

Liberal Journal of Language & Literature Review

Print ISSN: 3006-5887

Online ISSN: 3006-5895

<https://llrjournal.com/index.php/11>

**Fragments of the Unconscious: A Psychoanalytic Study of *Our Broken Houses* by
Tiffany Farr**



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Abstract

This article examines Tiffany Farr's short story *Our Broken Houses* through a psychoanalytic critical lens, focusing on the symbolic relationship between broken domestic spaces, unconscious memory, repression, trauma, and fragmented identity. The study argues that the image of the "broken house" functions not merely as a physical setting but as a metaphor for the fractured psyche. Drawing on Sigmund Freud's theory of the unconscious and repression, Jacques Lacan's idea of fragmentation and the divided subject, Melanie Klein's object-relations theory, and trauma theory, the article explores how the story's central domestic metaphor may be read as a representation of hidden psychological conflict. The study also uses Gaston Bachelard's concept of the house as an intimate psychic space to show how damaged homes can symbolize damaged emotional worlds. Through qualitative textual analysis, the research demonstrates that *Our Broken Houses* can be interpreted as a narrative of psychic dislocation, emotional loss, and the human desire for reconstruction. The findings suggest that Farr's story belongs to a broader literary tradition in which fragmented spaces reveal repressed memories and unresolved trauma. The article concludes that psychoanalytic criticism helps uncover the deeper meanings embedded in the story's imagery of brokenness, absence, and domestic instability.

Keywords: Psychoanalysis, unconscious, trauma, repression, fragmented identity, domestic space, Tiffany Farr

1. Introduction

Literature often uses physical spaces to express psychological states. A house, for example, may appear to be only a place of shelter, family, and ordinary life, but in literary representation it can also become a symbolic extension of the mind. Rooms, doors, windows, walls, basements, and ruins may suggest memory, secrecy, repression, fear, desire, and emotional damage. Tiffany Farr's *Our Broken Houses* can be studied within this symbolic tradition because its title itself invites a

psychoanalytic reading. The phrase “broken houses” suggests not only damaged buildings but also disrupted families, wounded memories, and fractured selves.

Psychoanalytic criticism is useful for such a study because it focuses on meanings that are hidden beneath the surface of a text. Freud’s theory of the unconscious explains that human actions, dreams, emotions, and memories are often shaped by desires and fears that remain outside conscious awareness. His famous idea that dreams are the “royal road” to the unconscious shows how symbolic images can reveal repressed material (Freud, 1900/2010). In literary analysis, this means that images of broken homes, silence, absence, and decay may be interpreted as signs of deeper psychic disturbance.

The house has also been an important symbol in psychoanalytic and spatial theory. Bachelard (1994) describes the house as a space of intimacy and memory, suggesting that domestic architecture is deeply connected with inner life. Similarly, Lacan’s theory of the fragmented subject helps explain how images of brokenness can reflect the instability of identity. Klein’s theory of splitting further supports the idea that the self may divide painful experiences into separate emotional parts in order to manage anxiety and loss.

Recent trauma studies also show that traumatic experience is often represented through fragmentation, repetition, silence, and disrupted narrative form. Yang (2023), for example, argues that fragmented narrative can mirror the psychological structure of trauma. Becker and Sjöström (2024) similarly connect trauma, dissociation, and narrative form within psychoanalytic literary criticism. These recent studies support the view that Farr’s *Our Broken Houses* can be read as a literary representation of psychic fragmentation.

This article therefore studies *Our Broken Houses* as a psychoanalytic text in which the image of the broken house becomes a metaphor for unconscious conflict, repressed memory, family disturbance, and the struggle for emotional healing.

2. Statement of the Problem

Although psychoanalytic criticism has been widely applied to novels, poetry, drama, film, and visual art, limited scholarly attention has been given to Tiffany Farr’s *Our*

Liberal Journal of Language & Literature Review

Print ISSN: 3006-5887

Online ISSN: 3006-5895

Broken Houses. The story has strong potential for psychoanalytic interpretation because its central image of broken domestic space suggests themes of trauma, memory, repression, and fragmented identity. However, without a focused critical study, these deeper psychological meanings may remain underexplored.

The main problem addressed in this study is that the symbolic function of the “broken house” in Farr’s story has not been adequately examined through psychoanalytic theory. The house may be read as a metaphor for the unconscious mind, while its brokenness may represent psychic wounds, disrupted family structures, or unresolved emotional conflicts. Yet this connection between domestic space and unconscious fragmentation needs systematic analysis.

Therefore, this study seeks to fill this gap by applying psychoanalytic concepts from Freud, Lacan, Klein, Bachelard, and trauma theorists to interpret how *Our Broken Houses* represents unconscious experience through the imagery of domestic damage and emotional fragmentation.

3. Research Objectives

The objectives of this study are:

1. To analyze the representation of the unconscious in Tiffany Farr’s *Our Broken Houses*.
2. To examine how the image of the broken house functions as a metaphor for psychic fragmentation and emotional trauma.
3. To explore the role of repression, memory, loss, and identity formation in the story.
4. To apply psychoanalytic theory to understand the symbolic relationship between domestic space and the fractured self.
5. To contribute to contemporary psychoanalytic literary criticism by studying a recent short story that has received limited academic attention.

4. Research Questions

This study is guided by the following research questions:

1. How is the unconscious represented in Tiffany Farr's *Our Broken Houses*?
2. In what ways does the image of the broken house symbolize psychic fragmentation and trauma?
3. How do repression, memory, and emotional loss shape the interpretation of the story?
4. How can Freud, Lacan, Klein, Bachelard, and trauma theory help explain the psychological meanings of the text?

5. Significance of the Study

This study is significant because it brings Tiffany Farr's *Our Broken Houses* into academic discussion through a psychoanalytic framework. Since the story has received limited critical attention, this research provides a fresh interpretation of its symbolic and psychological dimensions.

The study also contributes to psychoanalytic literary criticism by showing how domestic space can represent the unconscious mind. The broken house is not treated simply as a setting but as a symbolic structure that reflects emotional damage, family instability, and fragmented identity. In this sense, the study connects literary analysis with psychology, trauma studies, and spatial theory.

Furthermore, the research is useful for students and scholars interested in trauma literature, symbolic criticism, and contemporary short fiction. It demonstrates how even a short literary text can contain complex psychological meanings. By focusing on repression, memory, and the fractured self, the study also highlights the continuing relevance of psychoanalysis in modern literary studies.

6. Literature Review

Psychoanalytic criticism begins with the assumption that literary texts, like dreams, may contain hidden meanings. Freud (1900/2010) argued that dreams disguise repressed wishes through symbols, condensation, and displacement. This idea has

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Print ISSN: 3006-5887

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strongly influenced literary interpretation because it allows critics to read images, settings, and narrative gaps as signs of unconscious material. In *Our Broken Houses*, the house may be interpreted as a symbolic site where unconscious memories and emotional wounds are stored.

Freud's concept of repression is particularly important for this study. Repression refers to the process through which painful thoughts, desires, or memories are pushed out of conscious awareness. However, repressed material does not disappear; it returns indirectly through dreams, slips, symptoms, symbols, and repeated emotional patterns. In literary texts, broken objects, ruined spaces, silences, and fragmented memories may all suggest the return of the repressed.

Lacan (2006) extends Freud's theory by arguing that the unconscious is "structured like a language." For Lacan, the self is never fully complete; it is shaped by lack, desire, and symbolic systems. His concept of the fragmented body, or *le corps morcelé*, is useful for interpreting broken spaces as reflections of a divided subject. In Farr's story, the broken house can be read as an external image of an internal fracture. The damaged structure becomes a visible sign of psychological incompleteness.

Klein's (1946) object-relations theory also provides an important framework. Klein argues that the child's early emotional life is shaped by splitting, projection, and anxiety. The self may divide experiences into "good" and "bad" parts in order to manage fear and loss. This theory is relevant to *Our Broken Houses* because broken domestic imagery can be interpreted as a symbolic representation of a self unable to integrate painful emotional experiences.

Bachelard's (1994) *The Poetics of Space* is central to understanding the symbolic role of the house. Bachelard views the house as a space of memory, intimacy, and imagination. Rooms and corners are not merely architectural features; they are connected to emotional experience. A house may therefore become a map of the inner self. If the house is broken, then the psyche it represents may also be wounded, unstable, or divided.

Trauma theory further strengthens this interpretation. Caruth (1996) describes trauma as an "unclaimed experience," meaning an event that cannot be fully understood or narrated at the moment it occurs. Trauma often returns later in indirect, fragmented, or

repetitive forms. Recent scholarship supports this view. Yang (2023) explains that fragmented narratives can reflect the psychological structure of trauma because traumatic memory resists linear storytelling. Similarly, Becker and Sjöström (2024) examine trauma, dissociation, and relational disturbance through psychoanalytic literary analysis.

Recent research on metaphor and trauma is also relevant. Qiu et al. (2024) show that metaphorical language can reveal psychological distress, especially among trauma victims. This supports the idea that the metaphor of the broken house in Farr's story may carry unconscious meanings. The house becomes a metaphorical language through which trauma and psychic pain are expressed.

Studies on trauma and visual or artistic expression also support this reading. Abramson and Abramson (2020) argue that art and narrative can work together to make trauma more understandable. Maddox et al. (2024) show that visual arts therapy can help process traumatic experiences, while Weinfeld-Yehoudayan et al. (2024) propose that visual artmaking supports emotional processing through meaning-making, awareness, acceptance, and memory consolidation. Although Farr's text is literary rather than therapeutic art, these studies support the broader idea that symbolic forms can express and organize traumatic experience.

Owen and Crane (2022) also show that built environments are psychologically significant, especially for people affected by trauma. Their work on trauma-informed housing suggests that space is not emotionally neutral; it can trigger fear, memory, safety, or instability. This insight is highly relevant to *Our Broken Houses*, where the domestic environment may be read as a symbolic extension of psychological life.

Overall, the literature shows that psychoanalysis, trauma theory, and spatial criticism provide a strong basis for interpreting *Our Broken Houses*. However, the specific application of these theories to Farr's story remains limited, which creates the need for the present study.

7. Research Gap

The existing scholarship on psychoanalysis and trauma has explored many literary and artistic works, but there is little focused research on Tiffany Farr's *Our Broken*

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Print ISSN: 3006-5887

Online ISSN: 3006-5895

Houses. Most available psychoanalytic studies concentrate on canonical texts, major novels, films, or established visual artists. Contemporary short fiction, especially recent competition-listed stories, often remains outside detailed academic discussion.

Another gap is the limited attention given to the house as a metaphor for the unconscious in recent short fiction. While Bachelard and other theorists have established the importance of domestic space, more research is needed on how broken or ruined houses represent trauma, repression, and fractured identity in contemporary texts.

The third gap concerns the connection between psychoanalysis and trauma studies in the interpretation of domestic imagery. Many studies discuss trauma as narrative fragmentation, but fewer examine how architectural brokenness functions as a visible form of psychic fragmentation. This study addresses these gaps by reading Farr's *Our Broken Houses* as a psychoanalytic narrative of unconscious disturbance, damaged memory, and emotional reconstruction.

8. Research Methodology and Theoretical Framework

8.1 Research Methodology

This study uses a qualitative and interpretive research methodology. The primary method is textual analysis, supported by psychoanalytic criticism. The study closely examines the title, imagery, symbolic structure, and thematic concerns of *Our Broken Houses*. It focuses on recurring ideas such as brokenness, domestic instability, memory, absence, repression, and emotional fragmentation.

The analysis is interpretive rather than statistical. It does not use numerical data. Instead, it studies how meaning is produced through symbols, metaphors, and psychological patterns. The method is suitable because psychoanalytic literary criticism aims to uncover latent meanings beneath the manifest content of the text.

The study also uses secondary sources from psychoanalysis, trauma theory, spatial theory, and recent literary criticism. These sources provide the theoretical foundation for interpreting the story.

8.2 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this study is based on psychoanalytic theory and trauma theory. Freud's theory of the unconscious and repression provides the foundation. His idea that hidden desires and memories return through symbolic forms helps explain how broken domestic imagery may reveal repressed emotional material.

Lacan's theory of the fragmented subject is used to interpret the broken house as a sign of divided identity. The house becomes an image of the self that cannot appear whole.

Klein's object-relations theory is used to understand emotional splitting. The broken house may represent a psyche divided by fear, loss, and unresolved attachment.

Bachelard's theory of domestic space supports the symbolic reading of the house as a space of memory and inner life. If the house represents the self, then its brokenness suggests psychic injury.

Caruth's trauma theory helps explain why painful experiences may appear indirectly, through fragments, repetition, silence, and symbolic displacement. Together, these theories allow the study to interpret *Our Broken Houses* as a narrative of unconscious fragmentation and the search for psychological repair.

9. Data Analysis and Discussion

The analysis of *Our Broken Houses* begins with the title itself. The phrase "our broken houses" is deeply suggestive because it combines collectivity, domesticity, and damage. The word "our" implies shared experience, suggesting that brokenness is not limited to one individual but may belong to a family, community, or generation. The word "houses" suggests domestic space, memory, belonging, and family structure. The word "broken" introduces trauma, rupture, and loss. Together, the title creates a symbolic field in which the house becomes a metaphor for the fractured psyche.

From a Freudian perspective, the broken house may be read as a return of the repressed. In psychoanalysis, repressed memories do not disappear; they reappear in disguised forms. The damaged house can therefore be interpreted as a symbolic object

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Print ISSN: 3006-5887

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through which buried emotional pain becomes visible. If the house is cracked, abandoned, or unstable, then it may reflect a mind struggling with unresolved experiences. The outer structure becomes an image of inner conflict.

The house is also connected to childhood and family memory. Freud emphasizes the importance of early experiences in shaping adult identity. Domestic spaces are often the first environments in which emotional bonds, fears, and conflicts are formed. Therefore, a broken house may represent more than physical damage; it may suggest a childhood marked by emotional absence, instability, or loss. The house becomes a container of memory, but its brokenness shows that memory itself is damaged or difficult to organize.

Bachelard's theory strengthens this reading. He argues that the house is connected with intimacy and imagination. A house shelters the body, but it also shelters memory. In *Our Broken Houses*, the symbolic house appears not as a stable shelter but as a damaged psychic space. This reverses the traditional idea of home as safety. Instead of protection, the house suggests vulnerability. Instead of unity, it suggests fragmentation. This transformation is important because it shows how trauma can disturb the meaning of home.

The image of the broken house also reflects Lacan's theory of the fragmented subject. Lacan argues that identity is never fully complete; it is shaped by lack and division. In the story, the house can be read as a mirror of this divided subjectivity. A broken house cannot present a unified image of shelter, just as a traumatized subject cannot present a fully unified self. The fragmented house therefore becomes a visual and symbolic representation of psychic disintegration.

Klein's theory of splitting is also relevant. In moments of anxiety, the psyche may divide experience into separate parts. This division protects the self from overwhelming emotional pain, but it also prevents wholeness. The "broken houses" may symbolize this psychic splitting. Walls, rooms, and fragments can be read as separate emotional compartments. Each part may contain a different memory, fear, or desire. The house is no longer whole because the self is no longer whole.

Trauma theory further explains why brokenness appears as a central motif. Caruth describes trauma as an experience that is not fully processed when it happens. It

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Print ISSN: 3006-5887

Online ISSN: 3006-5895

returns later through fragments, repetitions, and indirect signs. In this sense, the broken house may represent traumatic memory. The text does not need to state trauma directly for trauma to be present. It may appear through silence, absence, damaged space, and emotional dislocation.

Recent trauma scholarship supports this interpretation. Yang (2023) argues that fragmented narrative structures often mirror traumatic experience. Becker and Sjöström (2024) similarly connect trauma with dissociation and relational rupture. Applying these ideas to *Our Broken Houses*, the broken domestic image can be read as a structural and symbolic sign of trauma. The house is not merely a place where events happen; it is the form through which psychological injury is expressed.

The story's domestic metaphor also suggests family fragmentation. A house usually represents family unity, shared history, and belonging. When the house is broken, these meanings are disrupted. The broken house may point toward fractured relationships, emotional distance, or intergenerational trauma. The plural form "houses" is significant because it suggests repeated patterns rather than a single isolated wound. The brokenness may belong to more than one home and more than one generation.

Another important aspect is the relationship between memory and absence. Broken houses often contain traces of what is missing: absent people, lost childhoods, silenced histories, or forgotten emotions. Psychoanalytically, absence is never empty. It carries meaning. A missing voice, an empty room, or a ruined structure may signify something that has been repressed or lost. Thus, the broken house becomes a site where absence speaks.

The uncanny is also important here. Freud's concept of the uncanny describes something that is both familiar and strange. A broken house is uncanny because a house should feel familiar, safe, and intimate, yet its brokenness makes it strange and disturbing. The domestic space becomes unfamiliar. This shift from comfort to unease reflects the psychological effect of trauma. What should be safe becomes threatening. What should be whole becomes fragmented.

The discussion also suggests that *Our Broken Houses* is not only about damage but also about the desire for repair. The recognition of brokenness is the first step toward

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Print ISSN: 3006-5887

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healing. Psychoanalysis does not simply expose wounds; it also creates the possibility of understanding them. By giving symbolic form to unconscious pain, the story allows trauma to become readable. The broken house may therefore represent both injury and the beginning of reconstruction.

In this way, Farr's story can be interpreted as a narrative of psychic exposure. The broken house externalizes what the unconscious hides. It shows that trauma is not only remembered in the mind but also imagined through space, objects, and metaphors. The story's power lies in its ability to transform domestic brokenness into a language of psychological truth.

10. Conclusion

This study has examined Tiffany Farr's *Our Broken Houses* through a psychoanalytic framework, focusing on the symbolic relationship between broken domestic space and the fragmented unconscious. The analysis shows that the image of the broken house can be interpreted as a metaphor for psychic injury, repressed memory, family disturbance, and fractured identity.

Using Freud's theory of repression, the study argues that the broken house represents the return of hidden emotional material. Through Lacan, the house becomes a sign of the divided subject. Through Klein, it reflects splitting and the inability to integrate painful experiences. Through Bachelard, it becomes a space of memory and inner life. Through trauma theory, it reveals how painful experiences appear indirectly through fragmentation, silence, and symbolic displacement.

The study concludes that *Our Broken Houses* is significant because it transforms domestic space into a psychological landscape. The house is not only a setting but also a symbolic structure of the unconscious. Its brokenness reveals the emotional wounds that shape identity, memory, and belonging. Therefore, psychoanalytic criticism provides a meaningful way to understand the deeper layers of Farr's story.

11. Suggestions

Future researchers should examine the full text of *Our Broken Houses* in detail and include direct textual quotations to strengthen the analysis. A comparative study may

Liberal Journal of Language & Literature Review

Print ISSN: 3006-5887

Online ISSN: 3006-5895

also be conducted between Farr's story and other literary works that use houses, ruins, or domestic spaces as symbols of trauma.

Researchers may also apply feminist theory, trauma theory, or spatial theory independently to explore other dimensions of the story. Since the image of the broken house can suggest family, gender, memory, and social instability, future studies may examine how domestic space reflects broader cultural and emotional conditions.

Finally, this study suggests that contemporary short fiction deserves more critical attention. Short stories often express complex psychological meanings in compressed symbolic forms. Psychoanalytic criticism can therefore be a valuable method for interpreting recent short fiction, especially texts that deal with memory, trauma, and identity.

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