



Trauma, Memory, and the Lebanese Post-War Novel

Beirut's Invisible Histories in Rabee
Jaber's Fiction

Dani Nassif



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NOTES ON THE TRANSLATION AND THE TRANSLITERATION

Except in a few instances where I refer to the translator, all translations from Arabic novels and other Arabic sources (into English) are my own, and they are accompanied by the original text in the respective footnotes.

The study follows the transliteration guidelines of the *Arabic Romanization Table* for Arabic words, which generally uses diacritical marks (macrons and dots) and the letters ‘*ayn* [‘] and *Hamza* [’] in Unicode font. The transliterated words and statements follow specific formatting that might be summarized as follows:

- In transliterated titles of books and articles, only the first word and the proper names in those titles are capitalized. Names of publishing houses and newspapers also start with a capital letter. The Arabic article *al-* is written in lower case even after a full stop. However, when the Arabic word starting with *al-* is preceded by an adjective, the Arabic article is omitted (e.g. the traumatic *aṭlāl*).
- While the transliterated titles of books are italicized, those of articles and reports are written in regular font and placed between double quotation marks. In the manuscript, all transliterated words are written in italics except for the names of people, companies, and places.
- As the title of the dissertation implies, the proper names of Arabic authors whose works have been translated into English are written

in the way they are commonly known in English; otherwise, they are written in transliteration. In other words, the names of authors of Arabic origin whose publications are in English are kept as they are mentioned in those publications.

- Arabic names of prominent political or cultural figures are spelled according to the “accepted English spellings” (e.g. Elie Hobeika, Rafiq al-Hariri). Similarly, place names with accepted English spellings are also spelled in accordance with English norms (e.g. Beirut, Tripoli, Ehdén).

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

They shot me at the demarcation line that split Beirut in two in 1976. And my father carried me and took me to his home. Rabee, if you ever write my life in a book, may you begin my story with that sentence: They shot me at the demarcation line that split Beirut in two in 1976, and my father carried me and took me to his home.

Rabee Jaber (2008)

Writing the history of the civil war-disappeared in Lebanon, as in many post-conflict societies, remains a very challenging task, considering the circumstances that ensued the controversial war resolution, leaving the nation in a state of anticipation of a comprehensive reconciliation plan. Given the reluctance of successive postwar governments to conduct serious investigations in this respect, hardly any official documents are available to help write the history of the war-disappeared after their disappearances—except for the very few who returned from Syrian prisons. Moving beyond this deadlock, this book draws on fictional scenarios from Rabee Jaber’s novels to conceptualize the possibility of narrating the suppressed past of those who had gone missing during the war, a history that might otherwise remain unaddressed. It particularly focuses on generating methods to produce a traumatic history, introducing new constructs, notably the concept of traumatic *aṭlāl*, exploring new dynamics of intergenerational trauma, and drafting an ambitious model of trauma testimonies. For this purpose, the book refers to official

documents, historical narratives, journalistic accounts, and scholarly studies while putting notions and elements from Lebanese conceptual art and Arabic language and literature in dialogue with trauma theory. The book accordingly partakes in the debate on memory studies in general, and the traumatic history of the war-disappeared in particular, in contexts similar to that of the Lebanese civil war. It makes interventions that transcend the focus on the visible and the known to account for a history that is, and may forever be, inaccessible. It also represents the first contribution in existing literary scholarship to be devoted solely to Rabee Jaber's work.

In a close reading of three novels by Lebanese novelist Rabee Jaber, this monograph explores the potential of literary representations to render visible what would rather remain invisible in the experience of the Lebanese war-disappeared following their disappearances. By focusing on traumatic aspects in their everyday encounters in Beirut after the year 2000, it investigates the make-up of their latent histories and the type of language appropriate for such unconventional representations. It more specifically traces the traumatic repercussions of their ghostly experiences inside and by the war ruins, in the intergenerational transmission of war memories, and in the problematic testimonies of unreliable eyewitnesses. This exploration is especially relevant for Arabic-speaking societies where the different acts of "testifying," "bearing witness," and "bearing second-hand witness" are subsumed under the same verb *yashhad*, missing out on key discussions in this respect. In fact, the verb *yashhad* semantically and etymologically calls up the verb *yushāhid*, meaning "to watch," which asserts the centrality of the act of seeing and hence of visibility when using the Arabic language to recollect past events, without consensus about what actually happened.

Three main controversial events are known to frame the resolution of the Lebanese civil war. In 1989, most militia leaders were invited to al-Tā'if in Saudi Arabia where they agreed on ending the armed struggle by appointing themselves as political leaders for the postwar period. This inter-elite agreement, initially orchestrated by regional and international powers, culminated in a government that eventually issued an amnesty law in 1991 (Law #84), granting amnesty for all the crimes that had been committed during the war. This same government proceeded to approve a reconstruction plan that sought to erase all traces of the war from Beirut's central district. In addition to "letting bygones be bygones," successive authorities also encouraged a *laissez-faire* culture

that relied on clientelism, reinforcing the role of former militias as gateways for socio-economic survival, while pushing many unresolved issues, such as the case of the war-disappeared, into oblivion.

The fate of the 17,000 people who went missing during the war (other sources refer to 2500–3000 people) still remains unknown today, since the authorities have kept ignoring the need for investigations, arguably to avoid holding current politicians accountable for past crimes. Meanwhile, as the parents of the disappeared are kept waiting for their loved ones' return, so many events and erasures have occurred in the last 32 years that retrieving their traces has indeed become significantly challenging. Accordingly, most narratives about those who had gone missing present the case through the agony of the surviving family members, ignoring the unknown, or through the disappeareds' lives before their disappearances. There are testimonies by the very few who returned from imprisonment and those adopted by Western families without any documentation. However, a number never returned, and must have faced different scenarios to which they could only testify through fictional accounts produced by various means of cultural productions, such as art and literature. Although fictional, their stories provide valid possibilities of a history that will probably remain inaccessible, about a surviving generation that must not be overlooked in the peacebuilding process. For such an exploration, this book focuses on sample testimonies in Jaber's novels *Taqīr Meblis* (2005; *The Meblis Report*, 2013), *al-I'tirāfāt* (2008; *Confessions*, 2016), and *Berytus madīna taht al-arḍ* (2005; *Berytus a City Underground*).

By exploring the invisible traumatic history of the war-disappeared after their disappearances, this book contributes to the debate on post-war memory in contemporary Lebanon. Arab intellectual Jalal Toufic warns against the lack of fictional ghost stories in contemporary Lebanese fiction, which could perhaps create cracks and openings in what seems to be a blocked access to Lebanon's violent past. In addition to suppressing their war memories, people's daily lives remained threatened by recurrent deadly explosions, assassinations, and intermittent warfare. A number of Lebanese intellectuals accordingly argue that the war is not over yet, and that the postwar period is a mere continuation of the war albeit in a different guise and using a different rhetoric. It is against this controversial backdrop, which perceives the Lebanese to be suspended in the traumatic event of the war, that Toufic makes his argument about the lack of ghost stories in Lebanese literature.

However, a rapid overview in this respect shows that the “undead” are evidently present in several Lebanese novels, such as in Sélim Nasib’s *Fou de Beyrouth* (1991), Hoda Barakat’s *Hārith al-miyāh* (1998), and the three novels by Rabee Jaber mentioned above. What might then explain Toufic’s remark is the absence of literary studies—such as this monograph—that adopt the theme of the undead as their central focus and integrate it into public discourse.

Despite the many novels that have been written about the war, only a few scholarly works have been devoted to study trauma-related aspects in the depicted events and experiences, and none in relation to the war-disappeared. There is one major ethnographic study by Felix Lang who draws on the symbolic and cultural capital that Lebanese novelists would possibly receive for writing war stories with traumatic experiences, a theme that is quite prevalent and recognized in the West. Few other articles look at the textual and aesthetic representations of trauma in selected novels, and mainly refer to the way Lebanese society is haunted by a violent past that appears endless. Meanwhile, the traumatic experiences of the war-disappeared have remained unaddressed, and their traumatic history has subsequently remained invisible and excluded from public discussion.

A monograph exclusively dedicated to three of Rabee Jaber’s novels also contributes to existing scholarship on Arabic and Lebanese contemporary literature, especially the works of the Arabic Booker Prize which have received relatively limited and marginal attention considering his impressive *oeuvre*. A quick overview of his novels would mark his particular interest in reporting the deep suffering and struggle of the human being while trying to cope with life’s injustices. Several of these novels focus on Lebanese individuals whose postwar experiences were interrupted by premature death or disappearances: the sudden death of Lebanese film maker Maroun Baghdadi in *al-Bayt al-akhīr* (1996), the suicide of Lebanese psychologist Ralph Rizqallah in *Ralph Rīzqallah fī al-mīr’āt* (1997), the assassination of Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq al-Hariri in *Tagrīr Mehlīs* (2005), the presumed death of Mārūn in *al-I’tirāfāt* (2008), and the crime against the disappeared in *Berytus madīna taḥt al-ard* (2005). Jaber herein invites the dead and the disappeared to comment on their traumatic experiences in postwar Beirut. He invests in fiction’s potential to give voice to the Lebanese war victims who are no longer here to testify to their suffering and who might have hence remained marginalized. In the three selected novels, Jaber’s

focus on the war-missing might be perceived as an attempt to project a symbolic return of the traumatic past, initiating a dialogue with that invisible history, which could potentially break the state of numbness referred to earlier. Each of the novels is discussed in a separate chapter, drawing on the postwar Lebanese experience to explore the relation between suppressed traumatic memories and literary representations in a multidisciplinary and multicultural dialogue. In fact, the book goes a long way toward situating Jaber's work within networks of other narratives circulating in post-conflict Lebanon, from novels and contemporary arts, to public letters of regret, public debates, documentary video, and civil society projects. The analyses propose new trauma-related questions about the possibility of engaging the war's disappeared, whether dead or alive, in the writing of the history of the civil war, to produce new concepts for a deeper understanding of their experiences during and after the war—namely, traumatic *aṭlāl*, intergenerational trauma among disappeared survivors, and the credibility of fictional trauma testimonies—and also to develop methods that could help historians interrogate literature and art for the writing of this less visible history.

Chapter 2 is a lead-in chapter with the title “Trauma Theory, the Lebanese Civil War, and Lebanese Fiction.” It includes a literature review on trauma theory and its developments, the Lebanese experience as depicted in novels written during and after the civil war, the war's undead in Lebanese contemporary art, and Rabee Jaber's approach to human suffering and history. In section 2.1, I first present trauma theory as a contested field between psychiatry and anthropology and draw on its employment and functions in cultural representations such as art and literature, while putting emphasis on models and notions that are relevant to this monograph. The second section in this chapter (section 2.2) focuses on the Lebanese postwar experience and—more intently—on the way it is depicted by novelists, literary critics, and contemporary artists. I first expand on the argument that the controversial war resolution and postwar policies have prolonged the state of war, while referring to several initiatives by intellectuals and activists to recollect the suppressed memories of the past. I then provide an overview of the war experiences as depicted in Lebanese novels written between 1975 and the 2000s, drawing especially on the suffering of the individual in general, and women in particular, who must face the collective, national discourse adopted by militias and politicians. A comprehensive discussion will be devoted to examining the forms in which novels written after the war

resolution continued to be haunted by the war's ongoing violence: "the return of the beast" as a result of alienation, loss and suffering of former militia fighters, disorientation in the new downtown, and traumatic war experiences by Anglophone-Lebanese novelists. This will include a review of scholarly publications that focus on trauma theory in their readings of various Lebanese novels, yet which remain scarce despite providing schematic analyses of the traumatism resulting from the protracted civil war.

For more background information on the theme of "trauma and the war's undead" in the Lebanese experience, in section 2.3, the chapter turns to discuss the works and academic publications of Lebanese contemporary artists whose approach to "history," according to Felix Lang, is comparable to that of Rabee Jaber. Following this thematic sequence, this section proceeds to focus on Jaber's philosophical interest in human suffering, his critical approach to historical representations, and, for this purpose, his proficiency at employing literary techniques and exploiting the contested relation between fact and fiction. After setting forth this theoretical and historical backdrop, the study proceeds with thorough analyses of Jaber's three novels in the following three separate chapters.

Chapter 3, "The War Over *al-Aṭlāl* in Downtown Beirut: Suspension and Labyrinth in *Taqrīr Mehlis*," focuses on the forms of memory work that are triggered by the encounter with the traumatic *aṭlāl* in Beirut's reconfigured city center in 2005, following the assassination of Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq al-Hariri. As the title suggests, this chapter provides a close reading of Jaber's novel *Taqrīr Mehlis* (2005) to explore a symbolic war over a particular type of ruins, the traumatic *aṭlāl*, between Solidere's reconstruction plan of downtown Beirut and the return of the war's disappeared to the capital's reconfigured urban space. While the reconstruction of downtown Beirut aims at erasing the past history of the war and its traumatic events from daily experiences, the return of the war-disappeared to reclaim their suppressed memories signals the resurrection of their loci—the war ruins. The analyses in this chapter will develop around this proposal while drawing an important distinction between the *al-aṭlāl* motif from Arabic literature and the concept of "ruins." Both of these will be brought into dialogue with the notion of trauma in light of the "war over the ruins" which is, in fact, a war over the past between the state-sponsored narrative and trauma fiction, between repression and return, which posits "trauma" as a cultural trope that can go into or "declare" war against "the state." This chapter,

consequently, presents Beirut as a site of tension over the past between two competing narratives, through the experiences of two antithetical characters that Jaber's fiction could simultaneously accommodate in the city in 2005.

The novel starts with a detailed account of Sim'ān's experiences in the newly reconstructed city center, before his sister Josephine, who was abducted and killed during the civil war in 1983, is introduced as the main narrator in the novel. Residing in the afterworld, her narrative voice haunts the space of experience in Beirut as she comments on her brother's daily life while attempting to recollect her personal traumatic experience at the demarcation line the night she was kidnapped. The first section of Chapter 3 draws on Jaber's narrative technique to explain the challenges that *al-aṭlāl* of the war face in a reconfigured city center governed by a fresh sense of history. By following Sim'ān's daily roaming in the city center's commercial district, I investigate his ability/inability to recollect his past memories upon his encounter with *al-aṭlāl* that supposedly carry traumatic memories from the civil war. This is examined in relation to Jaber's crafty alliance between the narrative technique and events in the novel—between interruptions, self-reflections, and the character's experience—while considering Sim'ān's background as a war survivor and architect. Section 3.4 provides a closer inspection of the experience of entering the ghostly *aṭlāl*; first, by relying on outside observations of sudden mental lapses, for example prolonged absent-mindedness, and second, by exploring self-reflective accounts produced inside the ghostly ruins, adopting, developing, and transferring Jalal Toufic's notion of the “labyrinthine temporality” by ascribing it to the experience in those *aṭlāl*.

Chapter 4 is titled “The Disappeared Survivors in Postwar Beirut: Intergenerational Trauma and Inaccessible Memories in *al-I'tirāfāt*.” It provides a close reading of Jaber's other novel *al-I'tirāfāt* (2008), focusing on a particular experience of the war-disappeared who survived their disappearances yet remained missing in postwar Lebanon. The analysis generally aims to explore the possibilities of retrieving, or writing, such an invisible history through the traumatic repercussions transmitted from their inaccessible past experiences. In the absence of a war archive, and being unable to remember their past, they become suspended between the fraudulence of their present identity—which is not theirs—and the inaccessibility of their past experiences—which are not quite theirs. Such an exploration will naturally take into account fiction's potential to allow access to imagined yet realistic scenarios of possible suppressed experiences.

In fact, of all available narratives that address the case of the war-disappeared in postwar Lebanon, Jaber's novel stands out as the only account narrated by the disappeared themselves, who have remained missing, assumed dead, after the civil war. While mainstream narratives about the disappeared focus either on the suffering of the parents or on the disappeared before their disappearance, Jaber's fiction allows Mārūn, who is still missing in postwar Lebanon, to testify to his personal experiences. The novel bears witness to an invisible world of an invisible generation of disappeared survivors that covertly constitutes part of postwar Lebanese society. It is a first-person confession shared by Mārūn in front of novelist-character Rabī' Jābir¹ after the year 2000. Mārūn was kidnapped at a very young age during the first two years of the civil war (1975–1976) and unknowingly grew up as a son in a new family. It is only when he is in college that he is told about his abduction and henceforth decided to share with Rabī' memories from his current life, hoping that the recollection process might help him evoke dormant, latent images from a life he was informed existed but could neither remember nor retrieve any of its details.

The chapter looks at Mārūn's experiences, past and present, and at his self-reflexive interventions as a narrator to explore a new form of intergenerational trauma transcending the conventional focus on the family unit. The analyses draw on the significant contribution Jaber's metafictional narrative can offer in this respect, in his complex attempt to recollect what could arguably be visible only through the act of its invisibility. Section 4.3 examines the traumatic repercussions in Mārūn's interaction with the rest of the family members who, for a long period, had to suppress the news about the abduction. The traces are evident in the family's incomprehensible decisions and emotional outbursts Mārūn had to cope with as a child upon his encounter with his parents, sisters, and brother (his kidnappers). The section particularly focuses on the role of his name and face, which carried problematic references to the initial crime, resulting in a seamless transmission of traumatic inaccessible memories. This section also explores the transmission of such repercussions in Mārūn's psychological suffering and disorientation following the disclosure of his abduction, when he became suspended between his fraudulent present history and his irretrievable past. The trauma of confronting this rupture

¹ To avoid confusion, and for an easier read, I will be referring to the novelist as Rabee Jaber and to his doppelgänger as Rabī' Jābir throughout the study.

between two irreconcilable histories of the same generation of disappeared survivors can be traced in the language deformities that Mārūn starts to suffer from. The chapter then focuses in section 4.4 on the contribution that figurative language and metafictional interruptions offer in the disappeareds' attempt to address their inaccessible experiences, navigating between the events and narrative process at work to project the inaccessible past in its withdrawal, making visible what language fails to verbalize and make known.

Unlike the previously discussed novels, *Taqrīr Meblis* and *al-I'tirāfāt*, where the disappeared testify to their personal traumatic experiences, a security guard strives to bear witness to the disappeareds' final trauma in front of Jaber's doppelgänger in *Berytus madīna taht al-ard*. His attempt, however, is repeatedly interrupted by his need to testify to his own suffering, while expecting his listener to bear second-hand witness to the whole tragedy. With this intersection of various perspectives participating in the production of the same traumatic event, guided by a self-reflexive narrative voice, Chapter 5 offers an exploration into the intricacies of sharing credible testimonies and bearing witness.

Under the title "The Art of Trauma Testimonies: The Credibility of Fictional Accounts in *Berytus madīna taht al-ard*," Chapter 5 provides a close reading of Jaber's *Berytus* (2005), focusing on the problematics of "speaking" about the traumatic event during mass annihilation. In brief, Berytus is the name of a Roman City in the year 64 BCE, an ancient Beirut whose ruins have lately been excavated then destroyed by real estate investment in 2018 and 2019 to build the headquarters of SGBL Bank. Reflective of the *laissez-faire* culture in postwar Lebanon, such barbaric practices against the ruins and the environment are highlighted by Jaber as being the source of mass contamination that bring the lives of the undead in the underground labyrinthine city of Berytus to an end.

The chapter reconsiders what it signifies for an account about a traumatic event to be credible, giving preference to the mitigation of the victim's pain over historical accuracy, and accordingly advances a type of "false testimony" that is needed, not only as an attempt to explore the event, but also as a means to control the form of relationship with that event. In contrast to mainstream literary analyses that present the contemporary Lebanese novel as an attempt to write and unveil the suppressed history of the war, this chapter explores the past through traumatic testimonies primarily concerned with the needs of the victims of trauma. I accordingly approach fiction as a key factor in such narratives,

as a new language capable of embracing the traumatic encounter that transcends the parameters of a coherent “reality.” I then proceed to draw on the important distinction between testifying, bearing witness, and bearing second-hand witness to the past. I demonstrate how literary narratives have the potential to address the difference between eye-witnessing and imagining the event, in the transference of past traumatic experiences, while drawing on the critical role of the listener as a co-producer of the testimony, to draft a literary model that transcends various challenges, often emerging during the narrative production, and that allows the producing of a credible form of bearing first and second-hand witness to past and present violence.

At the core of the reconstructed downtown Beirut, the suffering of many Lebanese continues as they vainly await news about their disappeared who persist as both dead and not-dead in Lebanese society, as the undead whose possible survival can only be addressed through fictional narratives. Rabee Jaber’s novels particularly allow for a critical discussion on the invisible traumatic history of those disappeared, first through the role of the ghostly *Aṭlāl* in postwar Beirut, then through the traumatic repercussions transmitted through inaccessible memories, and finally through a literary model that presents fiction as a credible source for writing such a history. By setting trauma theory in dialogue with the Lebanese, Arabic-speaking experience, this book contests existing notions and concepts in both trauma and literary studies while opening up new pathways in the exploration of post-conflict invisible histories.



CHAPTER 2

Trauma Theory, the Lebanese Civil War, and Lebanese Fiction

This chapter presents and reviews the relevant literature from trauma studies and the Lebanese Arabic-speaking context of the war and post-war experience in order to establish a parallel reading and hence a connection. I will first cover concepts and terminologies from Western scholarship that summarize the development of trauma studies as an interdisciplinary field of research that transcends psychology to occupy a paramount position in anthropology, art, and literature. This emphasis on the role of fiction in trauma theory becomes more evident after looking at the conditions that framed the forms of suffering during and after the Lebanese civil war. The chapter hence proceeds to provide historical background information that also clarifies the socio-political context of the war, explaining the absence of official war testimonies following the controversial war resolution. It also turns to discuss a selection of cultural productions by Lebanese novelists—who seem to have become possessed by the need to write about the war’s violence in simulated experiences—and Lebanese postwar conceptual artists—who, influenced by Western schools, developed more direct strategies, concepts, perspectives, and terminologies of remembering while referring to their personal experiences as war survivors. Within this dialogue between trauma theory and the Lebanese context, the chapter will especially elaborate Jaber’s highly self-reflective writing, drawing on his general perception of human suffering, and on three main trauma aspects that the analyses of the novels will later build upon: traumatic ruins, intergenerational trauma, and

trauma testimonies. In essence, it serves as a backdrop for the theoretical, historical, cultural, and literary material necessary for readers to better understand the arguments and analyses and, subsequently, appreciate the new explorations this book presents. It also allows them to evaluate the study's contribution with respect to the existing literature in trauma studies and the Lebanese postwar cultural scene.

2.1 TRAUMA THEORY: PSYCHOLOGY, ANTHROPOLOGY, LITERATURE

In *The Empire of Trauma* (2009), Didier Fassin and Richard Rechtman trace the early beginning of trauma studies to World War I, when it was still referred to as “shell shock” and ironically used to assess soldiers’ competency to rejoin the war. Back then, “the problem was with the patient, not with the war,”¹ yet the debate on whether the traumatized should be compensated was present. Trauma studies continued to develop and shift until it became concerned with the victim’s pain, rather than the soldier’s state, and in producing a moral culture capable of preventing or reducing war crimes. Despite addressing various forms of disasters, its development has remained primarily associated with war violence; and the experience of concentration camps during World War II “became the favored model for explaining what can happen to human beings in extreme conditions.”² Trauma studies has since entered various spheres of exploration and expression, both scientific and fictional. This book exploits trauma literary theory primarily developed in the 1990s by the likes of Dori Laub and Cathy Caruth, yet its scope transcends the mere perception of the text as an experience or a representation of trauma’s ineffability. It instead attends to the social and political implications of trauma, the specificity of both the experiential and narrative contexts, and the complex, productive relationship between language and experience. While choosing not to get tangled in the debate over artistic and literary representations of trauma, this section furnishes a succinct account of the main body of trauma literature.

In her highly referenced book *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (1995), Cathy Caruth brings literature into the debate on trauma,

¹ Fassin and Rechtman (2009), 62.

² *Ibid.*, 72.

while referring to a model previously developed by psychiatrists following World War II. In her introduction, she explains that when a person undergoes a violent experience, the intensity of that experience might exceed their ability to symbolize and conceptualize the event, “whose force is marked by its lack of registration.”³ The survivor is overwhelmed by the immediacy of the harsh encounter, and their direct experience of the event is numbed. Yet what has been suppressed is never abolished, but may recur at some point in the future, in the form of affective repercussions and distorted images that “belatedly” haunt and possess the person. Since the event could not be “assimilated or experienced fully at the time,”⁴ the survivor is unable to develop a comprehensible relationship with the re-emerging past, which instead assumes the form of a ghost or a non-event and persists to repeatedly haunt the now traumatized victim. Caruth describes this reappearance of the event at the post-traumatic phase as “a symptom of history,” in the sense that the traumatized individuals “carry impossible history within them.”⁵ It is a history they can neither bear witness nor testify to, except through the experience of failure that accompanies every attempt to accommodate it.

Accordingly, Caruth introduces fiction as a productive means to examine trauma in the spatio-temporal structure of its performance. In fictional narratives, elements of textuality (e.g. stylistic devices) and literary imagination contribute to trauma discourse through *performing trauma*, and through allowing for *critical reflections* with the distinctive space and time the literary act and literary world can provide. This Caruthian correspondence between fiction and trauma has been extensively praised and adopted by a significant number of literary critics. Anne Whitehead maintains that “novelists have frequently found that the impact of trauma can only adequately be represented by mimicking its forms and symptoms, so that temporality and chronology collapse, and narratives are characterized by repetition and indirection.”⁶ Many trauma literary analysts have hence alleged that stylistic devices as well as fragmentation, gaps, incoherence, uncertainty, and repetition can aesthetically and textually reflect how it feels to be traumatized, particularly in first-person

³ Caruth (1995), 6.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁶ Whitehead (2004), 3.