themselves from the external world and retreat into their own internal one. They are afraid of social interaction and human communication. Betrayal trauma has a profound impact on the traumatized mental and emotional health. Therefore, the road to recovery necessitates the empowerment of the survivor to create new connections. Herman claims that “the first principle of recovery is the empowerment of the survivor. She must be the author and arbiter of her own recovery. Others may offer advice, support, assistance, affection, and care, but not cure”(1992: 94). Accordingly, writing therapy is considered one of the most successful therapies that help the traumatized people in their healing journeys. It can be highly therapeutic and effective. Actually, the purpose of scriptotherapy is reconnection with people. Birrell and Freyd state that: “The focus of the treatment for those who have suffered betrayal is reconnection—reconnection with themselves and reconnection with the wider community. What has been fragmented and silenced must be allowed to re-emerge”(2006: 53). What these authors propose is a therapeutic environment which provides a safe and calm atmosphere for amnesia to be emerged.

In *The River of Forgetting*, Jane Rowan joins a writing group after the death of her mother. She attempts to use writing as an important therapy in her healing journey. Writing has opened a new realm of creativity and recovery for her. Writing this memoir reflects the therapeutic element of life writing. Women often use writing in order to heal the wounds of psychological trauma. Suzette Henke states that the concept of scriptotherapy refers to writing about trauma that can lead to individual and collective healing and alleviation of trauma symptoms. It offers the possibility of reinventing the self and reassessing the past as pertaining to many fictional narratives that focus on protagonists who attempt to survive by creating enabling stories and self-concepts, thereby, recovering a sense of self and agency in the face of devastating losses (2000: xii). Rowan confirms the importance of scriptotherapy as follows: “Writing this memoir... actually forced me to carve a new life. It compelled me to live the life of an artist, paying attention to moods, subtle perceptions, writing in intense spurts of energy interspersed with apparently lazy days of vagueness, naps, hikes, and staring into space” (*The River*, Ch.32, Para. 35). Writing is considered an outlet for her repressed emotions and feelings that tire Rowan for about forty years.

According to Herman, “fragmented components of frozen imagery and sensation” are used to create a narrative and recollect them into “an organized, detailed, verbal account, oriented in time and historical content” (1992:177). Scriptotherapy has the potential to reconstruct the physical and psychological imprint left by trauma. By writing *The River of Forgetting*, Rowan expresses her pain and confesses her traumatic experience from child abuse and emotional neglect. She is finally able to turn this painful experience into a cohesive narrative in order to achieve inner peace that is necessary for her recovery. Rowan decides to write a book about her journey of healing after six years from the beginning of her psychotherapy. She thinks that it will benefit others who are suffering from child sexual abuse.

In the final chapter of *The River of Forgetting*, Rowan writes about the journey of healing from trauma in a very significant way. She defines healing as the absence of the negative symptoms of PTSD and the absence of flashback memories. She believes that the sense of wrongness is replaced by a general sense of rightness. She admits that she knows where her weak spots are and that fear is the most terrible feeling that she suffers from. She feels grateful that she has a loving, supporting and understanding son who controls his anger and not poison others with it. Finally Rowan is able to have this sense of connection and wholeness with nature. She feels connected to people and the beautiful environment around her. She feels satisfied with her life that has many loyal friends like Sarah. She feels her parents’ love inside her while not denying their faults and shortcomings as human beings. She admits: “Healing is feeling my story as beautiful despite all the pain and struggle” (*The River*, Ch.32, Para. 48). She is grateful that through writing poetry and her memoir she is able to connect to other people who are caring and helpful.

## V. Conclusion

To conclude, child maltreatment and emotional neglect can have a drastic effect on the psyche of children. Betrayal trauma that takes place within the family can be particularly harmful. It can lead to long lasting fear and lack of self-confidence. It can also be life-threatening due to the lack of safety and protection of the traumatized child. This leads to Post Traumatic Stress Disorder that results in the continuous feeling of anxiety, sadness, and depression. Moreover, betrayal trauma victims will be subjected to dissociative amnesia as an adoptive response for survival. However, this research paper proves that healing from betrayal trauma is possible through engaging in different therapies like psychotherapy, dance therapy, art therapy and scriptotherapy. This autobiographical memoir highlights the journey of Jane Rowan from surviving to healing. It is considered a glimpse of hope to those who suffer from betrayal trauma. The paper sheds light on Rowan’s success of giving the reader the guidance towards healing and the strategies of survival amid this life-threatening experience. It has attempted to explore betrayal trauma theory and to analyse the symptoms of PTSD that the writer suffers from. The textual analysis also deals with the surviving techniques like dissociative amnesia that the author adopts to have a peaceful life with her parents who violate her safe zone.



Through the close relationship with her therapist she finds the caring mother and the loyal friend who can help her in her predicament. Finally Rowan is able to forgive her parents for what they have done to her physically and emotionally. She is also able to reconcile the conflict within her multiple personalities and her adult self. Rowan's memoir proves that one's life resembles a Pandora's box that is full of secrets and repressed desires for love, safety and peace.

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