

## Traumatic Experiences in the Main Character of Blue Eye Samurai (2023)

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### Abstract

This research examines the representation of traumatic experiences in the main character of the animation series Blue Eye Samurai (2023), with a focus on Cathy Caruth's ideas of belated trauma and the process of numbness. As one of the most popular animations at the end of 2023, this animation reveals the impact of trauma on the main character's behavior and life over time. This research used the close viewing method to analyze each episode's text and visual content in order to determine how narrative and visual structures portray unresolved trauma and the trauma's long-term behavioral effects on Mizu. The results show that Mizu's trauma is fragmented and occurs in nightmares and flashbacks. Mizu's behavior and life are also altered by the trauma, leading to emotional numbness and challenges with feeling, expressing, or accepting particular emotions. This research concludes by highlighting Blue Eye Samurai as an intriguing example of how modern animation might investigate themes of trauma, identity, and resiliency, adding a fresh perspective to literary studies.

**Keywords:** trauma, belatedness of trauma, flashback, nightmare, numbing process, emotional numbing.

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### INTRODUCTION

Trauma is a complex and multidimensional concept that has received widespread attention in various disciplines, particularly psychology and literature. In the field of psychology, trauma is defined as an emotional wound that causes real psychological injury or an event that causes an individual to experience severe and prolonged stress. According to Pierre Janet (in White, 2016) in his work "L'automatisme Psychologique," an event becomes traumatic when intense emotions disrupt the normal process of memory management. This perspective has since evolved, including through Erikson (in Heidarzadeh, 2015), who defines it as a condition or state arising from extraordinary pressure or impact.

On the other hand, in the world of literature, trauma is not only seen as a psychological disorder but also as a narrative phenomenon that plays a crucial role in 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 that trauma is not only a psychological phenomenon but also a deep cultural and narrative one. 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 & Hall (1921) and Cathy Caruth (1996).

As time progressed, representations of trauma, which were initially limited to psychological studies, began to spread to the field of visual media, including film and animation. This phenomenon is particularly evident in the popularity of Japanese anime, which in recent decades has not only entertained but also raised issues of mental health, particularly trauma as a central theme. Anime series such as Attack on Titan (2013–2024), Violet Evergarden (2018–2020), and Demon Slayer (2019–2024) not only feature action and adventure but also delve deeply into how past trauma shapes the psychology of the main characters and influences their life journeys. This demonstrates how the medium of animation serves as an effective vehicle for conveying complex social and psychological issues through a 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 to continue exploring in Japanese and global popular culture.

In a global context, it is not only Japanese anime that explicitly addresses the theme of trauma. One recent example that has attracted attention is the non-Japanese animated series *Blue Eye Samurai* (2023), a Netflix production that combines Japanese aesthetics and narrative with a story that addresses deep trauma. The series gained popularity for its complex characterization and its historical setting in Japan's Edo period (1603–1867), known for its 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 the injustice she faces due to racial and gender discrimination. Mizu's journey, filled with pain, revenge, and a search for identity, reflects the ongoing trauma that haunts the lives of trauma survivors, making *Blue Eye Samurai* an intriguing case study in the representation of trauma through animated media. The series' popularity is further supported by widespread recognition on social media and high ratings (IMDb 8.7/10), sparking in-depth discussions among both fans and academics.

The portrayal of trauma embedded in the historical backdrop and internal conflicts of the main character in *Blue Eye Samurai* can be analyzed in greater depth using contemporary trauma theory, particularly Cathy Caruth's theory emphasizing the concept of "belatedness of trauma" or the delayed onset of trauma. Caruth (1996) views trauma as a double wound, where victims not only experience the initial impact of the traumatic event but also the delayed and recurring psychological effects through haunting memories. Trauma, according to Caruth, is not merely an event but an experience that is carried forward and resurfaces in the form of flashbacks, nightmares, intrusive thoughts, and other forms of repetition. that influences the victim's daily life. Through this theory, Mizu's experience of facing repeated discrimination and violence can be understood as a manifestation of unresolved prolonged trauma, which shapes her behavior and identity. In addition, the process of emotional numbing (Caruth, 1995) as a psychological response to trauma is also relevant in explaining how trauma survivors frequently exhibit behavioral changes, characterized by emotional suppression as a protective mechanism; however, this leads to alienation and difficulty in forming emotional connections in the long term.

Although *Blue Eye Samurai* has received positive responses and widespread attention, academic studies that systematically analyze the representation of trauma 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 the application of Caruth's trauma theory, which has been widely used in the analysis of literary works and other media. By comparison, there are several academic studies that examine trauma using Caruth's theory in the context of anime and literary works, such as Husnia's (2024) analysis of *Violet Evergarden* (2018), which focuses on the causes of trauma and the main character's reflections in overcoming her trauma, Def & Ghounane's (2024) study examines 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 the concept of belatedness (the delayed effects of trauma) in films and novels, such as *Mockensturm* (2014) on the impact of the Fukushima nuclear disaster, *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 a 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 the development of PTSD, while Kerig's (2016) review also examines the psychosocial impact of emotional numbing on veterans. Overall, these studies provide a theoretical foundation and deep context for the representation of trauma, psychologically, symbolically, and socio-culturally, in animation and literature. However, academic research specifically focused on trauma in *Blue Eye Samurai* (2023) remains limited, so this study aims to fill that gap by using Cathy Caruth's trauma theory as an analytical framework.

Overall, these studies provide a theoretical foundation and deep context for the representation of trauma, whether psychological, symbolic, or socio-cultural, in animated media and literature. However, academic studies that focus specifically on trauma in *Blue Eye Samurai* (2023) are still limited, so this research seeks to fill that gap by using Cathy Caruth's trauma theory as a framework for analysis. This gap in academic research opens up significant opportunities for future research. This study aims to fill this 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 of this study is to understand how the concept of 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 posed include: (1) How the concept of trauma is depicted in the main character, and (2) how that trauma influences the main character's behavior in the series.

The theoretical framework used will focus on Cathy Caruth's (1996) theory of belatedness of trauma and the process of emotional numbing (1995), which describes the psychological responses of trauma survivors in their daily lives. The significance of this research lies in its contribution to literary and visual media studies, particularly the development of trauma analysis in contemporary animation. In addition to expanding academic understanding of trauma representation through the medium of animation, this research is also expected to strengthen the use of Cathy Caruth's theory in interdisciplinary studies of literature and trauma psychology. Furthermore, the research results can serve as a 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 in Japan's Edo period. Thus, this research is not only theoretically relevant but also has social and cultural implications in understanding the psychological and narrative impacts of trauma that continue to persist and take root in the lives of individuals and society.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study uses the Netflix animated series *Blue Eye Samurai* (2023) as its main data source. The series consists of eight episodes, and the focus of the study is on the main character, Mizu, who is 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 an 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 that the filmmaker wants to convey. This method not only includes observing images and scenes but also narrative elements such as dialogue and subtitles that can enhance understanding of the context and emotions of the characters. The atmosphere or ambience in the animation is also analyzed because it can reinforce or add meaning to the trauma narrative process.

After the visual and narrative data were collected, the analysis process was carried out using the trauma theory concepts of Cathy Caruth, a psychological trauma expert. The analysis was applied using the TEEL technique, a systematic approach to writing analysis consisting of four parts: Topic (the main statement that is the focus of the analysis), Evidence (evidence from the data, such as scenes or dialogues that support the statement), Explanation (a detailed explanation of how the evidence is relevant and contributes to the understanding of trauma theory), and Link (the connection between the conclusions of that section which align with Cathy Caruth's concepts).

## RESULTS 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 the impact of trauma on the development of the main character's behaviour over time. The analysis is conducted using the TEEL format: each paragraph begins with a clear topic sentence, followed by evidence such as the subtitle and the picture from the series, a detailed explanation of the evidence, and closes with a sentence that links back to the main topic.

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

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

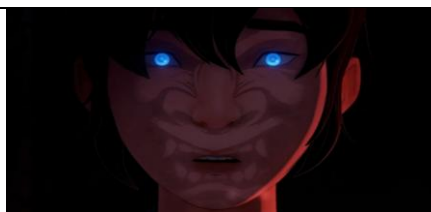
#### 1. Flashback

In the first episode of the series, 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 get out. In the end, Mizu lost her mother and had to face the world alone. After getting into conflict with the village children, Mizu meets an old blind man on the edge of a ravine 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 the making and use of swords in order to realize her goals of becoming a reliable warrior and seeking revenge.

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

*Table 1. Mizu perceives herself as a monster, a shameful creature*

Dialogue	Episode	Timecode
Mizu: "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, <b>and made of me... a monster. A creature of shame.</b> "	1	00:39:39- 00:40:07



*Figure 2 Illustration of the monster resembling Mizu's face*

Mizu describes herself as a "monster" and a "shameful creature" in Table 1, with a sad expression on her face. Figure 2 depicts a monster transforming into Mizu's face, followed by her distinctive blue eyes, representing how she is constantly haunted by the 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 and 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 the 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 the essence of trauma 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 her 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 the fact 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 mom warned about the threat of leaving the house*

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



*Figure 3 Mizu peeks at the village children playing*



*Figure 4. 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 that 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 3) depicts Mizu peering out at the village children playing outside. Notably, these children are Taigen and his friends. This scene

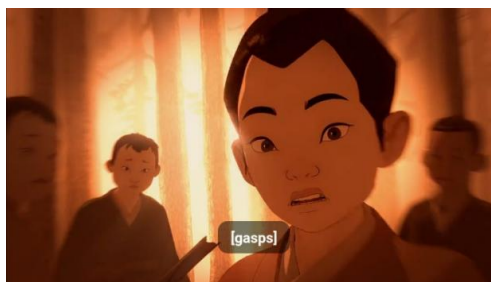
symbolizes how Mizu has been conditioned to remain perpetually alert, seeing potential threats in everyone, whether child or adult. Figure 4 further heightens the sense of danger, depicting a house engulfed in flames and amplifying the tense atmosphere.

The visuals and dialogue above 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 very 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 that surface only after time has passed, as though the individual is reliving the trauma during the flashback itself.

The impact does not end there. As Taigen continues to taunt Mizu, his words keep pulling her deeper into her 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 made Mizu have a flashback*

Dialogue	Episode	Timecode
Taigen: "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 lived with his whore mother</b> "	3	00:18:06 - 00:18:30



*Figure 5 Taigen and the other were surprised to see Mizu*



*Figure 6 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 5, where Mizu tries to get a closer look at the village children, Taigen and his friends, at play. When they notice her, Taigen and the others react with shock and instinctively retreat, reinforcing the idea that Mizu is someone to be shunned. Figure 6 then shows Mizu standing motionless, viewed from a distant camera angle, surrounded by fire and

accompanied by the sound of a monster. This powerful imagery not only heightens the tension but also visually conveys the enduring weight of trauma that 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 7 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: "You let them see you? Men will come. Men will always come"	3	00:18:31 - 00:18:55



Figure 8 Mizu's mom screamed from inside the burning house

This pivotal moment is captured in Figure 7, where Mizu's eyes widen and tremble as she locks eyes with Taigen just before the flashback overwhelms her. The memory that surfaces is of her mother reprimanding her for venturing outside the house. This flashback is triggered by the immediate danger Taigen represents, reigniting the 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 that shadows Mizu's life. Figure 8 further illustrates this, showing Mizu attempting to sneak out of the house, an act that ultimately leads to the 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 that 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 a lingering emotional weight from the past, but an active force that shapes her current perceptions and reactions to threats. This reflects

Caruth's (1996) concept of the "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, where Mizu confronts her enemies in a brothel. Facing off against 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 the intense battle.



Figure 9 In the past, Mizu was also stabbed in the stomach



Figure 10 Hamata's army stabbed Mizu in the same spot

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

Figure 9 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 10). These mirrored scenes highlight how Mizu's traumatic memories resurface in response to present danger. The recurring injury to her abdomen symbolizes not just a physical wound, but also an 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 a physical injury but a psychological wound that happens too quickly to be fully processed at the time. As a result, the trauma resurfaces later through flashbacks, indicating that the experience has not been fully integrated into the 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 the 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 11 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 goes so far as to call Mizu a “monster” and shoves her to the ground, leaving her there. This label is more than just an insult, it signifies a rejection of Mizu’s very identity and capabilities. Figure 11 emphasizes Mikio’s look of disgust after pushing Mizu, underscoring the internal struggle Mizu faces between her longing for acceptance and the painful reality of being rejected, even by those she trusts.

The evidence above illustrates how the conflict between Mizu’s desire for acceptance and her experience of rejection leads to lingering trauma. This trauma, which stems from emotional wounds accumulated during her 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 the victim cannot fully understand it. Such experiences reflect unresolved trauma that continues to resurface, seeking recognition and healing.

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 the foundational trauma of her childhood has forged her into a person consumed by an unrelenting drive for revenge.

Across the flashbacks in episodes 1, 3, and 5, it is clear that the 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 the challenges she faces as an adult.

## 2. 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 mom slapped Mizu because Mizu left hhe 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 18 Mizu was slapped by her 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 18 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, the terror of death threats, severe restrictions on her freedom, and a 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, the lack of freedom, and the 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 the 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 that still affects her today. Based on the 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 Behaviour**

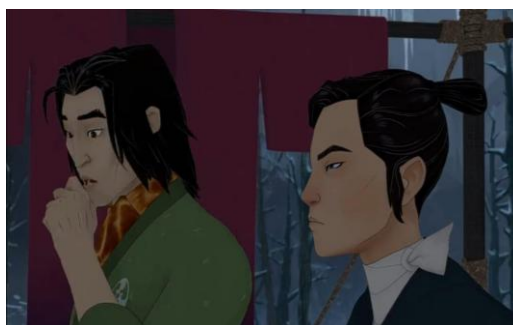
The repeated traumas Mizu has endured from childhood through adulthood, including her experiences within marriage, have deeply shaped her life. As she grows older, the consequences of these traumatic events become more pronounced. Mizu has reached a state of emotional numbness, suppressing or disregarding 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 that illustrate this progression.

### **Numbing Process**

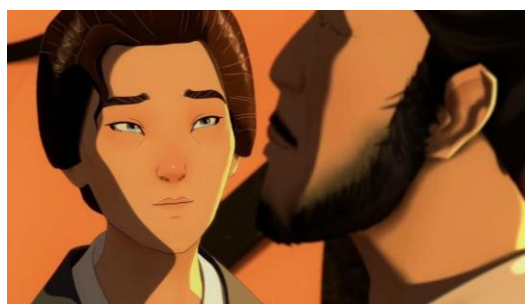
Mizu's trauma has led to a noticeable numbing of her emotions, which becomes especially apparent during her quest for revenge. The psychological scars from her childhood, compounded by traumatic experiences in adulthood, have dulled her emotional responses. In episode three, Mizu's emotional detachment 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 19 Mizu's flat expression when offered 50,000 ryo by Heiji*



*Figure 20 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 the trauma inflicted by those she once trusted most. This emotional detachment is further illustrated in Figure 19, 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 20, 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: "The man I met is no man. A demon. <b>Eyes empty.</b> Eyes like yours. Nothing can stop him. He'll come. He'll stand right here, <b>and he will open your throat. He'll watch you die.</b> "	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 21 Mizu attacks Heiji Shindo without hesitation



Figure 22 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 21, Mizu swiftly and expressionlessly cuts off his hand, after he forced Mizu into the 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 22). 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 a 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.

From all the 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 a profound emotional numbness, blocking all pain and emotional response.

After conducting an 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. In conclusion, 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

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, 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.

In summary, 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.

### Limitations and future direction

This study has limitations in that it focuses only on the traumatic experiences of the main character and their impact on Mizu's life journey. 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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