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**“But we have to learn to live again”:
Moving Beyond Psychological Trauma in *The
Beekeeper of Aleppo* by Matthew Spangler and Nesrin
Alrefaai**

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Abstract:

The intersection of literature and trauma has gained significant attention, notably following the Holocaust, with Cathy Caruth's seminal work, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (1996) serving as a pivotal milestone. The 20th century witnessed a surge in critical literature examining trauma's effects and portrayal in literary works, particularly during the 1990s, and the 21st century. This paper explores the impact of traumatic memories on the central characters in Matthew Spangler and Nesrin Alrefaai's play, *The Beekeeper of Aleppo* (2023), an adaptation of Christy Lefteri's novel. The play portrays loss, grief, spiritual disintegration, vulnerability, and gradual recovery, offering a compelling portrayal of the characters' struggles with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Michelle Balaev's Pluralistic Model of Trauma is also explored in this paper to take into account external influences, such as historical periods, cultural contexts, and geographical settings, which collectively shape the interpretation and significance of traumatic experiences in literature. *Beekeeper* masterfully conveys the theme of traumatic loss through adept utilization of Balaev's techniques and other literary devices, underscoring the significance of employing diverse literary tools to effectively convey the central theme of traumatic loss within the play.

Keywords:

traumatic experiences- Balaev- *Beekeeper of Aleppo*- pluralistic model of trauma- Freud

"There are wounds that never show on the body that are deeper and more hurtful than anything that bleeds".

(Laurell Hamilton: *Mistral's Kiss*)

Introducing Trauma Theory: Freud and Balaev

As a concept, the word 'trauma' lacks a fixed definition and it has sparked various interpretations among critics. Some define it as a psychological and emotional response to distressing experiences (Rosen 1), or "an event in the subject's life defined by its intensity, by the subject's incapacity to respond adequately to it, and by the upheaval and long-lasting effects that it brings about in the psychical organization"(Laplanche and Pontalis 37), others perceive it as an overwhelming catastrophe beyond full comprehension by the individual (Goarzin 1). Yet, another definition characterizes trauma as "any disturbing experience that results in significant fear, helplessness, dissociation, confusion, or other disruptive feelings intense enough to have a long-lasting negative effect on a person's attitudes, behaviors, and other aspects of functioning" (VandeBons 1104). From these multifaceted definitions, we can discern trauma as a term encompassing psychological and behavioral symptoms that afflict individuals who have undergone traumatic events; trauma theory serves as a tool for illuminating how literature and historical texts depict the repercussions of such events by analyzing expressions of grief and loss.

As a theoretical framework, trauma studies focus on comprehending how traumatic occurrences are portrayed in diverse literary texts. This aspect of trauma theory began to gain scholarly attention following the publication of Cathy Caruth's groundbreaking works "which opened up the humanities to trauma" (Radstone 9). During the same era, Kali Tal published *Worlds of Hurt: Reading the Literatures of Trauma* (2020), and subsequent years witnessed a proliferation of related publications. In 2018, for instance, Roger Kurtz authored *Trauma and Literature*, shedding light on the enduring significance of trauma

within literary studies, that continues to captivate the academic community. The surge in interest in recent decades surrounding trauma theory used in literary criticism can be attributed to several compelling reasons. For one, trauma theory offers a critical approach that accommodates innovative methods of literary analysis applicable to diverse cultures and nations. This framework has substantially enriched the field of literature by enabling researchers to scrutinize various representations of trauma in contemporary literary works. Such analyses serve as a potent means of illustrating the profound impact of suffering both on individuals and society as a whole. Mohd

Nazri argues:

The influence of trauma theory in literary criticism might be connected with the varying rhetorical, semiotic, societal, and emotional implications of trauma in literature. Modern critics have established new semiotic approaches to trauma on the aforementioned aspects. This development in trauma theory has formed a series of critical procedures that places particular emphasis on the aspect of sociocultural contexts of traumatic experience (3).

It is noteworthy that the foundational concepts of trauma originated and were established by Freudian psychoanalysis during the early 20th century. In fact, while Sigmund Freud was not the first to address trauma in his writings, his theory resonated far more significantly than the formulations of his predecessors. Freud's most remarkable contribution to trauma studies came through his work, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), where he grappled with evidence, drawn from the Great War, that soldiers continued to be haunted by the atrocities they experienced in their waking lives that were, manifested in their dreams. This observation astounded Freud because it contradicted his famous theory articulated in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1899), which posited that every dream served to fulfill an unconscious wish, albeit often in a disguised form. The phenomenon of traumatic dreams prompted Freud to revise his theory and identify a masochistic aspect of the ego. To account for the recurrence of trauma, Freud introduced the term "repetition compulsion".

As a fundamental premise, Freud posited that various human neuroses were shaped by the repression of thoughts that for various reasons the conscious mind could not admit. Psychic material, he argued, was 'repressed' into the unconscious, seeping out in ways that the conscious mind, while registering it as conscious thought, could not recognize as the repressed material it truly was. For instance, in dreams, the conscious mind lowers its guard, allowing unconscious material to enter the dream space, albeit in a condensed and displaced form that eludes clear understanding. Analysts might attempt to infer the 'latent reality'—the actual repressed issue—from the dream. Repetition compulsion, as outlined in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, shares similarities with the earlier concept of the return of the repressed. However, in repetition compulsion, there is a reenactment of previously repressed, typically traumatic material. Unlike the subtle disguises found in ordinary dreams, traumatic nightmares, a prime example of repetition compulsion, bring the mind almost immediately back to the original traumatic experience. Individuals experiencing repetition compulsion are compelled to relive the initial trauma, often with less disguise.

Freud envisioned this mental process as an attempt to achieve retrospective mastery over a situation in which a person had initially experienced only helplessness. Repetition compulsion, could be therefore seen as the mind's way of integrating trauma into conscious memory, preventing it from haunting the present with the ghost of an inescapable past. Contemporary theorists, however, challenge the idea of mastery, asserting that we are beings predisposed to repetition, trapped in a destructive inability to move on from trauma. Freud's reconceptualization highlights the notion that despite seeking pleasure, the mind, may also be compelled to sustain our most painful experiences or the darkest aspects of ourselves. He even proposed that a primitive, self-destructive element (the death-drive) precedes the desire for pleasure.

Freud's contribution to trauma theory extends to the concept of latency, referring to the "incubation period" between a traumatic event and the onset of symptoms. For Freud, Trauma is not a singular event but rather a complex interplay between an original event, possibly not perceived as traumatic at the time, and a later trigger that 'returns' it from a non-conscious state, creating the trauma. He termed such a gap in time a latency period, a concept he used in his final major work, *Moses and Monotheism* (1939).

Balaev's thorough exploration of trauma representation in literary discourse unveils profound insights into the interplay of narrative elements, in which the focus on the traumatized protagonist challenges established models of trauma portrayal. Contrary to the prevailing view of a fractured identity, trauma induces a profound recalibration of the self, often shaped by societal dynamics, and such a symbiotic interaction between the individual and the communal realm offers significant commentary on the broader sociocultural fabric. The discourse gains depth through the evocative use of landscapes as potent symbolic constructs, through which authors adeptly employ landscapes to evoke emotive responses, visually manifesting internal tumult and subsequent metamorphosis caused by trauma. Temporal fractures and deliberately crafted silences, viewed through neural-hormonal perspectives, emerge as strategic devices that enhance reader involvement, encouraging reflective interludes for interpreting unarticulated experiences, and the narrative achieves heightened profundity and resonance.

Balaev's scholarly inquiry in advocating for a multi-layered approach to the discourse of trauma that interweaves individual and collective narratives beyond binary paradigms, resists monolithic interpretation. Through the lens of landscapes, temporal discontinuities, and deliberate articulation of the unsaid, the authors weave a profound tapestry of the experiential dimensions of trauma. This scholarly excursion attests to literature's intrinsic potency, serving not only as a medium for articulating anguish and turmoil but also for expressing indomitable spirit and redefinition in the face of adversity.

The pluralistic trauma model challenges the static preservation of traumatic experiences and the belief in their "unspeakable and unrepresentable nature", thereby advocating for the recognition of various types of traumas, coping strategies, and cultural influences. In this context, memory, the primary tool for coping, is considered fluid and adaptable. On the other hand, Caruth contends that "traumatic memory is chaotic, making it difficult for the traumatized individual to recount the experience coherently" (*Explorations* 3). A traumatic experience resists integration into the psyche; it is either silenced or overshadowed by another memory, allowing the traumatized subject to function. Due to its belatedness and the resulting disruption, trauma is challenging to remember, let alone integrate into a narrative to aid in comprehending its role. Since the psyche resists bringing buried pain and shock to the surface, constructing a coherent narrative that accommodates the traumatic experience requires a process of working through.

In the *Traumatic Studies* model, while trauma is conceptualized as an event that alters perception and identity, in the wake of such disturbance new knowledge may be formed about the self and the external world. The reorientation of consciousness caused by traumatic events may include an ambiguous referentiality as well as determinate meaning. Allowing for trauma's variability in terms of its causes, effects, and representative potential demonstrates the diverse values accorded to a traumatic event and its remembrance (Balaev, *Traumatic* 366). Balaev's perspective on trauma theory seeks to expand the possibilities for addressing the narrativization and interpretative framework of trauma, moving beyond the original Freudian and Caruthian models.

Balaev's perspective shifts from focusing solely on the silences and rhetorical patterns of the unspeakable to embrace a more fluid concept of trauma that is continually shaped by culture, society, and personal experiences. Balaev suggests that trauma need not be seen

only as a rupture in an individual's psychic life but can also manifest as an empowering realization, sometimes expressed non-verbally through physical rituals. Her argument is rooted in the observation that while Caruth, for instance, argues that literary narratives indicate traumas through the unspeakability of the experience and its rhetorical equivalents, there are numerous examples in literature that require different interpretative contexts. Hence, this leads her to advocate for a pluralistic approach that acknowledges the manifold ways traumatic experiences are represented in narratives.

In her work *Trends in Literary Trauma Theory*, Balaev examines the role of traumatized protagonists in fiction. She defines a trauma novel as "a work of fiction that conveys profound loss or intense fear on individual or collective levels" (150). She points out that both Freud and Caruth view traumatic experiences as repetitious, timeless, unspeakable, and yet also literal, contagious, and preserved events (151). Trauma exhibits repetitious qualities because the initial event does not simply disappear; it becomes ingrained in the psyche and resurfaces through symptoms such as hysteria and nightmares, symptoms that simultaneously reveal and conceal the traumatic event, acting as a defense mechanism that prevents the mind from perceiving the event as a mere memory of the past. For trauma, the past is never confined solely to the past.

In *The Nature of Trauma in American Novels*, Balaev argues that trauma can be best understood by examining the cultural models of self and suffering depicted within the literary world of the novel (116). Pluralistic trauma theory places great importance on the role of the protagonist represented in works of fiction. Pluralistic literary theory seeks to illuminate how the traumatized protagonist perceives and undergoes a transformation of the self before and after the traumatic experience. Balaev contends that this process prompts the character to reevaluate and reorganize their sense of self in relation to this newfound understanding of reality (117). In essence, the analysis of trauma heavily relies on the perception and realization of the traumatic experience by the traumatized protagonist.

Apart from the pivotal role played by the traumatized protagonist, writers employ various techniques that include the depiction of landscapes, temporal gaps, silence, and narrative omissions. within trauma novels or play to effectively portray the experience of trauma. The portrayal of landscapes, whether tangible or imagined, serves as a means for communicating traumatic experiences within a trauma novel. E.V. Walter contends that "place" encompasses not only the physical setting of an experience but also serves as a framework that organizes memories, emotions, and significance; with place representing the juncture where personal and cultural realities converge (21). Examining the traumatic experiences of the protagonist in relation to their surroundings establishes a connection between the human and the nonhuman; highlighting how the traumatized individual is influenced by the environment and the specific location where the traumatic event unfolds within the realm of fictional literary works.

Angela Mergentime, in her article *Trauma in Contemporary Short Stories*, adopts and aligns with the main points of Balaev's pluralistic trauma theory. In summary, the main points of pluralistic trauma theory can be outlined as follows:

- Trauma is a disruptive experience that fractures one's relational identity and perception.
- The recollection of traumatic memories influenced by present circumstances and varies each time victims revisit them.
- Victims of trauma frequently undergo internal struggles manifested as traumatic nightmares or flashbacks.
- Landscapes often symbolize traumatic experiences, illustrated by the location of the traumatic event and its impact on the identity of the traumatized individual.

- The concept of trauma's speakability is emphasized, suggesting that victims can make progress in their recovery by openly discussing their trauma or engaging in nonverbal forms of expression.

To distil these points, classical trauma theory posits that traumatic experiences shatter the coordinates of the self, causing a rupture in subjectivity that profoundly impacts the individual. The trauma remains an enclave within the psyche, challenging integration and altering the subject's relationships with both themselves and with the world. Recollection, revisiting, and reliving the traumatic experience help diminish its violent effect on the self—the cornerstone of psychoanalytic practice involves putting the experience into words, translating emotional and psychic amplitude into symbolic forms, and aiding the traumatized in making sense of the experience. The traumatic experience may be blocked from conscious access and repressed to sustain the subject's operation, and a conflict or struggle, arising from the unspeakability and unrepresentability of the trauma, may return in different symptomatic formations, often in daydreams or nightmarish visualizations.

Balaev seeks to broaden the understanding of trauma, moving beyond the traditional Freudian and later Caruthian models that focus on the silences and rhetorical patterns of the unspeakable within narratives. In Balaev's conceptualization, trauma takes on a more fluid nature, influenced by acts of remembering and revisitation it within a broader cultural context and through one's own experiences and replaying of memory. Unlike Caruth's view of trauma as a rupture in an individual's psychic life, constituting an unspeakable secret, Balaev's approach suggests a more dynamic and interconnected relationship with one's experiences. From that perspective, trauma becomes a narrative that extends beyond a mere rupture, offering a broader and more diverse range of representations for traumatic experiences. This approach invites exploration into the complexities of how trauma is understood and communicated, emphasizing the

dynamic interplay between personal experiences, cultural context, and the act of remembering.

In summary, classic trauma theory perceives traumatic experiences as unrepresentable, beyond comprehension and language, thereby fostering silence. In contrast, Balaev's pluralistic approach acknowledges a broader array of potential representations for such experiences. For example, not all traumas exert the same power or hold over the subject, prompting critical attention beyond unrepresentability or unspeakability to explore diverse ways of discussing trauma in literature .

Traumatic Experiences in *Beekeeper*: A Perspective from Balaev's Pluralistic Model of Trauma

Nuri and Afra, residing in the idyllic city of Aleppo, Syria, are an ordinary couple— he is a beekeeper, she is an artist both living a peaceful life with their son, Sami. However, their tranquil existence is suddenly shattered by a brutal war, resulting in a devastating loss when Sami perishes in a bomb blast. Forced to flee their homeland, Nuri and Afra confront the cataclysmic events in profoundly different ways: Afra loses her sight, while Nuri grapples with delusions, convinced that a boy resembling Sami accompanies them. Their harrowing journey unfolds as they traverse from Syria to England, passing through Turkey and Greece, where they face relentless trials and barely manage to escape. These tumultuous circumstances challenge every facet of their lives— their physical safety, their mental stability, and their marriage, now marred by the void left by their son. Despite enduring overwhelming adversity and a feeling of being trapped in an unsettling state suspended between cherished memories of their former life and the harsh present, Nuri and Afra eventually find solace in England. There, with the guidance of their cousin, Mustafa, they rediscover a fragment of their former existence by taking up beekeeping. The play masterfully presents a narrative of

profound loss, inconsolable grief, spiritual disintegration, and extreme vulnerability, while also offering glimpses of a rekindled life, hope, and love.

Beekeeper delves into the grim realities of war-ravaged Syria, offering insight into the conflict's profound impact on human lives. It serves as a conduit for readers to gain a deeper understanding of the complex narratives that often remain obscured by fleeting news reports from troubled regions around the world. At its core, *Beekeeper* explores the effects of trauma, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and the enduring agony of grief. The playwrights employ various narrative devices, including shifts between past and present, interwoven flashbacks, and haunting nightmares – all quintessential elements of traumatic experiences. These devices poignantly depict the characters' anguish and their relentless struggle for survival, as well as gradual revelation of the underlying events and their profound consequences.

In the play, there is profound symbolic significance in Afra's blindness and Nuri's interactions with apparitions, both intricately connected to the trauma they endure and laden with symbolic meaning. Afra's blindness, on one level, serves as her coping mechanism for the anguish of losing her son and being compelled to abandon their war-ravaged homeland– a form of rejection, a protest against the cruel reality. Drawing from literary tradition, it can also be seen as a physical manifestation of guilt, signifying a mother's perceived failure to shield her child from harm. In contrast, Nuri responds differently to his grief, his sorrow leading him to perceive things that are not tangible, yet it is his blind wife who, despite her sightlessness, comprehends the truth and empathizes with him. This interplay between blindness and insight forms a recurring motif, shedding light on the play's central theme: the devastating consequences of war, loss, grief, and radical displacement, which resonate not only within the characters but also throughout the narrative itself.

Traumatic grief, too often resulting from the sudden and unexpected death of a loved one, is a prevalent psychological trauma (VandenBos 104), and Neil Thompson suggests that such losses, commonly referred to as traumatic losses, similarly go beyond typical bereavements, affecting us psychologically, socially, and spiritually (1). Such traumatic losses disrupt our expectations and deeply impact us at a spiritual level. Individuals who experience trauma are profoundly affected by the events they endure, often grappling with feelings of responsibility and guilt, especially when the loss of a child is involved. Since the grieving process for traumatized individuals is often marked by self-blame, and the death of a child is considered one of the most devastating forms of traumatic loss, it represents an acute form of traumatic loss, with long-lasting repercussions that significantly affect parents' lives.

In *Beekeeper*, Afra grapples with an intense sense of self-blame, particularly with respect to the tragic loss of her only child. This is most evident when she articulates her feelings of responsibility for her child's suffering and distress, even when she was present and unable to prevent the traumatic events. Afra tries to remember the traumatic events of losing her child by saying

We were in Aleppo, before we came here. Sami asked if he could go outside and play in the garden. We were planning to leave the next day, and I couldn't say no, because a boy needs to play. There had been no bombs for days and I thought we were safe. I heard a whizzing sound and I could tell it was close. I ran outside to get Sami. But I was too late. The bomb landed in the back of the garden. Not right near him. It was some distance away, but the force was so strong. So loud. A cloud of dust covered everything. I went out and found him. He wasn't moving. I sat there holding him in my arms. (91)

Although not explicitly focused on trauma, Freud's work "Mourning and Melancholia" explores the differences between normal and pathological grieving (melancholia) arguing that the latter is

associated with a certain cognitive confusion regarding the true nature of loss that makes it difficult for individuals to fully recover from it. This confusion results in the ongoing awareness of loss in the present, rather than being confined to the past where it should belong. In the case of a parent who experiences the death of a child, profound guilt arises due to the parental responsibility of safeguarding their children. This means that in addition to an overwhelming sense of emptiness, there is a pervasive feeling of failure and a perceived disturbance in the natural order of the world. Both trauma and loss have the capacity to overpower the mind.

In other words, Caruth emphasizes that trauma is not only about an encounter with death or violence but also includes the challenge of continuing to live, of being a survivor" (Unclaimed 13). For Caruth, the dissociation caused by the trauma must be resolved for survival; it is not enough to cope with the unspeakable loss or pain, but also includes the challenge of forging a survivor's position. Facing the traumatic past is only the first step; hardship more often accompanied with an attempt to integrate the experience into everyday life.

In *Beekeeper*, the portrayal of chaotic memory, flashbacks, and hallucinations serves as a lens through which we explore the intricate facets of trauma. Geoffrey Hartman in his book *On Traumatic Knowledge and Literary Studies* says:

The knowledge of trauma... is composed of two contradictory elements. 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 (537).

In *Beekeeper*, Nuri struggles to remember the exact details surrounding traumatic experience, stating, "Maybe some of it didn't happen, or it happened in a different way, I don't know, but I need to say it out loud" (5). The central question emerges: What defines an event as traumatic? For Freud, the answer lies in the relationship between the experience and the interpretive paradigm employed. He

posited that traumatic experiences leave an almost pristine psychological trace, distinct from normal memory, resulting in flashbacks and nightmares indistinguishable from the original traumatic event. Caruth's phrase, "unclaimed experience" aptly captures this concept as she contends that trauma encompasses any experience that cannot be seamlessly integrated into the subject's existing paradigm, leading to the subject's recurrent return to the "unclaimed experience" through dreams, flashbacks, and other manifestations.

Caruth defines the PTSD as an "overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often uncontrolled, repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena"(58). In other words, PTSD, a psychological disorder characterized by panic, anxiety, phobias, flashbacks, and nightmares, is often triggered by highly distressing events, with war being a significant contributor to such disorders. In *Beekeeper*, we witness Nuri's trauma manifested in a fear of and phobia related to sounds, particularly those reminiscent of explosions in Syria. In Scene 3, as Nuri tries to persuade the receptionist to use the "business address" instead of the "residential address," a bomb-like sound disrupts the scene, causing Nuri to react intensely, reflecting his traumatic experiences.

Trauma, as described by Caruth and her contemporaries, represents something unspeakable, dissociative, and repressed to the extent that the subject lacks direct access to the original experience. Such repression results in diverse psychological or physiological manifestations, all marked by the subject's lack of control over when and how this repression resurfaces and the form it takes. For Caruth, the unspeakable nature of the trauma creates gaps and missing links in an otherwise coherent narrative structure, leading to fragmentation in recalling and intrusions such as hallucinations into dreams or daydreams.

Hallucinations, a prominent element of trauma explored in the play, serve as a means of recollecting and reliving details of deeply distressing and repressed memories. While they represent false perceptions created by the mind, they feel undeniably real to those who have experienced trauma. These perceptions encompass various forms, including visual, auditory, olfactory, tactile, or gustatory experiences. In essence, individuals may perceive sensory stimuli that do not actually exist, experiencing sensations such as seeing, hearing, smelling, feeling, or tasting something nonexistent. Hallucinations present "the enigma of the otherness of a human voice that witnesses a truth that "the traumatized individual is not fully equipped to comprehend, while also "bearing witness to the past he has unwillingly repeated" (Caruth, *Unclaimed*: 3).

Another facet of trauma depicted in the play is the profound transformation undergone by Nuri after the war. Afra discusses Nuri's traumatic metamorphosis during her conversation with Angeliki, who provides Afra with the comfort Nuri is unable to offer. Afra reveals: He's not the man since we left Aleppo. We used to hold hands, but now he only holds my hand when he wants to guide me somewhere. And when I try to hold his hand, he pulls it away. . . He has disappeared inside himself (83).

In the play, we also witness Nuri struggling with sleep deprivation, that can be seen as yet another manifestation of trauma or PTSD. Nuri himself acknowledges, "Maybe I'm a little sleep-deprived" (105), and this sleep disturbance becomes evident as we observe him sleeping in unconventional places, that includes the back garden and the rain-soaked garden .

As Balaev posits, the triggering event for intense protagonist reactions isn't confined to large-scale disasters; it may encompass deeply personal incidents, such as sexual violence (150). In *Beekeeper*, Afra's encounter with rape vividly illustrates how sexual violence inflicts not only physical but also profound psychological harm, permeating the victim's psyche. Beyond physical boundaries, the aftermath can lead to dissociation, shattering the victim's self-

image and causing indescribable pain. The severity often relegates the trauma to repression, buried deep within the victim's consciousness, and the violation extends beyond immediate harm, leaving enduring scars on mental and emotional well-being. Afra's experience becomes a haunting force disrupting her sense of self, highlighting the enduring impact of such violence on the psyche. This withdrawal isn't unique to Nuri; Afra undergoes a similar retreat. As Nuri observes, "She never leaves the bedroom. Doesn't talk to anyone. It's like she's disappearing inside herself" (89).

The playwrights employ the first technique through selection of the play's title, establishing a link between the protagonist, referred to as the "Beekeeper" and the setting, Aleppo.

The title itself carries dual significance – it alludes to the recurring symbol of bees in the narrative and provides clarity regarding the story's origin. Although the play's events transpire beyond Aleppo, the protagonist's identity remains inseparable from his Syrian past. Beekeeping was Nuri's vocation before the war, a way of life intertwined with nature, embodying the simplicity and clarity of the natural order– a semblance cruelly disrupted by the ravages of war. This title choice effectively underscores the theme of traumatic loss and grief with which the main characters grapple. Throughout the play, numerous moments arise where the characters engage in reminiscences and recollections of their hometown, Aleppo. In a later conversation, Afra, the central character and emotional anchor of the play, fondly reflects on their life in Aleppo. She articulates:

AFRA: I know where we are. Bab al-Faraj, by the clocktower.

NURI: Yeah, they told us to wait here. They said he would come at midnight

AFRA: Remember the ice cream shop around the corner . . . where we used to go. Is it still there?

NURI: Not sure. It's probably gone.

AFRA: I want to come back in the spring and get pistachio ice cream. I'll wear that yellow dress you like and we'll walk together. We can start at our house and walk through the city all the way to the souq. Then we'll wander through the covered lanes of the old market, the alleyways of spices and soaps and teas and bronze and and dried lemons and honey and herbs, and maybe gold and silver you can buy me a silk scarf.

NURI: Afra, the souq is empty. The buildings are bombed and burnt. Only rats wander through the lanes now. This is not our home anymore.

AFRA: I know (49)

The longing for former peaceful lives and homes effectively portrays the deep emotional impact of traumatic events. Mergentime's demonstration highlights landscapes as symbolic representations of trauma, capturing specific locations and their profound influence on traumatized individuals.

The play utilizes the technique of silence to create temporal gaps, introducing pauses within the narrative that convey shock, trauma, and a sense of tragedy. The repetition of the word "silence" in the play serves to express the characters' stunned reactions, as exemplified in the following instances within the play:

NURI (to us): That night, someone set fire to the beehives. They were all burned to a crisp. I stood there the next day looking over the field and I will never forget the *silence* (*my emphasis*). Three generations of bees I knew so well were all gone. I saw a bee on the ground, one that was still alive. I crushed it with my shoe. Without their hives, they had nowhere to go. (30)

MOROCCAN MAN: And, uh, Afra, she told me about your son. I am sorry. I lost my children, too. Three of them. As soon as we got on that boat, I knew it was a mistake. The sea took them. It took my three beautiful children, but it spared me. And now I am here, alone. But you . . . you have each other. You are not alone. Don't forget that.

The MOROCCAN MAN exits. A moment of *silence* (*my emphasis*) between them (113).

Afra's profound silence stems from her inability to communicate after the tragic loss of her child. Balaev diverges from Caruth, arguing that Afra's silence intensifies anticipation and disgust, allowing readers to imagine their worst fears (Balaev: "Trends" 158). Unlike Caruth's view of silence as post-traumatic fragmentation, Balaev sees Afra's silence as an intentional artistic choice, symbolizing post-civil war trauma in Syria. Silence, in this context, isn't just a symptom but a deliberate narrative technique conveying the depth of trauma, reinforcing the atmosphere and unfolding events. The cultural motives of the Syrian civil war lead the playwrights to adopt a fluid, detailed narrative of Nuri's and Afra's post-traumatic lives. This narrative delves into personal experiences while representing the broader challenges faced by individuals dealing with loss after the crisis.

These expressions of sorrow, loss, and grief within the play employ two literary techniques for analysis. First, the imagery vividly portrays the impact of traumatic loss on Afra, enabling the reader to visualize the emotional suffering she experiences. Second, there is the use of an apostrophe, where Afra addresses Sami despite his absence. This reflects Afra's refusal to accept the reality of her son's death as she continues to speak to him. Afra's possession of her son's marble also serves as a synecdoche, representing the entirety of his being; keeping the marble as a memento helps Afra remember Sami and holds deep significance for her. The following conversation effectively illustrates the impact of Sami's death on his mother. The stage directions read, AFRA shows Nuri the marble in her hands."

AFRA: What is this?

NURI: It's a marble.

AFRA: Whose marble is it?

NURI: It's Mohammed's.

AFRA: No, it's Sami's.

NURI: Sami's?

AFRA: Our son. This marble belonged to him.

NURI: No.....

AFRA: I took it from his room the day we left (108).

In this respect, there is an intersection between Caruth and Balaev's theories. Afra, unable to resist revisiting her memories, evokes them by utilizing objects and locations, thereby summoning the forgotten reminiscences.

Both Nuri and Afra undergo personal traumas while grappling with deeply distressing events that leave lasting wounds on their minds. While traumatic experiences challenge their mental well-being and core sense of self, as the play draws to a close, both characters exhibit resilience and inner strength in overcoming their traumas. **The visit of** Nuri and Afra to Mustafa in London provides them with an opportunity to break free from their traumatic circumstances and confront the emotional pain that has consumed them, in essence, demonstrating an elevated awareness and acknowledgment of the trauma that confines them. Shulga contends that individuals who have undergone trauma may revisit it, yet maintain a sense of detachment, because it exists simultaneously as familiar and unfamiliar. Considering this perspective, Nuri and Afra, having experienced trauma, distance themselves from the crisis, embarking on a journey towards healing and liberation from their isolated existence. Ultimately, in *Beekeeper*, a stark reality unfolds in which trauma inevitably befalls individuals, but within this harshness, a glimmer of hope for survival endures.

In *Beekeeper*, Nuri serves as a representative figure, illustrating individual aspects of trauma influenced by broader societal and cultural factors. His journey becomes a symbol of the collective suffering endured during significant historical events such as war. Throughout the play, the traumatized protagonist experiences

moments of emotional overwhelming and even psychosis but he ultimately finds healing and restoration through support of their community.

The central question that arises is whether the characters can adapt to life without their wings or if they will succumb to the labyrinthine horrors of their ordeal. Towards the novel's conclusion, the protagonists are finally reunited with Mustafa, their dear friend from home, who brings them much-needed hope and the promise of a bearable future. They resume their roles as beekeepers, and even Afra, though she can only perceive colors at this point, begins to see a world filled not just with sadness but also with hope. They thus learn to navigate life in an unfamiliar land, mending their lives by drawing from their past preoccupations and sense of identity. The play concludes on a hopeful note, with the image of birds spreading their wings and soaring into the sky.

Conclusion

"What matters is not how well you can avoid trouble, but how you cope with trouble when it comes" (Auster 34).

Using trauma theory, as a reading strategy, offers invaluable insights into the layers that often exist within literary works, encompassing characterization, narrative framing, and plot dynamics. It has greatly enriched literary studies by unveiling the mechanisms of silencing traumatic experiences and shedding light on ways to amplify these silenced voices. Traumatic experiences are characterized by their overwhelming magnitude, making assimilation into one's existing value system an insurmountable challenge. Those who have endured trauma grapple with the stark incongruity between their previous, more optimistic beliefs and the harsh, incomprehensible reality of extreme adversity. The impact of trauma destabilizes the very foundation of their existence, leaving them adrift in a world

irrevocably altered. Devoid of their fundamental bearings, they are immobilized by their inability to make sense of their own experiences. This inherent inability to categorize or comprehend trauma in conventional psychological terms contributes to its terrifying and destructive nature.

The presence of trauma theory in the study of literature mirrors the current cultural landscape. We are in the midst of a shift in how we perceive ourselves and others, with an increasing focus on understanding the long-term effects of trauma on the body. *Beekeeper* illustrates that victims may not only be physically wounded but also may suffer mentally, and they struggle to move forward in life because they cannot forget the horrors they witnessed during the war. The play invites readers to comprehend the complex nature of a refugee's life and to contemplate the characters' experiences, not only as individuals but also as representatives of entire traumatized communities.

Beekeeper, through the lens of Michelle Balaev's pluralistic model, successfully unveils the intricate layers of trauma within its narrative. The play masterfully navigates beyond monolithic interpretations, adopting a multi-layered approach that intertwines individual and collective narratives. Balaev's model, as applied to the play, allows for a nuanced exploration of trauma, transcending binary paradigms. The protagonist's journey, shaped by the trauma of war and displacement, intricately recalibrates the self within the broader societal dynamics. Temporal fractures and deliberate silences, examined through neural-hormonal perspectives, strategically enhance reader involvement, fostering reflective interludes. *Beekeeper*, in alignment with Balaev's pluralistic framework, not only articulates the profound anguish and turmoil resulting from trauma but also captures the indomitable spirit and redefinition that emerge in the face of adversity.

مستخلص البحث

يتناول البحث الحالي مسرحية نَحَال حلب (٢٠٢٣) للكاتبين نسرين الرفاعي وماثيو اسبرينجلر المأخوذة عن الرواية الشهيرة والمسومة بنفس العنوان (٢٠١٨) للكاتبة البريطانية المعاصرة كريستي ليفتري (١٩٦٩-) والتي كتبت هذا النص من خلال تجربة شخصية لها في ملاجئ السوريين في اليونان. وعليه فان هذا البحث يلقي الضوء على الواقع المرير والمعاناة الانسانية التي تواجهها عائلة سورية تحت وطأة أعقاب الحرب الاهلية في سوريا ومحاولتهم الهروب من الجحيم والهجرة بداية إلى تركيا ومنها إلى اليونان عن طريق البحر للاستقرار في بريطانيا في نهاية المطاف. ويكشف لنا هذا النص أعراض ما بعد الصدمة التي تواجه اللاجئين في ظل حنين مستمر يشدهما الى وطنهم ألام، سوريا. وسيعتمد الباحث في سياق ورقته البحثية على النظرية التعددية للصدمة لميشيل بالاييف باعتبارها واحدة من الوسائل المنهجية المعاصرة المهمة في تحليل النص الأدبي وكمنهج لتحليل الصدمة في المسرحية وذلك لاكتشاف معاناة الشخصيات الرئيسية.

الكلمات المفتاحية:

نَحَال حلب- صدمة فقدان- نظرية الصدمة التعددية- ميشيل بالاييف- فرويد

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