

## **REPRESENTATION OF DELAYED TRAUMA AND EMOTIONAL NUMBING IN BLUE EYE SAMURAI (2023): AN ANALYSIS USING CATHY CARUTH'S TRAUMA THEORY**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This research examines the representation of psychological trauma in the main character of the animated series *Blue Eye Samurai* (2023), with particular focus on the concepts of belatedness of trauma and numbing process as theorized by Cathy Caruth. The study analyzes how trauma is experienced by Mizu and its effects on her behavior and life over time. Using close viewing methods for in-depth textual and visual analysis of each episode, this study identifies how visual and narrative structures convey unresolved trauma and its long-term behavioral impact. The analysis employs the TEEL technique, a systematic approach consisting of four parts: Topic (the main statement), Evidence (scenes or dialogue from the series), Explanation (detailed connection to trauma theory), and Link (connection to Caruth's theory). The findings reveal that Mizu's trauma is fragmented and resurfaces through flashbacks and nightmares, manifesting changes in her behavior and emotional capacity. Mizu experiences emotional numbness that impairs her ability to feel, express, or accept emotions. The study demonstrates how Mizu's unresolved childhood trauma, compounded by adult experiences of betrayal and violence, leads to pervasive emotional detachment that shapes her identity and choices. This research highlights *Blue Eye Samurai* as a significant case of how contemporary animation engages with trauma, identity, and resilience, offering new dimensions to literary and trauma studies.

**Keywords:** Belatedness of Trauma, Emotional Numbing, Flashback, Nightmare, Numbing Process, Trauma

### **INTRODUCTION**

Trauma is a complex and multidimensional concept that has received widespread attention across disciplines, particularly psychology and literature. In psychology, trauma is defined as an emotional wound causing psychological injury or an event producing severe and prolonged stress. According to Pierre Janet (in White, 2016), an event becomes traumatic when intense emotions disrupt normal memory management processes. This perspective has evolved through scholars like Erikson (in Heidarizadeh, 2015), who defines trauma as a condition arising from extraordinary pressure or impact.

In literature, trauma is not only a psychological disorder but a narrative phenomenon crucial to depicting human experiences related to past suffering. Balaev (2014) (in Sartika, 2020) argues that since the late 19th century, trauma theory has been studied seriously and increasingly dominated post-World War I studies, indicating trauma as both a psychological and deep cultural narrative phenomenon. In literary works, trauma is studied as a narrative

phenomenon closely related to language, memory, and identity, as argued by psychoanalytic theorists such as Freud and Hall (1921) and Cathy Caruth (1996).

Representations of trauma, initially limited to psychological studies, have expanded into visual media, including film and animation. This is particularly evident in Japanese anime, which in recent decades has not only entertained but raised mental health issues, particularly trauma, as central themes. Anime series such as *Attack on Titan* (2013-2024), *Violet Evergarden* (2018-2020), and *Demon Slayer* (2019-2024) feature action and adventure while exploring how past trauma shapes character psychology and influences life journeys. This demonstrates how animation serves as an effective vehicle for conveying complex social and psychological issues through strong and symbolic visual narrative language (Ortez, 2022). Furthermore, classic works such as *Barefoot Gen* (1983), *Grave of the Fireflies* (1988), and *Neon Genesis Evangelion* (1995-1997) have proven that themes of trauma caused by war and humanitarian tragedies remain relevant in Japanese and global popular culture.

Globally, anime is not alone in explicitly addressing trauma. One recent example is the non-Japanese animated series *Blue Eye Samurai* (2023), a Netflix production combining Japanese aesthetics and narrative with a story addressing deep trauma. The series gained popularity for its complex characterization and historical setting in Japan's Edo period (1603-1867), known for strict isolationist policies, highly homogeneous social life, and discrimination against mixed-race individuals. The main character, Mizu, is a woman of mixed Japanese and European descent who must disguise herself as a man to survive and fight against injustice due to racial and gender discrimination. Mizu's journey, filled with pain, revenge, and identity search, reflects ongoing trauma haunting trauma survivors, making *Blue Eye Samurai* an intriguing case study in trauma representation through animated media. The series' popularity is supported by widespread social media recognition and high ratings (IMDb 8.7/10), sparking in-depth discussions among fans and academics.

The portrayal of trauma embedded in the historical backdrop and internal conflicts in *Blue Eye Samurai* can be analyzed using contemporary trauma theory, particularly Cathy Caruth's theory emphasizing the concept of "belatedness of trauma" or delayed onset of trauma. Caruth (1996) views trauma as a double wound where victims experience not only the initial traumatic event impact but also delayed and recurring psychological effects through haunting memories. Trauma, according to Caruth, is not merely an event but an experience carried forward and resurfacing through flashbacks, nightmares, intrusive thoughts, and other forms of repetition influencing the victim's daily life.

Through this theory, Mizu's experience facing repeated discrimination and violence can be understood as manifestation of unresolved prolonged trauma shaping her behavior and identity. Additionally, the process of emotional numbing (Caruth, 1995) as a psychological response to trauma is relevant in explaining how trauma survivors frequently exhibit behavioral changes, characterized by emotional suppression as a protective mechanism, leading to alienation and difficulty forming emotional connections long-term.

Although *Blue Eye Samurai* has received positive responses and widespread attention, academic studies systematically analyzing trauma representation in this series remain very limited. Previous research focusing on this series has primarily examined religious and symbolic aspects based on Japan's historical context (Acar, 2024). Meanwhile, specific discussions on psychological trauma and the narrative of the main character's experiences have not received adequate attention, particularly through application of Caruth's trauma theory, widely used in literary works and other media analysis.

By comparison, several academic studies examine trauma using Caruth's theory in anime and literary works contexts, such as Husnia's (2024) analysis of *Violet Evergarden* (2018), focusing on trauma causes and the main character's reflections in overcoming trauma, Def and Ghounane's (2024) study examining childhood trauma and emotional attachment issues in the anime character *Black Clover*, while Tsang (2016) discusses nihilism and collective trauma in *Neon Genesis Evangelion*. Additionally, several studies examine belatedness (delayed trauma effects) in films and novels, such as Mockensturm (2014) on the Fukushima nuclear disaster impact, Onega (2022) on World War II trauma in Sarah Waters' novel, and Gligorić (2020) on delayed trauma in the novel *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*. Other research highlights the numbing process as trauma response. Studies by Kerig (2016) and Christina et al. (2018) discuss how trauma affects the ability to feel positive and negative emotions and predict PTSD development, while Kerig's (2016) review also examines emotional numbing's psychosocial impact on veterans.

Overall, these studies provide theoretical foundation and deep context for trauma representation, whether psychological, symbolic, or socio-cultural, in animated media and literature. However, academic studies specifically focused on trauma in *Blue Eye Samurai* (2023) remain limited. This study aims to fill that gap by analyzing how trauma is depicted in the main character of *Blue Eye Samurai* through the lens of Cathy Caruth's trauma theory, particularly the concepts of belatedness of trauma and emotional numbing. The main objective is to understand how trauma is represented in Mizu, the main character of *Blue Eye Samurai* (2023), and how Mizu's past trauma shapes her behavior throughout the series. The research questions include: (1) How is trauma depicted in the main character? (2) How does that trauma influence the main character's behavior in the series?

The theoretical framework focuses on Cathy Caruth's (1996) theory of belatedness of trauma and the process of emotional numbing (1995), describing psychological responses of trauma survivors in daily life. The significance of this research lies in its contribution to literary and visual media studies, particularly trauma analysis development in contemporary animation. Beyond expanding academic understanding of trauma representation through animation, this research strengthens the use of Cathy Caruth's theory in interdisciplinary studies of literature and trauma psychology. Furthermore, the research results can serve as reference for further studies examining mental health issues in popular media and enriching academic literature on trauma in specific cultural and historical contexts, such as Japan's Edo period.

## METHOD

This study uses the Netflix animated series *Blue Eye Samurai* (2023) as its main data source. The series consists of eight episodes, with focus on the main character, Mizu, depicted as experiencing psychological trauma. Mizu is the center of analysis because of her role in demonstrating the emotional and psychological effects of trauma throughout the story.

To collect data, the researcher conducted in-depth observation of the visual narrative in the series. The method used was close viewing, which involves watching each scene in all episodes carefully and repeatedly to capture the message the filmmaker conveys. This method includes observing images and scenes, as well as narrative elements such as dialogue and subtitles enhancing understanding of context and character emotions.

Through close viewing, researchers can identify storytelling techniques used by filmmakers, including how images, editing, sound, and other visual elements contribute to depicting experiences and trauma experienced by the main character. The atmosphere or

ambience in the animation is also analyzed because it can reinforce or add meaning to the trauma narrative process. Detailed observations are made of each scene and story sequence to understand how each part relates to form the overall trauma narrative of the main character. This helps researchers gain a comprehensive picture of Mizu's emotional journey from beginning to end of the series.

After visual and narrative data were collected, the analysis process was carried out using trauma theory concepts of Cathy Caruth. The analysis employed the TEEL technique, a systematic approach to writing analysis consisting of four parts: Topic (the main statement that is the focus of analysis), Evidence (evidence from data, such as scenes or dialogues supporting the statement), Explanation (detailed explanation of how evidence is relevant and contributes to understanding trauma theory), and Link (connection between section conclusions and overall topic and Caruth's theory). By using the TEEL technique, the analysis is well structured and easier to understand. Ultimately, the analysis results are summarized in a conclusion affirming that findings align with Cathy Caruth's concepts and theoretical framework of trauma, thereby providing valid and profound understanding of how trauma is portrayed in the main character of *Blue Eye Samurai*.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section is divided into two main focuses: first, examining the concept of trauma as represented in Mizu, the central character of *Blue Eye Samurai* (2023); second, exploring trauma's impact on the main character's behavior development over time. The analysis is conducted using the TEEL format: each paragraph begins with a clear topic sentence, followed by evidence such as subtitles and pictures from the series, detailed explanation of evidence, and closes with a sentence linking back to the main topic.

### **Traumatic Experience in Blue Eye Samurai: Delayed Manifestation of Trauma**

After collecting data through in-depth observation of *Blue Eye Samurai* (2023), it appears that Caruth's theory of delayed trauma is realized through depiction of flashback scenes and nightmares experienced by Mizu. The data is analyzed by paying attention to visual and narrative aspects of the series, with results presented in structured manner following the TEEL format.

#### **Flashback**

In the first episode, a flashback of Mizu's childhood is shown. Mizu experiences great emotional distress after realizing that her identity makes her unaccepted by her surroundings. Her mother often asked Mizu to stay hidden at home, sometimes even behaving violently when Mizu tried to leave. Eventually, Mizu lost her mother and had to face the world alone. After conflict with village children, Mizu meets an old blind man on a ravine's edge who turns out to be a samurai swordsman. Mizu chooses to live with him and calls him "sword father". While with the sword father, Mizu diligently learns sword making and use to become a reliable warrior and seek revenge.

One day, Mizu discloses her true origins to the sword father and explains why she is determined to become a swordsman. As she tells her narrative, she has a vivid flashback to her birth, a tragic and indelible incident that has tormented her entire life.

Table 1. Mizu Perceives Herself as A Monster, A Shameful Creature

Dialogue	Episode	Timecode
Mizu: <i>"At the time I was born, there were four white men in all of Japan. Men who traded in weapons and opium and flesh. One of them took my mother, and made of me... a monster. A creature of shame."</i>	1	00:39:39-00:40:07

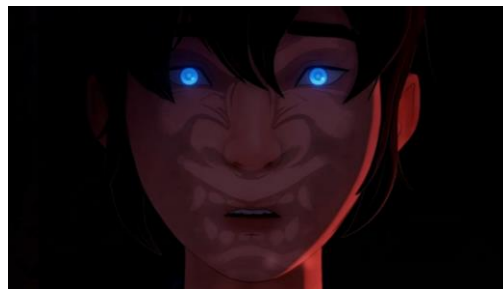


Figure 1 Illustration of The Monster Resembling Mizu's Face

Mizu describes herself as a "monster" and "shameful creature" in Table 1, with a sad expression on her face. Figure 1 depicts a monster transforming into Mizu's face, followed by her distinctive blue eyes, representing how she is constantly haunted by negative stigma associated with her identity as a mixed-blood woman. The terms "monster" and "shameful creature" addressed to her, combined with the flash of her blue eyes that light up then slowly fade, demonstrate how her past remains strongly attached to her today. Although she has grown older, the negative memories of her identity persist.

According to evidence presented above, Mizu has been exposed to traumatic events since childhood. This trauma continues to leave an imprint on Mizu, making her feel isolated and strange as she grows older. The tragedy that happened to Mizu is consistent with Caruth's (1996) theory that trauma's essence is unconscious repetition, in which traumatic experiences "haunt" the victim through flashbacks.

In the third episode, Mizu's flashbacks gradually become more vivid. These memories take her back to childhood, when her mother repeatedly kept her confined to their home, terrified that a dangerous man outside might harm them at any time. This recollection underscores that Mizu grew up without ever feeling secure, always living in fear and on high alert. The lingering sense of danger stays with her, resurfacing in repeated flashbacks as she grows older.

Table 2. Mizu's Mother Warned About the Threat of Leaving the House

Dialogue	Episode	Timecode
Mizu's Mother: <i>"The bad man will find you. If that door opens, we die."</i>	3	00:17:27-00:18:07





Figure 2 Mizu Peeks at The Village Children Playing



Figure 3 Illustration of The Burning House When Mizu's Mom Warned Mizu

During Mizu's confrontation with Taigen, a childhood rival who once tormented her, she is suddenly flooded by memories from her past when Taigen strikes a wound Mizu had recently stitched from a previous battle. In Table 2, Mizu's mother is shown warning her, "The bad man will find you. If that door opens, we die," while an illustration (Figure 2) depicts Mizu peering out at village children playing outside. Notably, these children are Taigen and his friends. This scene symbolizes how Mizu has been conditioned to remain perpetually alert, seeing potential threats in everyone, whether child or adult. Figure 3 further heightens the sense of danger, depicting a house engulfed in flames and amplifying the tense atmosphere.

The visuals and dialogue demonstrate how Mizu's trauma resurfaces in moments of peril. Taigen's attack prompts Mizu to recall her mother's warning, casting Taigen as the embodiment of the "bad people" she was taught to fear. Mizu's traumatic past resurfaces because it is triggered by a present threat, someone from her past who remains an adversary. This aligns with Caruth's (1996) assertion that flashbacks are not simply memories, but "belated" experiences surfacing only after time has passed, as though the individual is reliving trauma during the flashback itself.

The impact does not end there. As Taigen continues to taunt Mizu, his words keep pulling her deeper into childhood memories. Although Mizu attempts to fight back, she gradually loses focus, increasingly affected by Taigen's provocations. When Taigen lands another blow, Mizu is once again overwhelmed by her past. In this particular flashback, Mizu disobeys her mother and sneaks out of the house, only to be met with harsh reactions from those who notice her presence, a painful experience that further scars her.

Table 3. Taigen's Condescending Words Trigger Mizu's Flashback

Dialogue	Episode	Timecode
Taigen: <i>"The village kids used to scare each other with stories about you. The hut at the end of the woods, where <b>the monster boy</b> lived with his whore mother"</i>	3	00:18:06 - 00:18:30

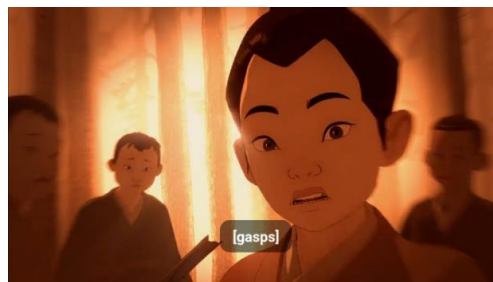


Figure 4 Taigen and the Other Were Surprised to See Mizu



Figure 5 Mizu's Reaction After Taigen and the Others Were Shocked and Stepped Backwards

In Table 3, Taigen's dialogue, "scare each other with stories about you" and "the monster boy lived with his whore mother", echoes the flashback Mizu experienced in the first episode. Taigen's words underscore how Mizu is perceived as an outcast, someone to be feared, avoided, and excluded from the community. This is further illustrated in Figure 4, where Mizu tries to get a closer look at village children, Taigen and his friends, at play. When they notice her, Taigen and others react with shock and instinctively retreat, reinforcing that Mizu is someone to be shunned. Figure 5 then shows Mizu standing motionless, viewed from a distant camera angle, surrounded by fire and accompanied by monster sound. This powerful imagery not only heightens tension but also visually conveys the enduring weight of trauma Mizu carries.

This flashback demonstrates how trauma and social stigma continue to cast a long shadow over Mizu's life. This resonates with Caruth's (1996) theory of trauma, which posits that traumatic experiences become deeply ingrained in memory and resurface through repetition, such as flashbacks, compelling individuals to unconsciously relive their pain.

Taigen persists in taunting Mizu, eventually causing her to stop fighting back. At this critical moment, Mizu is engulfed by a vivid flashback of her home burning and her mother's desperate cries as she calls out for Mizu. The memory is so intense and immediate that it feels as though Mizu is reliving the trauma all over again.



Figure 6 Mizu's Eyes Trembled Watching Taigen's Face

Table 4. Mizu's Mother Scolds Mizu for Trying to Leave The House

Dialogue	Episode	Timecode
Mizu's mother: <i>"You let them see you? Men will come. Men will always come"</i>	3	00:18:31 -00:18:55



Figure 7 Mizu's Mom Screamed from Inside the Burning House

This pivotal moment is captured in Figure 6, where Mizu's eyes widen and tremble as she locks eyes with Taigen just before the flashback overwhelms her. The memory surfacing is of her mother reprimanding her for venturing outside the house. This flashback is triggered by immediate danger Taigen represents, reigniting fear and emotional scars from Mizu's childhood. In Table 4, her mother's words, "You let them see you? Men will come. Men will always come", epitomize the enduring psychological threat shadowing Mizu's life. Figure 7 further illustrates this, showing Mizu attempting to sneak out of the house, an act ultimately leading to traumatic memory of returning to find her home engulfed in flames and her mother's anguished cries. This secret attempt to leave becomes the trigger for a traumatic event Mizu had not yet fully processed or come to terms with. The flashback is not just a memory but a vivid, haunting reliving of the past, demonstrating how Mizu's trauma relentlessly pursues her into the present.

This sequence reveals that Mizu's trauma is not merely lingering emotional weight from the past, but an active force shaping her current perceptions and reactions to threats. This reflects Caruth's (1996) concept of "belatedness" of trauma, which posits that trauma is not confined to the past but persistently affects the victim's present identity and experiences because it remains unresolved and continues to "return."



In episode five, Mizu confronts her enemies in a brothel. Facing hundreds of Boss Hamata's henchmen armed with iron claws, Mizu is plunged into an extended flashback that distracts her and alters her behavior during intense battle.



Figure 8 In the Past, Mizu Was Also Stabbed in The Stomach



Figure 9 Hamata's Army Stabbed Mizu in the Same Spot

(Blue Eye Samurai Episode 5, 00:06:30-00:07:19)

Figure 8 depicts the moment when Mizu is unexpectedly stabbed in the stomach, close to her waist, by one of Boss Hamata's henchmen. Simultaneously, she experiences a flashback to a past encounter in a shop where she was stabbed in the same spot by another man (Figure 9). These mirrored scenes highlight how Mizu's traumatic memories resurface in response to present danger. The recurring injury to her abdomen symbolizes not just physical wound, but also emotional trauma that has never fully healed. This ongoing vulnerability and pain are encapsulated in the repetition of the wound.

These events resonate with Caruth's (1996) perspective, which suggests that trauma is not simply physical injury but psychological wound happening too quickly to be fully processed at the time. As a result, trauma resurfaces later through flashbacks, indicating that experience has not been fully integrated into victim's consciousness.

A surprising twist emerges in Mizu's flashback: her mother is revealed to be alive, working as a prostitute. After Mizu is injured, she reunites with her mother, who nurses her back to health. Once Mizu recovers, her mother compels her to marry Mikio, a disgraced samurai. This reunion with her mother and forced marriage to Mikio introduce additional layers of trauma for Mizu, further complicating her emotional burden.

Table 5. Mikio Called Mizu A Monster

Dialogue	Episode	Timecode
Mikio: "You are a monster"	5	00:31:42 - 00:32:00



Figure 10 Mikio Called Mizu a Monster and Pushed Her Away

In this scene, Mizu reveals her true identity and explains why she has disguised herself as a man to pursue vengeance. Mikio urges her to show her true self and demonstrate her abilities. However, when Mizu displays her exceptional sword skills, Mikio responds with anger and disappointment, upset that her abilities surpass his own. In Table 5, Mikio even calls Mizu a "monster" and shoves her to the ground, leaving her there. This label is more than an insult; it signifies rejection of Mizu's very identity and capabilities. Figure 10 emphasizes Mikio's look of disgust after pushing Mizu, underscoring internal struggle Mizu faces between her longing for acceptance and painful reality of being rejected, even by those she trusts.

The evidence illustrates how conflict between Mizu's desire for acceptance and her experience of rejection leads to lingering trauma. This trauma, stemming from emotional wounds accumulated during childhood with her mother, is intensified by Mikio's harsh condemnation. This aligns with Caruth's (1996) concept of flashbacks as a "wound voice" that demands to be heard and acknowledged, even when victim cannot fully understand it. Such experiences reflect unresolved trauma that continues to resurface, seeking recognition and healing.

Following Mikio's flashback of abandoning her, the scene shifts to Mizu being increasingly overwhelmed by Boss Hamata's numerous henchmen. Despite being pushed to the brink, Mizu continues to fight for survival. As danger intensifies, she experiences another flashback: after Mikio leaves, Mizu suddenly finds herself surrounded by six horsemen intent on killing her.



Figure 11 Mizu Fought the Mysterious Army Alone in The Past



Figure 12 Mizu Fights Boss Hamata's Army Alone

(Blue Eye Samurai Episode 5, 00:35:01-00:36:45)

Figure 11 depicts soldiers in Mizu's flashback who were hired to surround and kill her. When they attacked, Mizu was completely alone; her mother had disappeared, and Mikio simply watched without offering help before quickly leaving. Overcome with despair, Mizu silently wept, abandoned to confront six soldier's intent on her death. In a surge of emotion, she grabbed her sword and fought them all by herself. This memory parallels the scene in Figure 12, where Mizu is similarly encircled by hundreds of Boss Hamata's men and, just as in her flashback, must battle her way out entirely on her own.

These scenes illustrate how Mizu's trauma of helplessness and isolation from the past resurfaces whenever she finds herself in dangerous, vulnerable situations. The recurring sense of loneliness deepens her trauma, reinforcing belief that she cannot depend on anyone, not even those closest to her. Even under immense pressure and threat, Mizu continues to fight, demonstrating resilience and courage forged by traumatic experiences. Yet, this determination may also reflect unresolved trauma, as Mizu feels compelled to always be prepared to defend herself without assistance.

The confrontation with Boss Hamata's men continues, intercut with flashbacks of Mizu battling six mercenaries who once tried to kill her. In these memories, Mizu recalls how when she was in a state of absolute desperation, she killed the mercenaries without mercy.

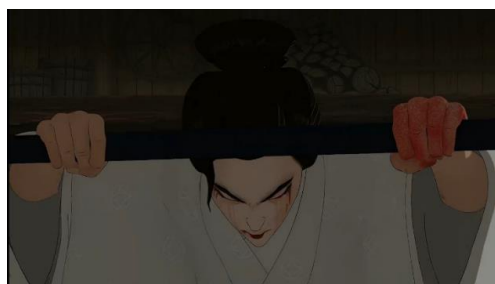


Figure 13 How Mizu Held Her Sword in The Past



Figure 14 How Mizu Holds Her Sword When Fighting Boss Hamata's Army

(Blue Eye Samurai Episode 5, 00:36:37-00:38:32)

Figure 13 and 14 capture Mizu's every movement during her battle with Boss Hamata's men: her grip on the sword, her swings, thrusts, dodges, and attacks, all mirroring the way she once fought and defeated six soldiers who tried to kill her in the past. Each time Mizu strikes down one of Boss Hamata's men, she simultaneously relives a flashback of killing those six soldiers one by one until none remain.

These recurring flashbacks reveal that Mizu's combat instincts are driven by traumatic memories remaining vividly imprinted in her mind, as though she is perpetually reliving the same life-threatening situation. This powerfully demonstrates the depth and persistence of her trauma, which is not confined to the past but actively shapes how she fights and responds to danger in the present. Mizu's flashbacks, which bring back fragmented memories of her mother's return, her husband Mikio, and her battle with six mysterious soldiers, align with Caruth's (1996) assertion that trauma is not merely a relic of the past but an ongoing force molding victim's current experiences and identity, as these unresolved events continue to resurface.

Mizu's final flashback occurs in the eighth and concluding episode. The episode begins with Mizu remembering the vow she made at her mother's grave to seek vengeance for both of them. This flashback underscores how foundational trauma of her childhood has forged her into a person consumed by an unrelenting drive for revenge.

Table 6. Mizu's Promise at Her Mother's Grave

Dialogue	Episode	Timecode
Mizu: <i>"Mama, they came for me, like you said. The bad men. It was my fault. I'm sorry I'm a monster, Mama. I'll avenge us, Mama."</i>	8	00:00:12 - 00:01:02



Figure 15 Mizu's Promise at Her Mother's Grave



Figure 16 Mizu's Mother's Grave

In Table 6, Mizu's statement, "It was my fault. I'm sorry I'm a monster, Mama," reveals how deeply she has internalized negative stigma, transforming it into trauma that erodes her self-worth and leaves her feeling ashamed and guilty. Yet, immediately afterward, Mizu firmly declares, "I'll avenge us, Mama," illustrating how her traumatic experiences have forged her identity and hardened her resolve. She emerges as a more courageous figure, steadfastly choosing the path of revenge. Figure 15 offers a close-up of Mizu's face, eyes closed, as if wrestling with doubts that have long silenced her. Figure 16 shows her mother's grave alongside the subtitle of Mizu's monologue, "I'll avenge us, Mama," symbolizing the sacred vow she has made to honor her grief and fulfill her promise.

Overall, this final flashback supports Caruth's (1996) argument that trauma is not confined to the past but actively shapes victim's present experiences and identity, as these unresolved events persistently "return."

Across the flashbacks in episodes 1, 3, 5, and 8, it is clear that trauma Mizu endured from childhood does not simply fade away. The negative stigma, physical violence, loss, and disappointment from her past frequently resurface, whether she is at rest or in peril. Pieces of her painful history, specific events, fragments of dialogue, randomly intrude into her thoughts. This suggests that Mizu's memories are not organized linearly but are instead disjointed, indicating that she has not fully processed these experiences emotionally. As such, Mizu's flashbacks fit Caruth's criteria for delayed trauma. The traumatic events of her youth continue to affect her even as an adult, and encounters with new people often trigger these unresolved memories. The true emotional impact of these experiences only becomes apparent later in life. This ongoing trauma profoundly shapes Mizu's emotional responses to challenges she faces as an adult.



## Nightmare

In *Blue Eye Samurai*, another instance of repetition occurs in the third episode. While Mizu is unconscious after battling her enemies, she is haunted by a nightmare.

Table 7. Mizu's Mother Slapped Mizu Because Mizu Left the House

Dialogue	Episode	Timecode
Mizu's mom: "No Mizu! No one can see your face. The bad men will find you. If that door opens, we die."	3	00:02:18 - 00:02:55



Figure 17 Mizu Was Slapped by His Mother

Mizu was seriously injured, but fortunately, Ringo, who had previously been told not to follow her, managed to find her lying helpless and carried her to safety. As he transported her, Mizu appeared restless, moving uneasily in her sleep. Figure 17 illustrates this moment, showing Mizu in the grip of a nightmare where she relives her mother slapping her as a child for attempting to sneak out of the house. Her mother strictly prohibited Mizu from leaving or being seen outside, warning that doing so would result in their deaths. This is underscored in Table 7 by her mother's words: "If that door opens, we die." These threats are the foundation of Mizu's trauma, instilling a deep, lasting fear that colors her perception of the world as a dangerous and hostile place. The nightmare in this episode is a powerful expression of unresolved childhood trauma, rooted in physical violence, terror of death threats, severe restrictions on her freedom, and sense of entrapment.

The nightmare, which reconstructs Mizu's mother's harsh treatment, serves as a reminder that this trauma remains unresolved and continues to shape Mizu's behavior and choices, both consciously and unconsciously. The fear of threats, lack of freedom, and physical and emotional violence she endured as a child all resurface in her dreams, especially when she is gravely injured and vulnerable. This explains why Mizu always feels threatened around new people. As Caruth (1996) notes, these experiences occur while Mizu is unconscious, with her trauma expressing itself through disturbed sleep.

Furthermore, Mizu's nightmare can be seen as a form of "double wounding." The initial wound occurred when her mother slapped her, leaving Mizu silent and unable to process what was happening. The second wound arises when memory unexpectedly returns in a nightmare, forcing Mizu to confront the truth of her past (Caruth, 1996). This episode highlights how Mizu's vigilance, tension, and reluctance to trust others are direct consequences of unresolved trauma still affecting her today.

Based on data collected and analyzed, flashbacks are more frequent than nightmares in the series. This is because Mizu's traumatic memories are more often triggered by conscious

interactions with others or by life-threatening situations, such as battles with her enemies. In contrast, nightmares occur only once, when Mizu, after being severely injured in a fight, loses consciousness and is plunged into a distressing dream.

### Trauma Affects Mizu's Behavior

The repeated traumas Mizu has endured from childhood through adulthood, including her experiences within marriage, have deeply shaped her life. As she grows older, consequences of these traumatic events become more pronounced. Mizu has reached a state of emotional numbness, suppressing or disregarding feelings that cause her discomfort. To explore how this process of numbness developed as a result of Mizu's trauma, this section will analyze key narrative elements and scenes from several episodes illustrating this progression.

### Numbing Process

Mizu's trauma has led to a noticeable numbing of her emotions, which becomes especially apparent during her quest for revenge. The psychological scars from her childhood, compounded by traumatic experiences in adulthood, have dulled her emotional responses. In episode three, Mizu's emotional detachment is highlighted through both her actions and dialogue. When her enemy, Heiji Shindo, offers her wealth and power, Mizu responds with a blank, expressionless face and rejects the offer, demonstrating her emotional numbness.

Table 8. Mizu's Expression of Disinterest in Happiness

Dialogue	Episode	Timecode
Mizu: <i>"I refuse, I have no interest in money or power. I have no interest in being happy. Only Satisfied"</i>	3	30:33 - 32:30



Figure 18 Mizu's Flat Expression When Offered 50,000 Ryo by Heiji

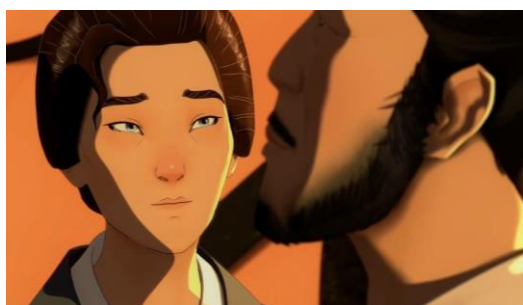


Figure 19 Mizu's Happy Expression When Given A Horse by Mikio

(Blue Eye Samurai Episode 5, 26:12 - 26:33)

In Table 8, Mizu rejects all offers that could potentially improve her life, declaring, "I'm not interested in happiness." This statement suggests that, for Mizu, happiness, no matter its source, is no longer a priority, likely due to trauma inflicted by those she once trusted most. This emotional detachment is further illustrated in Figure 18, where Mizu remains expressionless and unresponsive, in stark contrast to Taigen, who reacts with visible surprise when offered 50,000 ryo. This stands in sharp opposition to Figure 19, which shows a younger Mizu looking genuinely happy and moved when her husband gifted her the horse she had cared for. However, after discovering that her husband was the source of new trauma, Mizu loses interest in all forms of happiness, even material possessions, and becomes singularly focused on achieving revenge, which she believes will bring her satisfaction.

These examples demonstrate how trauma has altered Mizu's emotional responses. Where one might expect surprise or joy at the prospect of wealth and power, Mizu's reactions are muted, overshadowed by her overwhelming desire for vengeance. She explicitly states that happiness holds no appeal for her, suggesting that her painful past has extinguished any hope for joy from external sources. This appears to be Mizu's way of staying focused on her goal of revenge while avoiding the risk of further trauma. This aligns with Caruth's (1996) assertion that emotional numbing is a coping mechanism, resulting in a lack of response even to experiences that would typically evoke strong emotions.

In the final moments, Heiji Shindo and Abijah Fowler discuss Mizu's demeanor, particularly her piercing gaze. Heiji Shindo even describes Mizu as heartless, cruel, and terrifying, citing her act of cutting off his hand as evidence of her ruthlessness.

Table 9. Heiji Shindo Calls Mizu a Heartless Demon

Dialogue	Episode	Timecode
Heiji Shindo: <i>"The man I met is no man. A demon. Eyes empty. Eyes like yours. Nothing can stop him. He'll come. He'll stand right here, and he will open your throat. He'll watch you die."</i>	3	41:14 - 41:40

Table 10. When Mizu's Emotional Responses Were Still Normal?

Dialogue		Episode	Timecode
Mizu: "No, I only want to ask."		5	00:06:30 - 00:07:19



Figure 20 Mizu Attacks Heiji Shindo Without Hesitation



Figure 21 Mizu Did Not Strike Back When Harassed in The Past

Mizu's emotional numbness is vividly illustrated through Heiji Shindo's dialogue in Table 9. The description "eyes empty" underscores how Mizu's gaze appears devoid of emotion and hope, making it difficult for others to discern what she is truly feeling. The phrase "he will open your throat. He'll watch you die" further emphasizes Mizu's ruthless, unhesitating behavior; she kills without being troubled by fear or doubt. Heiji Shindo's words are confirmed when, in Figure 20, Mizu swiftly and expressionlessly cuts off his hand, forcing him into a sake barrel. As Heiji screams in pain, Mizu remains impassive, showing no fear, panic, or remorse.

This detachment stands in stark contrast to Mizu's earlier behavior. When she first began her quest for revenge and encountered a man in a shop who stabbed her in the stomach, Mizu initially tried to de-escalate the situation. After the man threw a bucket at her, Mizu cut it down with her sword, but when he attempted to attack again, she raised her hand in a calming gesture, signaling that she did not want to fight and preferred to communicate peacefully (Figure 21). In Table 10, Mizu even says, "No, I just want to ask," demonstrating that, at that time, she was still capable of responding emotionally and thoughtfully, even when faced with potential obstacles to her plans.

These examples highlight how trauma has eroded Mizu's ability to experience negative emotions such as fear. Her fear is now eclipsed by her relentless drive for revenge. Killing an enemy no longer feels like a grave or terrifying act; she is indifferent to bloodshed if it advances her goals. Having endured so much violence in the past, Mizu sees inflicting harm on her enemies as a form of justice, equivalent to the suffering she has endured. Her psyche has not

fully processed or integrated these traumatic experiences, resulting in chronic emotional disconnection. This aligns with Caruth's (1996) assertion that when traumatic experiences are not assimilated into one's identity, the victim may appear emotionally detached and unable to express feelings normally.

In episode five, a flashback depicts Mizu killing her husband. In this scene, Mizu is overwhelmed by circumstances, leading to profound disappointment and a decision to emotionally withdraw, caring no longer about the consequences.

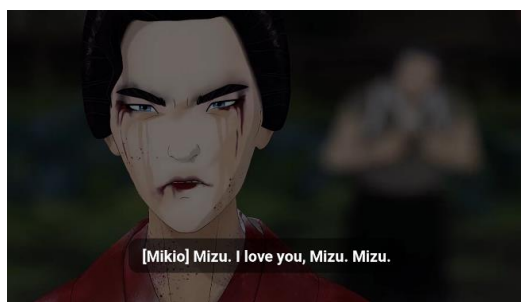


Figure 22 Mizu Ignore Mikio's Words

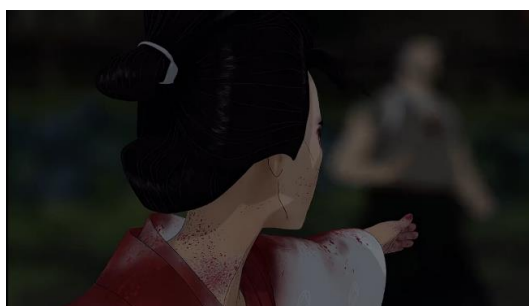


Figure 23 Mizu Kills Mikio Without Hesitation

(Blue Eye Samurai Episode 5, 40:25 - 40:55)

The two images above capture the moment Mizu kills her husband. She is profoundly disillusioned by both her husband and her mother, who abandoned her when she was attacked by a mysterious army. Earlier, her husband's accusation that she was a "monster" had dredged up painful memories from her past. After Mizu defeats the entire army, her husband suddenly reappears to apologize, but her mother arrives at the same time. As her husband and mother begin to argue, Mizu, already overwhelmed, is shown in Figure 22 with a look of deep disappointment as she turns away from them. In Figure 23, after her husband kills her mother and attempts to express his love, Mizu abruptly throws her sword, fatally stabbing him in the chest. Her face shows no tears, no hope, and she remains completely silent, only a lingering expression of disappointment. She leaves the scene immediately after both are dead, no longer able to tolerate positive emotions like love or happiness.

This sequence demonstrates how both past and recent traumatic events have profoundly affected Mizu's emotional responses. At the height of her crisis, she becomes emotionally numb, instinctively rejecting love and abandoning hope in those around her. She shows no anxiety when her mother is attacked, no grief when her mother is killed, and no remorse after killing her husband. The trauma has effectively stripped her of her emotions. She does not even



glance at the bodies of her mother and husband, as if severing all ties to the source of her pain. This aligns with Caruth's (1995) assertion that emotional numbing is a defense mechanism in trauma victims, causing them to detach from their feelings and sense of self. At the end of episode five, Princess Akemi describes Mizu's behavior as she confronts hundreds of Boss Hamata's soldiers alone, calling her a monster, devoid of compassion.

Table 11. Princess Akemi Calls Mizu a Heartless Demon

Dialogue	Episode	Timecode
Princess Akemi: <i>"I met an onryo once. A real one. But it was incapable of love. I searched its eyes for a sign of love or mercy or good. There was only darkness"</i>	5	43:51 - 44:15

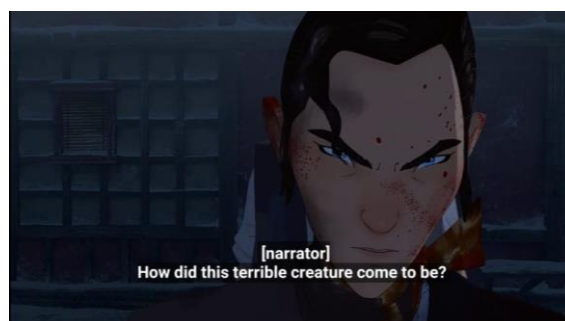


Figure 24 Mizu's Expression After Killing All of Boss Hamata's Armys and Ignoring Akemi's Screams for Help

In Table 11, Princess Akemi's dialogue highlights the emotional numbness evident in Mizu's gaze. Having witnessed Mizu's actions both when they first met and after she single-handedly defeated Boss Hamata's army, Princess Akemi reflects, "But it was incapable of love. I searched its eyes for a sign of love or mercy or good." This illustrates how Mizu eliminated her enemies without hesitation, mercy, or fear. Even after the battle, when Princess Akemi is taken away by her father's troops, Mizu remains cold and indifferent. Despite Princess Akemi's desperate cries for help, Mizu does not intervene; instead, she allows the troops to take her away. As shown in Figure 24, Mizu walks off without remorse, ignoring Princess Akemi's pleas, her focus solely on her mission of revenge. She is willing to discard anyone who might stand in her way. Trauma has effectively erased her capacity for empathy, as Princess Akemi observes: "There was only darkness."

This dialogue demonstrates how Mizu has lost her ability to feel compassion. Both positive and negative emotions have been dulled and no longer function normally. She can no longer express herself authentically, having been deeply wounded by repeated trauma. This aligns with Caruth's (1996) assertion that emotional numbing is the psyche's way of shielding itself from overwhelming pain. However, this defense mechanism also prevents the victim from living fully in the present, as they become emotionally detached and unable to process feelings in a healthy way.

From all evidence presented, it is clear that the most prominent manifestation of trauma in Mizu is her pervasive emotional numbness throughout her quest for revenge. Trauma has isolated her from the full spectrum of human emotion, leaving her unable to feel, express, or receive emotions in a balanced manner. This numbness not only shapes her behavior and

decisions but also causes others to perceive her as cold, cruel, and dehumanized. Ultimately, Mizu's story vividly illustrates how trauma can strip away a person's humanity, leaving them trapped in emotional darkness. This resonates with Caruth's (1996) claim that those who endure extreme trauma may experience profound emotional numbness, blocking all pain and emotional response.

The findings of this study align with and extend previous research on trauma representation in animated media and literary works. Husnia's (2024) analysis of *Violet Evergarden* (2018) examined trauma causes and character reflections in overcoming trauma, focusing primarily on the healing journey and recovery process. Similarly, this study identifies how Mizu experiences trauma from childhood that persists into adulthood. However, unlike *Violet Evergarden*'s narrative arc that emphasizes recovery and emotional reconnection, Mizu's journey demonstrates a contrasting trajectory where trauma leads to deeper emotional numbness and isolation rather than healing. This distinction highlights how different narrative approaches can portray trauma's long-term effects: while Violet gradually reconnects with her emotions and humanity, Mizu becomes increasingly detached and consumed by vengeance.

Furthermore, Def and Ghounane's (2024) study on childhood trauma and attachment issues in *Black Clover* provides another comparative perspective. Both studies examine how childhood trauma shapes adult behavior and emotional capacity. However, this research extends beyond attachment issues to demonstrate how Caruth's concept of belatedness manifests specifically through visual narrative techniques in animation, particularly through the systematic use of flashbacks and nightmares as vehicles for trauma representation. While *Black Clover* explores trauma within the framework of magical fantasy and character relationships, *Blue Eye Samurai* grounds trauma in historical context and demonstrates how social stigma and discrimination compound individual traumatic experiences.

Additionally, Kerig's (2016) research on emotional numbing in trauma survivors provides theoretical support for this study's findings regarding Mizu's behavioral changes. Kerig's work on PTSD development and emotional numbing in justice-involved youth parallels this study's demonstration of how Mizu's repeated traumatic experiences lead to emotional detachment as a protective mechanism. However, this study contributes unique insights by analyzing how animation as a medium visually represents the numbing process through character expressions, dialogue, and cinematographic choices, thereby expanding understanding of trauma representation beyond traditional psychological case studies into creative media analysis. The contrast between Mizu's early emotional responsiveness and her later cold indifference illustrates the progressive nature of emotional numbing documented in Kerig's psychological research, but contextualized within a narrative framework that makes trauma's effects accessible to broader audiences through popular media.

After conducting in-depth study of trauma in *Blue Eye Samurai* (2023), the researcher concludes that repeated traumatic experiences can lead to significant changes in a person's character. Individuals who have felt powerless and defeated by past trauma may later transform into formidable, even fearsome figures, a transformation clearly seen in Mizu, who evolves from a marginalized, belittled outcast into an unstoppable and terrifying force.

The research also reveals that time alone does not heal traumatic wounds; without reconciliation and adequate social support, these wounds may even worsen. As Caruth (1996) emphasizes, a holistic understanding of trauma is crucial not only for victims but for society as a whole, enabling appropriate, empathetic support for those affected. In Mizu's case, betrayal by those closest to her deepens her trauma, fueling a relentless thirst for vengeance. Even as an

adult, she remains consumed by revenge, willing to kill anyone who stands in her way, and ultimately burns down Edo in pursuit of her goal.

Therefore, those who endure ongoing trauma are not necessarily weakened or depressed; they may instead become more intimidating individuals. Healing from trauma requires more than the passage of time; it demands self-understanding, reconciliation with one's past, and supportive relationships. Without these, the scars of trauma may only deepen.

## CONCLUSION

This study explores the portrayal of trauma in Mizu, the protagonist of the animated series *Blue Eye Samurai* (2023), through the lens of Cathy Caruth's Theory of Trauma. The analysis reveals that Mizu's traumatic experiences persist long into adulthood, even as she encounters new people and situations. Memories of her past trauma frequently resurface, and the full emotional impact of these events only becomes apparent after they have occurred.

To address the first research question regarding how trauma manifests in Mizu, the study focuses on two key categories: flashbacks and nightmares. The findings indicate that Mizu's trauma is delayed, or "belated," in Caruth's terms. Her flashbacks demonstrate that memories of her troubled past are not linear but fragmented, suggesting these experiences have not been fully processed emotionally. Mizu repeatedly recalls scattered events from her childhood, particularly those involving her mother and the negative stigma she faced. The loss of her mother, her mother's harsh treatment, and the social ostracism she endured emerge as central sources of her trauma. Additionally, Mizu experiences nightmares that reconstruct these painful interactions with her mother. The second research question examines how trauma influences Mizu's behavior. In line with Caruth's theory, the study identifies emotional numbness as a major consequence of Mizu's trauma. As she matures, the cumulative effect of her traumatic experiences leads her to detach from her emotions. Mizu loses the ability to feel, express, or receive both positive and negative emotions in a healthy way. This emotional numbness not only shapes her actions but also leads others to perceive her as cold, cruel, and lacking in humanity.

Overall, this study demonstrates that Mizu's trauma in *Blue Eye Samurai* (2023) is characterized by its delayed and fragmented nature, resurfacing through flashbacks and nightmares. This unresolved trauma results in emotional numbness that isolates Mizu from ordinary human feelings, profoundly affecting her behavior and causing her to be seen as cold, ruthless, and dehumanized. Future research can build on this study by examining how trauma intersects with racial and gender-based discrimination, as the current analysis focuses primarily on the main character's trauma. It would also be valuable for future studies to employ theoretical frameworks that can simultaneously address the connections between race, gender, and trauma, while also considering the historical and social context of the Edo period, visual and symbolic elements, and the character's internalization of stigma. Since this study was limited to the first season of the series, subsequent research could incorporate future seasons of *Blue Eye Samurai*, including those set to be released in 2026, to track the evolution of the protagonist's trauma and coping strategies.

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