

The “Unclaimed Experience”: Trauma and Crime Fiction

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Abstract

This paper examines the intersections between trauma and literature and crime fiction, more specifically. By looking at the representations of trauma in crime fiction, it is argued here that trauma in crime novels involves a multilayered and complex discourse that generates its own narrative, one that relies on techniques like fragmentation, repetition, puzzle-solving, deliberate vagueness, and obscurity. It is also proposed that the use of trauma as a lens to examine crime narratives is both valuable and problematic, as it brings forth the conflict and the tension in the trauma discourse regarding words and wounds; expression and silence; representation and unspeakability. This paper will highlight that exploring the meeting points between trauma and crime narratives can also function as a as a point of departure from the conventional readings of crime fiction and contemplates a reading of the crime novel as trauma fiction. By so doing, this paper stresses the configurations of trauma in crime fiction beyond the medical framework and addresses the aspects and techniques in which trauma is centrally positioned in crime narratives.

Keywords : crime fiction, Posttraumatic Stress Disorder, psychology, trauma, , trauma fiction

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Introduction

As “exemplary conceptual knot” trauma is situated at the heart of psychological, cultural, medical, and literary discourses (Luckhurst, 2013, p.14). Defining trauma involves an effort to incorporate the various and sometimes conflicting ideas and concepts that fall under the term. This usually ranges from posttraumatic stress disorder to individual, historical, national and cultural traumas as well as testimonials of survivors of traumatic events. Indeed, trauma is a concept used in different fields: psychiatry, psychology, cultural studies, philosophy, history, anthropology, and literature. This interdisciplinary and multilayered nature of trauma is tied to the fact that trauma is a universal experience that touches universal issues such as disasters, wars, hardships, crime, and violence. Trauma, however, is not merely synonymous with catastrophes or sheer violence, although they can be interrelated. It is important that the definition of trauma is broad and wide enough to comprehend the plethora of the conceptualizations and ideations that fall under it.¹

The field of trauma studies is concerned with representations of trauma in various media, thereby exploring, investigating, and interrogating the themes of memory, mourning, shock, pain, healing, violence, war, torture, genocide, and others. With the increasing significance of trauma in the medical field as well as cultural studies in recent years, trauma studies has occupied a more prominent position and is attracting more attention. On the one hand, there is a body of scholarship that includes numerous academic works addressing trauma from psychological and medical perspectives. On the other, a body of literary texts that have engaged the representations of trauma has also developed, which adds to the mounting interest in trauma studies. A genre such as crime fiction poses

This article aims to investigate trauma in relation to literature, particularly crime fiction. It aims to answer the following research questions: How do fictional portrayals of trauma in crime stories inform the genre of crime fiction as well as the field of psychological studies on the issue? And in what ways does each field contribute to the larger discourse of trauma, and what are the meeting points between the two? These questions point to the intersections between trauma and literature, especially crime fiction. More importantly, however, these questions situate trauma within a larger discourse that transcends beyond the disciplinary limits of its medical framework to extend to literary representations, a connection this article aims to examine.

It is argued here that trauma fiction is both a useful and problematic term, one that brings about the conflict and the tension among several concepts under trauma studies and crime fiction in relation to the representation, visibility, and mystique of trauma. This article uses the intersections between trauma and crime fiction as a point of departure from the conventional discourse on trauma to draw attention to the plural and conflicting uses of the term trauma, and by so doing, it stresses the meanings and configurations of trauma beyond its medical understanding which is not only limiting but also inadequate. Moreover, this article addresses how crime fiction uses trauma as more than a theme, as well as the ways that trauma shapes the characterization and plot in crime narratives, its portrayal in narrative forms, and all the nuances of the textual representations of the post traumatic experience in crime narratives.

Definitions and Discourse on Trauma

The topics and themes under trauma are wide-ranging, yet trauma itself is usually born out of a historical moment or event. Trauma is a result, a consequence, an outcome, and it does not occur in vacuum. Briere and Scott state that trauma usually refers to “both to negative events that produce distress and to the distress itself” but technically it denotes the event not the reaction (2006, p.3). The American Psychiatric Association (2000) defines trauma as a

direct personal experience of an event that involves actual or threatened death or serious injury, or other threat to one’s physical integrity; or witnessing an event that involves death, injury, or a threat to the physical integrity of another person ... (Criterion A1). The person’s response to the event must involve intense fear, helplessness, or horror ... (Criterion A2). (p.463)

Thus, whether trauma concerns individuals or groups, communities or nations, there is an event and/or an experience (a crime or a natural disaster, for example) that pinpoints the trigger and writes the history of trauma.² Historically, World War Two with the calamities it involved is a significant marker in trauma studies. The war changed the face of Europe and the world more generally, and at the same time it restructured the hierarchies and priorities of individuals and communities. World War Two opened the door wide open for new conversations about the meanings of violence, peace, pain, memory and trauma. Another marker is the Vietnam War which is crucial to defining trauma particularly regarding the medical framework of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). With soldiers coming back from the war suffering from symptoms and struggling to cope with life after experiencing the horrible realities of the war, there was a need for a new terminology, a new theorization to capture the commonalities among the suffering soldiers; hence PTSD came into existence.

Cathy Caruth, one of the prominent trauma scholars, maintains that trauma studies was born out of the fragmented discourses after the Vietnam War. The keyword here is “fragmented,” as it points to how the medical and sociological discussions have failed to produce a cohesive or unified discourse on trauma. Even when trauma was codified as PTSD by the American Psychiatric Association in 1980, it has not brought us closer to a unified or complete grasp of trauma. This codification, however, signifies the increasingly political connotations around trauma especially after the second half of the Twentieth Century and its connectedness to medical institutions. However, on an individual level, trauma is described as a “foreign body” – “an inoperable bullet” in the person’s psyche (Hartman, 2003, p.257). Because of the sudden and difficult nature of traumatic events, the person does not have time to prepare for it and the human defenses are not in place. This is when the traumatic experience “lodges in the person” without having been “fully passed into consciousness” (Hartman, 2003, p.257). The abrupt, overwhelming, and usually out-of-the-ordinary nature of the traumatic experience intensifies and materializes the difficulties in processing and telling the story of trauma.

Thus, trauma is complex and its story is experienced, lived, and told differently by different people. It is often non-linear and disjointed. Leys and Goldman (2010), commenting on the history of trauma, point out what they call “structural repetitions” of the theories about trauma according to which there is a “tendency for certain theoretical and indeed empirical difficulties and tensions

to surface again and again at different historical moments or cruxes” (p.657), and this results in the failure of linear approach to trauma. Indeed, trauma is a multilayered discourse that creates its narrative in both content and form. That is, trauma narrative creates itself and its own parameters divorced from traditional conventions. The depth, intensity, and the weight of the traumatic experience, usually brought about by an overpowering event, dictate the parameters of the trauma narrative that include, for example, silence, disruptions, gaps and non-linear chronology, as the next sections will illustrate.

The scholarship on trauma is extensive and there are prominent publications that shaped trauma theory and trauma studies. Sigmund Freud stands as one of the early theorists and a key thinker of trauma theory. To Freud (1916), trauma occurs when the shield the individual surrounds himself/herself with is penetrated, and it is “an experience which within a short period of time presents the mind with an increase of stimulus too powerful to be dealt with or worked off in the normal way”, and this results in “permanent disturbances of the manner in which the energy operates” (p.275).³ It is also noteworthy to add that the study of trauma began with Freud's study of hysteria. In *Studies in Hysteria* (1955), Freud theorized that an unexpected and overwhelming event can return in the form of somatic symptoms, even though it is forgotten. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud developed his trauma theory which originated in his work with soldiers from World War One who came back from the war with symptoms. However, there is an ambivalence in the attitude towards trauma that started with Freudian theories. As Berger (1997) suggests, this “Freudian ambivalence toward the [traumatic] event (an ambivalence, though based on different premises, seen also in poststructuralist theory)” is crucial to the scholarship work on trauma. Critics of trauma address the effects, consequences and representations of traumatic events and how these events are significant to “interpreting personal and social histories” (p. 571).

More recently, there have been seminal works of significance in the field of trauma studies. Examples include Dominick LaCapra (2001) and Ruth Leys (2000). Also, Cathy Caruth influential books (1995) and (1996), Kali Tal (1996), and Geoffrey Hartman (1995) and (2003) have been important in theorizing trauma especially in relation to history, literature, literary theory and philosophy. These works address the myriad aspects of trauma and attempt at explaining and analyzing the complex trauma experience and its representations and ramifications.⁴

In psychology and medicine, trauma has also been widely discussed. There is a massive body of medical literature on trauma not only by the American Psychiatric Association but also Judith Lewis Herman (1992), and Bessel A. van der Kolk (2015) are only a few examples. While it can be argued that the study of trauma originated in medicine and particularly psychiatry, currently there are many theories, conceptualizations and critiques of the medical understanding trauma, which speaks to the overall discourse on trauma, as the following section will clarify.

Trauma through Clinical Lens

The tendency to medicalize trauma has a long history. Psychiatry has woven a trauma narrative that is still influential today with trauma being treated as a medical problem that needs professional intervention and its clinical treatment has become part and parcel of the overall discourse on trauma. The medical narrative of trauma, often written by medical professionals, has been constructed through a process of diagnosis that mostly equates trauma with the pathological

symptoms of PTSD. Hence, these processes of pathologization, diagnosis and labeling attempt to render a rather cohesive and fixed account of the trauma narrative, but might also lead to the dismissal of the victim’s account as a witness to the war, crime or any other significant event that triggered the trauma. This transforms the trauma account into a set of symptoms examined and explored through medical lens and reduces the resulting trauma narrative from that of a survivor to that of a victim, from a testimonial of a witness to a diagnosis of a patient.

With the main terminology associated with posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), trauma has not only become identical with illness but there is also labeling and stigma attached to the pathology of trauma. That does not mean that PTSD is not completely unnecessary or uncalled for. Sometimes PTSD is a fitting diagnosis that requires treatment. But the overall discourse on trauma has been affected and colored by the medical approach, hence some aspects of the resilience, healing and survival are disregarded or neglected.⁵ For example, Toremans (2003) critiques the PTSD label suggesting that it generated “a veritable epistemological crisis” by defying the chasms between fields concerned with trauma and pushing our understanding about the concept (p.334). Toremans cites Cathy Caruth's brave claim that regardless of the fact that the PTSD label facilitates the classification and codification of symptoms, and the “boundaries of our modes of understanding” are disrupted. Trauma becomes “all-inclusive” and it also pushes us to the very edge of understanding to the extent that “if psychoanalysis, psychiatry, sociology, and even literature are beginning to hear each other anew in the study of trauma, it is because they are listening through the radical disruption and gaps of traumatic experience” (Caruth, 1995, p.4).

It is worth mentioning that PTSD is “a politically motivated diagnosis that was generated through the legal system” (Rogers, 2004, p.32). In the words of Young (1997), trauma is “glued together” by discursive “practices, technologies, and narratives with which it is diagnosed, studied, treated, and represented” (p.5). As mentioned earlier, PTSD is a term that came out with the Vietnam War to summarize, or perhaps minimize the impact and the influence of the war on veterans as voiced by anti-war protesters, thus focusing on the medicalization of trauma instead of the political and legal aspects relating to the controversial war.⁶ Therefore, the challenge that PTSD poses is that it standardizes the response to trauma and trauma itself as a uniform and linear experience. It also pathologizes human response to overpowering events, hence taking away creditability from the witnesses who go through trauma and limiting them into the role of powerless “ill” victims. There are paradoxes within the trauma narrative itself as an experience and a human response to it that complicate a clear-cut PTSD narrative. One of the main aspects of the trauma paradox is the double-sided need to both tell and resist telling the story of the trauma which fiction materializes in innovative ways. Hartman (1995) argues that there are two contradictory elements in the body of the knowledge of trauma:

One is the traumatic event, registered rather than experienced. It seems to have bypassed perception and consciousness, and falls directly into the psyche. The other is a kind of memory of the event, in the form of a perpetual troping of it by the bypassed or severely split (dissociated) psyche. (p. 537)⁷

Indeed, there is an emphasis on trauma as hard to perceive, comprehend and remember in the critical literature on trauma. It is so abrupt and sudden that the person who goes through it does

not experience it fully. There is “narrative/anti-narrative tension at the core of trauma” (Luckhurst, 2013, p.80), and through storytelling trauma becomes more accessible and yet more enigmatic. As Caruth (1995) states, “To be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or event” (p.4). The fact that trauma is hard to process makes it indescribable which in turn makes the trauma narrative a crucial component in processing the trauma. Reenactment also is an essential, and at the same time precarious part of experiencing and processing the trauma, it is as if this “possession” to use Caruth's term, is the structure for re-living, re-experiencing and “performing” the trauma in and through various mediums.

Therefore, one of the significant aspects that stands out in the study of trauma is the challenge in telling the story of trauma away or beyond the PTSD account, that is, the attempt to express and process the trauma through narrative separately from the pathology attached to it. Trauma narrative, which is concerned with remembering, processing, and (re)experiencing traumatic events, is also tied to resisting these processes. However, telling the story of trauma within the medical framework is not only confining but it is also restricted within formulaic PTSD narratives. The symptoms and manifestations of the traumatic experience compose the trauma story and impose their own parameters and limitations to anything beyond this clinical presentation. This pathologization of trauma is key to understanding the representations of trauma particularly in literature, and it will be shown in the following section that trauma in crime fiction offers space and opportunities to render unique representations and readings.

Trauma in Literature and Crime Fiction

The connection between literature and trauma is a significant one and has its roots extending far back to the oral beginnings of literature in epic poems such as Homer's *The Odyssey*. It is a story about a ten-year struggle of Odysseus, the hero, to return home after the Trojan War, it is also a story of hardships and survival. Many works of literature address these themes in different ways. Authors like Toni Morrison wrote about the impact of slavery and abuse in *Beloved* (1987), Jonathan Safran Foer addressed the 9/11 trauma in the US in his fiction, for example, in his 2005 novel *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*. Patrick McGrath narrated experiences of posttraumatic stress disorder from the perspective of a psychiatrist in his 2008 novel *Trauma*, while Laurie Halse Anderson wrote about rape and sexual assault in his 1999 novel *Speak*, and Anne Michaels tells the story of Holocaust survivors in 1996 book *Fugitive Pieces*, to name only several examples.

The term “trauma literature” refers to a body of works of literature concerned with trauma as its main topic. The term “trauma fiction” which was suggested by Whitehead who in her book *Trauma Fiction* stresses that trauma fiction involves a paradox, the traumatic experience deeply affects the person yet it resists representation. However, to Whitehead (2004), the scholarship on trauma offers possibilities for writers to understand and represent the traumatic experience (p.3). Tal (1996), a critic in cultural studies, defines trauma literature as “writings of trauma survivors” with reference to those whose identities are redefined by the traumatic event (p.17). On the other hand, Balaev (2008) uses the term “trauma novel” which, to him, “conveys profound loss or intense fear on individual or collective levels” (p.150). Balaev (2012), contesting the dominant Freudian views on trauma, proposes that literature itself offers ways beyond one singular view, hence the

“manifold imagery of trauma in literature requires a theoretical pluralism that draws upon various models of trauma and memory” (p. xiii).

Literature in general and trauma literature in particular address human violence, loss, grief and pain and the responses to these experiences and catastrophes. It also exposes the feelings of vulnerability and strength; suffering and resilience, while offering unique angles to tackle these issues. Trauma fiction, with the way it thematizes and fictionalizes traumatic experiences, also provides methods of exploring these experiences and extreme human suffering and pain that usually defy understanding. It also provides tools to excavate certain aspects of trauma that are not easily portrayed through other channels. These tools go beyond the literal and physical aspects of trauma to uncover the emotional, cultural and historical features of traumatic experiences that are not clearly visible.

With crime as its core component, crime fiction allows for an array of portrayals of traumatic experiences to the readers. Despite the fact that crime fiction deals with a multitude of challenging topics like violence, evil, amorality, it is ultimately concerned with the moral order in societies (Spring & King, 2012). Crime fiction is widely considered as a conservative genre that relies on law and order. A number of critics emphasize that the function of crime fiction as a genre is concerned with the maintenance of the status quo. Part of crime fiction's appeal for readership is the predictable ways where order is restored at the end of stories when criminals are punished and justice is fulfilled. As Lucas (2004) states, “as readers we can trust in the extremes of exposure to trauma and anxiety because we know they will carry us safely through to resolution” (p.210). Trauma in crime fiction stands as one of the key features in narratives that tell of a violent world full of mayhem and uncertainty. However, trauma is not only part of this criminal world depicted but it also allows to read the characters' psychology and the dynamics of victimhood, guilt and violence. Indeed, trauma offers ways to read and interpret crime narratives and the characters' history, development, and psychology.

Crime fiction deals with mysteries and the detective's efforts to solve crimes, but it is also concerned with closure and making peace with traumatic experiences. As such crime fiction narratives serve as a space to reconsider and reexamine violence and the psychological, social, and legal dimensions of the traumatic events in the violent world of crime fiction. This trend started from the beginnings of crime fiction. For example, Arthur Conan Doyle *The Hound of the Baskervilles* involve trauma as a key component in the plot. More clearly, trauma is part of American hardboiled crime fiction that came after World War One and extended after World War Two. In the “mean streets” of the “tough guy” genre, violence is the force that drive the narratives and characterization. Unlike its British counterpart, hardboiled crime narratives tell stories of the underworld, where corruption and darkness are the cornerstones in the stories with a detective who is mortally compromised and struggling to cope with a violent world. Moreover, the genre relies on a style that is often described as unsentimental with authentic characters and economy in expression. With early writers such as Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler, hardboiled crime fiction establishes the centrality of the detective who suffers from the trauma of encountering violence and death on daily basis. It is not merely about solving the murder, rather the stories are also about the darkness that runs deep into the lives of people, especially after World War Two.

Indeed, in post-war crime fiction it became even more evident that trauma and crime are interconnected. Crime fiction in the post-war era went further in exploring the effects and the consequences that World War Two left on people. Post-war crime fiction attempts to conceptualize the violence, death, and mayhem that the war brought about. It also provided a safe place to explore the difficult traumatic experiences that are not easy to articulate and share. For example, Micky Spillane crime fiction portrays the paranoia and the anxieties that characterize the post-war crime narratives. He brought the anxieties of the Cold War of McCarthyism to a whole new level. Spillane's detective, Mike Hammer, who often functions beyond the law personifies the vision of a worldview that shows the trauma of the post-war years. As Cawelti (1976) explains, Spillane's

characters and situations not only strain credulity to its limits; they frequently turn the stomach as well. Spillane's narrative technique is so “hardhitting,” (...) that it has the expressiveness of a blackjack (...) His idea of a theme consists of a primitive right-wing diatribe against some of the central principles of American democracy and English law. (p.9)

This violence in crime narratives is part and parcel of the trauma of the post war era, and in a way crime fiction was a vehicle to deal with this trauma. The ending of crime novels often brings comfort to readers with the formulaic narratives as means for readers to cope and adjust to traumatic action these narratives often involve. Lucas (2004) explains what she describes as the “paradox of free fall and security” of the conclusion of Patricia Cornwell's crime fiction. She contends that with key characters that center on “both the irruption of violence (...) and the application of principles of rationality and explication to the puzzle posed by that violence” Cornwell crime fiction “exposes the underbelly and strives to recontain, to recover it” and ultimately brings a resolution for readers (p. 210).

Hence the relation between crime fiction and trauma manifests itself through many facets; crime fiction often tells the stories of traumatic events and traumatic experiences, yet it keeps some unknown, and mysterious aspects of trauma that resist telling. Crime fiction also becomes a means for reenactment, and the narrative is a vehicle for processing and addressing the effects and consequences of the traumatic experience. However, there remains the tension between writing (expression) and silence (mystery) as far as the representations of trauma in fiction are concerned. Caruth (1995) questions the narration of trauma in itself, which, in her account, might not only attempt to tell the incomprehensible story of trauma but it might also distort the “truth” and dilute its powerful effect (p.153).⁸ According to this view, trauma demands a special mode and means of representation that textually performs trauma and its “incomprehensibility” through, for instance, gaps, silences, the repeated breakdown of language, and the collapse of understanding (see Caruth, 1995, p.153-55). Through the very writing process a crime story, a relation or connection is established between words and ideas, and simultaneously between words and silence. There is a double-edged pull between language (expression) and silence and this complexity signifies the difficulty of writing trauma narratives, as both form and content communicate this tension between expression and silence, and the narrative occupies this odd position oscillating between the two. It is in the domain between “narrative *possibility*” and “*impossibility*” (Luckhurst, 2013, p. 83) where trauma in crime fiction is situated. The focus of trauma study in crime fiction can also be viewed through what Hartman (1995) describes as “words

that wound, and presumably can be healed, if at all, by further words” (p.259). Here, there is emphasis on “expressiveness” and the unloading and relief associated with expressing and talking about painful traumatic events in crime stories that allow to tell difficult stories that often end with a resolution.⁹

Another angle on the intersection between crime fiction and trauma is that the former functions as a document, a testament to the traumatic experiences. That is, crime narratives can be a catalyst or a mouthpiece for standing witness to difficult, painful and sometimes extreme human experiences. As stated above there is a paradox that is often attached to trauma: trauma texts especially in crime fiction seek to express and tell the very story that resists telling and resists remembering. It is the paradox of the possibility/impossibility of the unspeakability of trauma. While the medical narrative of trauma cites avoidance, denial and numbing as part of the symptomatic pathology of trauma, crime fiction can be seen to creatively expand the horizons of telling the trauma story. Hence with writing trauma within crime narratives comes the challenge of writing about an experience that is not only difficult to speak about but also connected to mystery and puzzle to be solved. Crime fiction is concerned with the denial and avoidance that are part of the trauma narrative to work with the gaps and the silence and find imaginative outlets for otherwise unspeakable unrepresentable experiences.¹⁰

Crime narratives can be said to be utilized to address difficult issues around trauma as well as healing as “a means of working through trauma” (Rogers , 2004, p.1). LaCapra (2001) elaborates on the concept of working through trauma, “[a]cknowledging and affirming, or working through, absence as absence requires the recognition of both the dubious nature of ultimate solutions and the necessary anxiety that cannot be eliminated from the self or projected onto others” (p.58). However, the challenge is to maintain the integrity of the traumatic event or experience. The general pattern that trauma in crime fiction follows is portraying characters suffering from traumatic experience, then there is a navigation of how the trauma shapes the plot and produces a story that revolves around the resolution or closure of the mystery at the heart of the narrative. This pattern also offers opportunity for readers to work through trauma, and to provide a space for processing and navigating traumatic experiences.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the significance of trauma in literature and crime fiction in particular transcends the literary arena to occupy and expand psychological and cultural spaces. Trauma in crime fiction can be said to not only problematize the pathologization of trauma but also challenge the basis on which the clinical framework of trauma stands. It uncovers creative ways to narrate the trauma story and uses narrative forms and techniques to destabilize the linearity and fixity of the medical narrative of trauma. Hence while narrating trauma is not an easy task due to the complex nature of trauma that requires magnitude and depth in the process of writing, trauma in crime narratives is also a means for resolution at the end of narratives. Not only is closure through words unconventional but it also subverts the recovery and treatment models that clinical practices rely on. There is a healing power that words (fiction) have; stories verbalize the trauma and the pain of the difficult traumatic experience and without this verbalization.

What makes trauma elusive, inaccessible and not easy to express or be told and narrated is the structure of trauma; it is multilayered, non-linear and intentionally disruptive. These characteristics loosely define and outline the traumatic experience and the entire discourse on trauma. As Tal (1996) explains: “[a]ccurate representation of trauma can never be achieved without recreating the event since, by its very definition, trauma lies beyond the bounds of ‘normal’ conception” (p.15). There is a paradoxical relation between trauma and narrative in crime fiction where the narrative is important for telling the story and working through trauma, but at the same time it can distort or give a false account of the trauma. This paradoxical relation offers many possibilities and prospects for the connectedness between crime and trauma, as it invites new and innovative ways to read trauma in crime texts and provides effective yet enigmatic vehicle for interpretations of the representations of trauma.

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Notes

¹James Berger suggests that trauma as identical with disaster offers a method of interpretation. Trauma, as a useful tool to examine history, “posits that the effects of an event may be dispersed and manifested in many forms not obviously associated with the event” (1997, p.572).

²For the differences between individual, collective and cultural traumas, see Eyerman (2013).

³For more on the relation between trauma and Freudian psychoanalysis, see Blum (2002).

⁴For an overview of the literature on trauma from literary, philosophical, legal and perspectives, see Hartman's excellent bibliographical note in his essay entitled "On Traumatic Knowledge and Literary Studies" (1995).

⁵PTSD has three main groups of symptoms that are recognizable by specialists in the medical profession. The first is concerned with re-experiencing the traumatic event in the form of flashbacks and/or nightmares. The second focuses on emotions or lack of (numbing and blunted emotions associated with trauma), and the third is different symptoms that include sleep problems, cognitive problems, guilt, etc. It is noticed that the symptoms share deficits in integrating the traumatic event through memory and identity; that is, the person either experiences intrusive thoughts or and/or avoidance. For more on posttraumatic stress disorder see van der Kolk (1987), van der Kolk, McFarlane and Weisæth (1996), and Rothschild (2003).

⁶For a full account on the history and development of PTSD, see McNally (2003).

⁷Memory plays an important role in trauma as it depends on how the story of trauma is remembered and told. It is a way for witnessing, verbalizing, and addressing the traumatic past. For more on trauma and memory see, King (2000), Antze and Lambek (1996), and Caruth (1995).

⁸For Caruth (1995), it is crucial that cultural representations preserve the full force of trauma, especially its incomprehensibility: “The danger of speech, of integration into the narration of memory, may lie not in what it cannot understand, but in that it understands too much” (p.154). Caruth's (1996) work is mainly concerned with the relation between trauma and language, and how language can/cannot express trauma.

⁹LaCapra (2001) elaborates on the concept of "working through trauma." It refers to coming to terms with the traumatic experience and dealing with its effects. Working through trauma does not only affect the individual but also on cultural and political levels. LaCapra states that the “processes of working through that are not simply therapeutic for the individual but also have political and ethical implications” (p.152).

¹⁰In literature, trauma has also been part of literary scholarship especially after the post-structuralist theories changed the face of literary theory in the second half of the twentieth century. Radstone (2001) argues that trauma theory owes

much to psychoanalysis and post-structuralism, especially theories by Caruth (1995; 1996) and Felman & Laub (1992).

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