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Sentimental Arcs From Grief to Mourning in An Unnecessary Woman and Koolaids: The Art of War by Rabih Alameddine

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Sentimental Arcs From Grief to Mourning in *An Unnecessary Woman* and *Koolaids: The Art of War* by Rabih Alameddine

An Honors Thesis

Presented to

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By

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Acknowledgements

Table of Contents

Introduction

     Koolaids: The Art of War and *An Unnecessary Woman* by Rabih Alameddine each cover expansive periods of time. In each, the Lebanese Civil War serves as a grounding cultural touchstone. Beyond this, the novels appear to have little immediately in common. *Koolaids* incorporates fragmented vignettes from a plethora of narrators, many of whom are queer men during the AIDS crisis. One could read Mohammad, a gay Lebanese American, as the primary narrator, but the form offers a variety of reading angles. As a whole, the style compresses expansive experiences into a brief period. This form has little that initially seems to resonate with the exclusive, isolated, and elderly narrator of *An Unnecessary Woman*, Aaliya. Her voice frequently elongates her life's history across several experiences in the present. Despite this, the narrators negotiate grief as central aspects of the plot. Aaliya's unresolved feelings about her best friend, and potential love interest, Hannah can be read in parallel to Mohammad's grief about his lover and best friend, Scott.

     This connection can serve as a tentative anchor to approach the plot and setting of each novel. Each novel, opens and closes in the same physical place, Mohammad's hospital room and Aaliya's apartment. However, in each case, the events of the present and reflections about past events lead to new conditions in the present and changed perceptions of the past. *Koolaids* ends with Mohammad's death and the destruction of Aaliya's work. Yet, each of these material events hold a provisionally transcendent quality, as each narrator has changed by the end of novel, even if the validity of that transformation may be tenuous at best. The ability to read this change depends on navigating the progressive unfolding of traumatic pasts. Arguably, Mohammad killing Scott, and Aaliya's perceived failure to stop Hannah's suicide offer the respective climaxes of this trend.

Though this angle of reading may certainly ignore large swathes of each text, and potentially run against the grain of *Koolaids*, it offers an avenue to consider two dense and complicated texts.

This reading approach centers trauma, which can lead to selectively searching for interpreted silences. Moving with this mode emphasizes the beginning and ending of each narration, where the finite vacuity of a work ending is juxtaposed with the text. This physical feature can easily serve as a type of silence itself, one which also encourages noticing silences elsewhere. Implicitly, this type of reading partially derives evidence from a psychoanalytic interpretation of narrators' subconscious internalizations and navigations of trauma. Coming to this conclusion depends on assessing narrative form's conformity to narrative expectations. At the same time, this method of reading privileges the material importance of trauma. Arguments that center particular traumas, rarely explain why Mohammad and Aaliya's bereavements about their respective best friends should be interpreted as the central location of trauma. In this manner, trauma offers a potentially useful way of approaching the narrative form and content of each texts, but its evaluative capabilities are worth complicating and dovetailing with other theories.

Given the potential challenges of trauma as analytic tool or term, having privileged determining characteristics while remaining exceptionally vague, it follows to look at the tentative narrative tools within each text that dialogue well with trauma. The use of sentimentality in *Koolaids* first arises as a pejorative (18). Though potentially anecdotal evidence, it presents a useful grounding point by starting with definitions. Still, the first of sentimentality in the text is confused. Mohammad anecdotally exhumes the term from the voices of his dead lover Scott. Scott's dismissive attitude becomes central to this approach of definition, but the textual definition may differ from both Scott's definition and Mohammad's ventriloquized definition. Despite being an unsettled definition, one can move from this outline of sentimentality to examine each text.

Likewise, one can move in the opposite direction by starting with the defining of grief in *An Unnecessary Woman*. The term arises regularly later in the text in relationship to Hannah. As somewhat representative of Aaliya's anxieties, she wonders if "grief make[s] us lose short wavelength cones as well, make[s] us less able to distinguish the color blue? I wonder whether Hannah, in her last year, gazed directly at her life and was overwhelmed. Could she have saved herself had she looked awry?" (203). Aaliya draws an ocular analysis between her personal experience of grief about Hannah, and the inaccessible material histories that Hannah navigated at that time. Like, Mohammad's relationship to sentimentality, tied up with memories of Scott, Aaliya connects a personal experience of grief ambiguously to Hannah's past. This illustrates that sentimentality and grief should be approached as relational definitions. What remains unclear is a pristine operating textual definition with the confines of each text. Reading grief in conversation with sentimentality can help unpack the complexities of each within their own works.

Thinking about trauma, narrative progression, and narration opens an approach to consider the connections between sentimentality and grief. Sentimentality and grief neither appear as ubiquitous terms in either novel. They are wedded to specific places in the text that can potentially be expanded from throughout. One might read them as local definitions that hardly travel throughout each novels' whole structure. This challenge of rigidity lends itself to considering narrative progression. As the approach of grief bridges Aaliya to Mohammad, it also makes sense to consider how their specific characteristics and histories can be linked and separated. When done with respect to trauma, a cultural studies perspective, rather than a medicalized understanding, makes sense. Similarly, this angle invites scrutinizing the psychoanalytic theoretical roots of trauma. Principally, one can look at the fraught history Freud as emblematic of vestiges of modernism that persist today. History of thought matters especially as the characters in each novel

encounter structures that medicalize their bodies and thus disrupt their access to autonomy. One might look at queer characters with AIDS related illnesses in the hospitals of *Koolaids* or Hannah's experiences with doctors and valium. Yet, this complicated theoretical history offers a useful point of analytic tension where the assumptions behind these structures of power can be denaturalized and made visible.

Proceeding from a destabilized concept of trauma in relationship to grief and sentimentality offers some methodological implications. First, given the unstable textual definitions of terms the arguments often proceed from somewhat ambiguous textual definitions. Secondly, partially as a result of the first point, this thesis leads to many unresolved questions that are worth continual exploration. As a first investigation this work largely problematizes old means of considering grief and mourning, rather than working to build new definitions and ways of thinking. As a methodogical result, many of the discussions occur in the progressive present. Lastly, the navigation of unstable definitions leads to the temporary privileging of certain analytic terms and ideas when it makes strategic sense.

With this methodological road map in mind, the first chapter in this thesis will explore how each text tentatively adheres to sentimental arcs that move characters through bereavement in a linear progression from grief to mourning. The second chapter will address how each texts' narrators explicitly reject the sentimental arc from grief to mourning. Finally, the third chapter will explore how the equivalency between trauma and grief imbedded in sentimental arcs misreads complexities of *An Unnecessary Woman* and only provisionally applies to *Koolaids*.

Literature Review

The goal of this literature review is to both disclose what intellectual strands brought rise to the analytic of sentimentality and prime the potential complications that arise from this framework. At times this will give the literature review an explicit texture that examines the specific methodologies. At other points, this chapter leaves ambiguous connections to open wide space for potential future avenues of exploration.

Literary critic, Tanyss Ludescher's article[1] of literary criticism usefully historicizes Arab American literature in relationship to waves of migration and navigates trends of literary analysis. The article charts the imbedded arguments of authors' works, largely in line with the titular argumentative progression from "Nostalgia to Critique." Written in 2006, it is worth considering what trends identified remain salient and how useful literary waves woven into material pasts of immigration, emigration, and movement functions. This analysis can both be misused to suggest homogenizing, but also can provide a useful starting place. The article's survey-like form coupled with the conclusion's admonishment for further literary criticism, implies an awareness of these potential issues of application.

The descriptive argument about overarching literary trends explicitly asks to consider the definition of nostalgia, a word with imbedded connections to sentiment, the sentimental, and sentimentality. The Oxford English Dictionary defines nostalgia as both "acute longing for familiar surroundings, esp. regarded as a medical condition; homesickness" and "sentimental

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[1] Tanyss Ludescher, "From Nostalgia to Critique: An Overview of Arab American Literature." MELUS: Multi-Ethnic Literature of the United States. 31. 93-114. 2006. 10.1093/melus/31.4.93.

longing *for* or regretful memory of a period of the past, esp. one in an individual's own lifetime." Implicit in these distinct definitions is the suturing of medicalized knowledge and discourses to a perceived excessive attitude about personal past and lost place. It is worth acknowledging that this term both weaves these interpretations together and understands them as separate. Considering Ludescher's overarching thesis suggesting a progression towards an attitude critical of nostalgia, this thesis grief in *An Unnecessary Woman* and *Koolaids* does.

In a similar survey-like form, the fourth section of literary critic Steven Salaita's monograph[2] articulates a useful attitude for navigating *Koolaids*. For dilettante readers and experts Salaita advises to "just read" (43). Rather than itemizing or identifying every scene and character he exhorts focusing on how the text coheres in a nontraditional manner. He argues this happens when one focuses on the simple act of reading. He then presents several thematic aspects of the texts supported by brief close readings of prominent passages. Mirroring his suggestions, he closes with a question (Salaita 47) that puns on the references built into the *Koolaids* itself about the "ever present sense of death" and "drink[ing] Kool-Aid" (99). His investigation of the real moral content of postmodern techniques that highlight "the heterogeneity of Lebanese identity," (44) and critique "ethnic or cultural boundaries" (45) offers one potential avenue to consider *Koolaids*. Yet, at the same time he emphasizes that *Koolaids* negotiates none of these facets in binaristic terms. Specifically, though the Lebanese Civil War and the AIDS Crisis serve as useful cultural touchstones, they alone do not totally open the novel. Salaita's warnings and encouragements can also open up a panoply of approaches to *An Unnecessary* Woman, a text which also uses a pastiche style. The questions he provides can

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[2] Steven Salaita, "Sex, Violence, and Story Telling: Rabih Alameddine." *Modern Arab American Fiction: A Reader's Guide.* (Syracuse University Press, Syracuse, 2011).

serve as a tentative entry reading guide for approaching the form of each, although the degree and form of fragmentation may be distinct.

Literary critic, Syrine Hout's monograph[3] also gives a broad sampling, though organized in thematic comparative critique across different authors' works. Her close reading of *Koolaids* and *Unreal City*[4], within the section "Homesickness and Sickness of Home," focused on the complications of diasporic Arab identities and exilic conditions, attends attentively to the form of *Koolaids*. This consideration can give a roadmap to how to read the noticeable complexities of *Koolaids*. Hout states her explicit privileging of the "gay identities of male Lebanese characters," an admission that shows the plurality of angles textual reading can prioritize in *Koolaids*. The heightened heteroglossia of the text invites conscientiousness privileging of particular voices. This project, like Hout's, will also privilege Mohammad's voice, even if Samir or Makram's, two other central narrators, could also be centered. A focus on narrating style, reliability, and narrative space afforded informs this strategic decision. An attention to this modality illustrates the connections and divergences from how Aaliya's voice does and, mostly, does not read relationally in *An Unnecessary Woman*. Foregrounding this tension, primes some of the methodological complications that arise when the instability of grief and trauma are brought to the foreground. Though Hout focuses on exilic conditions, the challenges she addresses read in parallel to several of the unresolved conclusions about the limits of contemporary analytics of grief and trauma (read medicalized and psychoanalytic). One could read Hout's attention to the

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[3] Syrine Hout, *Post-War Anglophone Lebanese Fiction: Home Matters in the Diaspora*. (Edinburgh University Press, 2012).
[4] Tony Hanania, "Unreal City." (Bloomsbury: Beirut, 2000).
Though Houts' comparative work draws these two texts into conversation, knowing this text specifically is not essential for the way I work with the article for this project.

distinct and often confused non-contradictory relationships between the state of exile and nation

state in connection to nostalgia as a potential through line for this thesis.

In more direct theoretical connection, one of Hout's later sections[5] discusses trauma

theory explicitly in the context of *I the Divine*, another one of Rabih Alameddine's novels. *I the*

Divine is a series of attempts at first chapters written by Sarah Bernhardt, the texts' ambiguous

narrator and central character. As she progressively shifts in narrative style and centers different

aspects of her life, the text probes the work that goes into and results from attempting to narrate

personal experience. From this, a reader might center various parts of Sarah's traumatic

experiences as correlated to the fragmented style. Hout illustrates how *I the Divine* potentially

maps the complicated trauma Sarah experienced throughout her life on the reiterated attempts at

first chapter for a memoir. As, again, a project with survey-like goals, her work primarily shows

how one might read Sarah's individual trauma in potential connection to broader collective

traumas without privileging that singular narrative as an end of a discussion. In other words,

Sarah's experiences with trauma are linked to, but do not effectively stand-in for traumas

endured in the Lebanese Civil War or exile experience at large.[6] Her approach cautions over-

reading an individual moment or character as generalizable. This reading stance matters

especially in *Koolaids*, as it readily invites reading across fragmentations a modality that can

easily become over-simplistic.

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[5] "Trauma Narratives: The Scars of War: I, the Divine and The Bullet Collection."
[6] The structure of this sentence might suggest these two subjects are potentially analogous, in implicit contradiction with the imbedded thesis. As a rhetorical goal this is attempting to dispel cumbersome mythologies, such that it tentatively uses the language of those reductive readings.

11

At times referencing Hout's introductory material and section on "Cultural Hybridity,"

Leila Moayeri Pazargadi[7] investigates the complicated relationships between the various "I's" of

I the Divine "can take on transcultural hybridity in the negotiation of Lebanese and American

identities" (45). This argument centers how formal components in *I the Divine* explore the

complications in narrating one's own life identity, especially when addressing traumatic

experiences. She argues that this form: "breaks through monoliths found in sensationalized

memoirs as it reworks autobiographical conventions" (55). Her argument centers form in a way

that can consider the function of narrating philosophy and rhetoric of Aaliya in *An Unnecessary*

Woman, a novel that implicitly constructs itself in relationship to and dialogues with the form of

memoir. Aaliya investigates a fairly brief material section of her life in a frame that expands out

to consider her life as a whole. Though Aaliya discusses the process of narrating and creating a

history less frequently and explicitly, and not in the context of diasporic exile, this appears a

frequent concern with her writing and translating. I will argue that *An Unnecessary Woman* uses

a parallel, but different, set of formal components that also criticize "monolithic" and

"sensationalized memoirs," though I critique these reductive frameworks in the context of grief

and trauma. Her analysis historicizes these "'misery memoirs" as "neo-Orientalist,"[8] a frame my

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[7] "Unfixing the Autobiographical Subject Fragmentation as aesthetics and identity in Rabh Alameddine's *I The Divine." Arab American aesthetics: literature, material culture, film and theatre.* ed. Therí. A Pickens. vol. 1. (Routledge, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon; New York, NY; 2018), 42-59. Print.

[8] For a start on the contemporary and historical contexts imbedded in this genre: Kahf, Mohja. "The Pity Committee and the Careful Reader: How not to Buy Stereotypes about Muslim Women," Abdulhadi, Rabab, *Arab & Arab American Feminisms: Gender, Violence, & Belonging*, ed. Evelyn Alsultany, and Nadine C. Naber. (Syracuse University Press, Syracuse, N.Y, 2011), 227-241.

This offers a useful place to start because the discussion extends broadly and Kahf offers a particularly useful attention to reading. It is also worth noting that the labels of Arab and Muslim are slipped between when discussing racialization, a dynamic that itself procedurally racializes. The lit review shows more direct attention to this more specifically later. The connection I offer

analysis will dovetail with by prioritizing the limited application of trauma theory to parallel and overlapping narratives.

Feminist psychologist, Leeat Granek argues that grief has functionally been pathologized under Westernized medical practices.[9] Despite this dominant frame, she also advocates grief as a possible sight that can link the personal to the collective without erasure. She differentiates grief as an embodied response to a "meaningfully loss" from mourning as the social practices that regulate the expected behavior of this experience (61). This framing illustrates a defining framework that this project will both use and critique. As the article slips between the terms of grief and mourning consistently, it is difficult to differentiate what constitutes an emotion and the public performance of that experience, a challenge that also arises in this project. Granek argues that the medicalization of grief in psychological discourses and practices locates grief as a site to be "potentially *pathological*," as "some grief is described as 'excessive'" (62). She positions this phenomena as a result of modernist Western logics. Questioning normative or abnormal amounts of possessing and displaying grief invites interventions from disability studies and queer theory with attention to the politicization of emotions.

The questions of pathology Granek introduce encourage an investigation of medical institutions central to Rosemarie Garland-Thomson's seminal article.[10] In a parallel, but not analogous way, Garland-Thomson differentiates impairment as the material counterpart to the social construction of disability. Her article casts a wide net unearthing and centering a wide

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here is not to reify this in an implied one to ratio, but where one might look to broach challenging and regularly elided questions.

[9] Leeat Granek, "Mourning Sickness: The Politicizations of Grief." *Review of General Psychology*, vol. 18, no. 2, June 2014, pp. 61–68, doi:10.1037/gpr0000001.

[10] Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, "Feminist Disability Studies." *Signs*, vol. 30, no. 2, 2005, pp. 1557–1587. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/423352.

variety of scholarship and cultural production.[11] She critiques a series of narrative tropes that deserve reimagining and intervention. Relevant is the trope of the "sentimental narrative that sees people with disability as occasions for narcissistic pity or lessons in suffering for those who imagine themselves as nondisabled" (1568). Although, this form of narration has its own hallmarks worthy of critiquing specifically, this trope reads in parallel to the work undercurrent in "misery memoirs." They each strategically mobilize peoples' bodies as sights of pity for Western and abled[12] audiences to strategically shift between differentiating themselves from and indulgently connecting with for the sake of projects that are often divorced from the interpretations of bodies themselves. Yet, in either case, neither are particularly concerned with the experiential[13] specificities and complexities of a unique person, but rather how a person's narrative can validate limited preconceived notions. Garland-Thomson admonishes creating and investigating narratives that intervene in these systems of power.[14] rather than reifying them.

This question hangs over, art historian Douglas Crimp's "Mourning and Militancy,"[15] a pun of the Freud's *Mourning and Melancholia*, an article that navigates the tensions and co-constitutions between grief and mourning in the context of the AIDS Crisis. Though it would be

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[11] This framing may falsely imply they are separate, this usage provokes connotations that helps illustrate the spread of Garland-Thomson's methodology and engagement.

[12] As suggested with the previous footnote, I would be remiss to suggest these projects and structures are wholly distinct or that the readerships highlighted are completely separate. Rather this was a strategic decision for argumentative clarity.

[13] One may look to the questions offered in Joan W. Scott, "The Evidence of Experience." *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 17, no. 4, 1991, pp. 773–797. *JSTOR*, JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/1343743. I deliberately did not foreground this text as this passage already structurally by potentially being over-read to make analogous. The generalized scope of this text is useful, but magnifies some of the problems that arise in this lit review.

[14] This is noticeably vague partially a consequence of the above point, but also to allow an easier transition.

[15] Douglas Crimp, "Mourning and Militancy." *October*, vol. 51, 1989, pp. 3–18. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/778889.

difficult to summarize the intricacies of Freud's argument, he differentiates mourning as the

positive and constructive form to a negative and pathological melancholia.[16] One might read the

undercurrents of this distinction as formulative for the psychoanalytic roots of medicalized

therapy and the framework that Granek tentatively uses to distinguish grief from mourning.

However, it is worth considering if this oppositional definition and categorization itself serves as

an exclusionary and oppressive paradigm. Crimp tentatively engages with Freud, but his analysis

overly accepts a clear cleave between personal grief and public mourning. Discussing the flawed

advocacy of AIDS activists like Larry Kramer, Crimp argues that personal and public mourning

should be sutured to militant AIDS organizing. Before moving into a reading of AIDS activists

methodologies, Crimp describes his own "ambivalent mourning," when "while I was visiting my

family in Idaho, my father died unexpectedly. He and I had a strained and increasingly distant

relationship, and I was unable to feel or express my grief over his death. . ." (4). This passage

illustrates a series of complicated slippages between mourning and grief. One might read

Crimp's perceived inability to express grief manifesting as a supposed failure in to participate in

appropriate public mourning rituals. Yet, Crimp also articulates an interpreted inability "to feel,"

not just a challenge of public articulation. He effectively locates grief as both a possessed object

and social emotion, with authenticity contingent on public presentation. His description perhaps

accepts normative assumptions about how he should act in bereavement. Though Crimp acts

with a critical posture towards "Mourning and Melancholia," he implicitly appears to accept

some conception of both normative affective response and communication of bereavement,

assumptions that differentiate "Mourning" as the positive counterpart to "Melancholia" and a

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[16] Sigmund Freud, *Mourning and Melancholia.* Trans. James Strachey. *The Standard Edition of the Complete Pyschological Works of Sigmund Freud*. Volume XIV. (Hogarth Press: London 1914-1916).

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normative communication.[17] In one fluid movement his work suggests how distinguishing

mourning from grief can act as tenuously useful paradigm to politically organize even as it also

reinscribes them as distinct categories.

Critical theorist, Sara Ahmed's claims in "The Cultural Politics of Emotions"[18] help

address the complicated political deployment of emotions.[19] Ahmed's analysis unpacks many

aspects of the import of emotionality, with frequent awareness to directionality. She investigates

the marginalizing "fear of passivity is tied to the fear of emotionality, in which weakness is

defined in terms of a tendency to be shaped by others" (2). Ahmed then contextualizes this

marginalized relationship across the various valences of emotions referencing the body mind

split's contingency on the separation of sensation and cognition (5). In resistance to a

psychological reading of emotions, Ahmed moves to investigate how emotions serve to "create

the very effect of the surfaces and boundaries that allow us to distinguish the inside and an

outside in the first place" (10). Her argument complicates Crimp's reading that views his grief,

as solely a possession. Ahmed contends that people do not exclusively possess emotions, but that

the application of emotions, in part, distinguishes what is and is not possessions. Though Ahmed

will not be used directly in this thesis, her arguments about emotions can offer one avenue for

further exploration.

Returning more directly to literary criticism, several pieces of queer theorist Jasbir K.

Puar's work help to consider how racial boundaries are formed in the context of Arab American

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[17] This could be read in relationship the operating definitions and framework that sets up the first chapter.

[18] Sara Ahmed, NED - New edition, 2 ed., Edinburgh University Press, 2014. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/10.3366/j.ctt1g09x4q.

[19] Given the connections to passage above, it is important to clarify that grief does exist statically discursively as either an emotion or set of emotions.

and South Asian American experiences.[20] Though it would be difficult to summarize her work

fully, she charts several key conceptual frameworks especially valuable in context of *Koolaids*.

Though *Koolaids* was written before 9/11, Puar's argument, based on Foucault, that "producing

and quarantining" of the monster depends on "normalization and discipline" seems to resonate

with the text's frequent depiction of discipling (119). This framework serves as a starting point to

think through Mohammad's entrapment in the hospital. Further, the illustration of the production

of the terrorist as contingent on a "double-framed reality" of differentiation reads in parallel, but

in partial thematic oppositionality[21] to *Koolaids*. As the previous critics have argued, the texts'

juxtaposed images read plurality and similarity even as they are aware to difference.

One should be considerate of these imposed representational tropes, without letting this

perception become superimposed on reading. As mentioned earlier, *Koolaids* was written before

9/11 and often does not dialogue much with post 9/11 processes of racialization. This fact brings

to mind important sets of warnings that consistently arise when considering media by, about, and

for Arab Americans.[22] Like Puar, media expert, Evelyn Alsultany examines how frameworks of

media representations themselves, that often require Arab American's to justify themselves as

good citizens serve as processes of racialization.[23] Likewise, literary scholar Therí A. Pickens, in

discussion of pedagogy about Arab American literature, invites how limited understandings of

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[20] Jasbir K. Puar & Amit Rai, "Monster, Terrorist, Fag: The War on Terrorism and the Production of Docile Patriots." *Social Text*, vol. 20 no. 3, 2002, pp. 117-148. *Project MUSE*, muse.jhu.edu/article/31948. It is worth noting that the labelling of Arab American and South Asian American experiences does not fully capture what she discusses, especially as this article centers the complex processes of racialization that happened after 9/11 that both collapsed these distinctions and entrenched them

[21] See earlier argument of Salaita.

[22] These categories often overlap, but at times one could read them as distinct.

[23] Evelyn Alsultany, "The Prime-Time Plight of the Arab Muslim American after 9/11." *Race and Arab Americans before and After 9/11: From Invisible Citizens to Visible Subjects.* ed. Jamal, Amaney A., and Nadine C. Naber. (Syracuse University Press, Syracuse, N.Y, 2008).

identity can over-impose into narrow readings of Arab American literature.[24] Consequently, it is worth recognizing Puar's exploration of how Western Orientalist narratives depend on images sexually repressed Arab and Muslim men. Readings might attend to this bias without forcing all readings to exclusively be rejection of that frame.[25] In other words, it is useful to contextualize artistic works without deploying context in a homogenizing manner. This resonates with Amira Jarmakani's admonishment, on the subject of Arab American feminist aims, that "[s]imply advocating for a rejection of current stereotypical categories of representation and narratives would inevitably lead to the establishment of lead to the establishment of equally limiting categories of representation, and spending energy to create a counter discourse will perhaps unwittingly reify the false binary that already frames much of public understanding" (240).[26]

This warning advocates for a demystifying return to definition. This advice both usefully leads into this project's opening and predicts some of the challenges that arise from dispelling harmful myths about sentimentality and grief. Namely, sentimentality provides a useful way to entrance point for considering bereavement in the texts, but becomes limited when trying to build new connections. Hopefully, this thesis will begin to open new productive pathways to consider grief and mourning, not in strictly progressive terms.

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[24] Therí. A Pickens. "What's (identity) politics got to do with it?" *Arab American aesthetics: literature, material culture, film and theatre.* Ed. Therí. A Pickens. Routledge, 2018. 42-59. Print.
[25] Puar, Jasbir K. "abu ghraib and u.s. sexual exceptionalism." *Terrorist Assemblages Homonationalisms in Queer Times.* Durham: Duke University Press. 2007. 85-87. Print.
[26] "Mobilizing the Politics of Invisibility" *Arab & Arab American Feminisms: Gender, Violence, & Belonging.* ed. Rabab Abdulhadi, Evelyn Alsultany, and Nadine C. Naber. (Syracuse University Press, Syracuse, N.Y, 2011), 227-241.

Chapter One: Defining Sentimental Arcs

The definitions of grief and mourning relate in complicated, co-constitutive, and often contradictory ways. The Oxford English Dictionary defines the intransitive verb usage of mourning both as "to feel or express sorrow, grief, or regret" and to "to exhibit the conventional signs of grief for a period following the death of a person." When the direct object is oneself or vague, tensions arise. The definition reflects the distinction between the usage of mourning as a performative verb and a sensation associated with emotion. Yet, the latter definition erases this nuance and depends more readily on normative assumptions about grief. The Oxford English Dictionary defines grief as "[m]ental pain, distress, or sorrow. In modern use in a more limited sense: deep or violent sorrow, caused by loss or trouble." The definition indicates a complicated causality that contributes to identifying grief. Grief is both explicitly rooted in and recognized expanding from conceptualizations of what constitutes bereavement.[27] Grief has a simultaneously material definition connected to an event and a set of narrative expectations about what comes along with bereavement.

It makes sense to delve into some popular narratives of grief. One may start with the popularization of the purported five stages of grief: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. This tentatively offers a framework that assumes a linear progression of differentiable modalities, static emotions, and a fixed endpoint. The connection between each of these stages does not readily come to bear. Anger is the only stage in the list that is immediately an emotion. The others require an interpretative intervention to reach emotion. This ambiguous texture causes the interpretation of grief to be heavily wrapped up in bias that judges the

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[27] In this paper bereavement refers to material realities of a death, whereas grief and mourning discuss constructed interpretative attitudes.

usefulness of narrators' accounts. This representative atmosphere causes challenges to explicitly court grief beyond a pathological framework of psychoanalysis, [28] a frame that hinges on normative displaces of affect.

The simultaneous breadth and specificity of grief, both referring to bereavement exclusively and expressions understood as metaphorically similar, leaves definitions of grief tellingly vague. Undercurrents of psychoanalysis juxtapose grief as the negative, emotional counterpart to mourning. Defining mourning as the performance of grief transforms grief into a narrowly destructive practice. The distinctions and overlaps in definitions and usages between mourning and grief create and reify boundaries between the private emotional and the public logical. Investigating this dangerous differentiation requires denaturalizing grief as a universal referent.[29] Intervening in this dominant discourse requires attentively analyzing "how remains are produced and animated, how are they read and sustained" (Eng, KaNanjian, ix), rather than simply abiding by bereavement as an experience, status, or series of moments that confronts an absence of meaning.

Aaliya and Mohammad negotiate implicit sets of assumptions about their roles as narrators and the invisible norms, such as a medicalized trauma, that regulate the narrative arc of grief. The pathologizing of grief causes a tendency to overanalyze trauma's import. Part of the challenge of approaching grief hinges on the contested definition of trauma. The significance and effect of trauma is frequently vague as a result of the metaphorizing and analogizing as and with disability. James Berger, an American Studies scholar, critiques trauma theory's individualistic

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[29] Referent, as opposed to "experience," posits an uncertainty about what grief is and also counters the opposition between grief and mourning

perspective on causality. They then implicatively advocate reading trauma theory in a dovetailing manner with disability studies "[as] [t]rauma theory presumes an event that wounds so profoundly as to obscure the nature and cause of the wound" (Berger 181). This analysis of event places the ability to narrate and clearly recollect a past event as a parameter for healing trauma.[30] The interpretation of trauma as a wound validates and itself acts as a medicalizing rhetoric. This discourse begins to unpack how discourses manufacture trauma as simultaneously of limited scope and overdetermined consequences. Intervening in trauma theory with an approach from disability studies asks how knowledge produced about grief as exclusively a trauma limits possible modes of narration.

Invisiblized expectations of narration act as one force in a web that creates normative expectations about grief and grievers. The simultaneous co-constitution and differentiation between grief and mourning construes a static transition in narrative arc from one to the other. As explored above, medicalized discourses locate grief as a repository for and metonymy of trauma. This rhetoric constructs moving from grief to mourning as an expectation of bereavement. In this paradigm, mourning acts as a performative action and status to be achieved. Assumptions like these translate into narrative expectations about narratives of grief. An implied general audience,[31] navigate a grieving narrators' voice with attention to certain narrative touchstones. The perhaps overly simplistic five stages of grief, offers one place an audience could enter a text from. Though not wholly emblematic, the five stages provides a utile

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[30] For more discussion on the theoretical and at times oppositional positions of trauma theory and disability studies read. Berger, James. "Trauma." *Keywords for Disability Studies*. Adams, Rachel, et al., editors. NYU Press, 2015. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt15nmhws.

[31] Admittedly, questions of readerly response are not necessarily accessible, but discussing an implied audience dialogues with the expectations of conformity (or not) any writing often navigates.

consideration of narrative closure when it comes to grief. Specifically, an abstract grounding finish such as "acceptance." This endpoint becomes wedded to other theories of narrative, like the argument that plot flows in the linear order: exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and resolution. Tentatively wedding this idea to grief suggests that presumed endpoint, acceptance or something of that ilk, occurs in tandem with resolution. With attention to the undercurrents of medicalizing discourses already developed, this resolution requires that trauma of grief has been putatively resolved, and implicatively erased, in pursuit of normative function. These static start and endpoints understand grief both as the subject of tension and target of resolution. Attending to this dominant disciplining narration of bereavement requires examining narrative arc.

This section will examine how this process of resolution depends on and is mediated through sentimentality, as a genre and discursive modality. Each text provides a tenuous and abruptly rapid resolution. *Koolaids: The Art of War* builds an imaginative introductory and concluding space that allows a fulfillment of the presumed sentimental arc from grief to mourning, despite material obstacles. Similarly, *An Unnecessary Woman* allows Aaliya to temporally silence her skepticism to indulge a burdensome obligation to sentimental resolution.

Koolaids begins with a fanciful allegorical scene where the four horsemen of the apocalypse manifest to witness Mohammad's physical pain. The scene draws attention to biblical tropes of apocalypse in connection to contemporary queerphobic rhetoric. This linkage builds a seemingly imagined story connecting the contemporary period to past narrative traditions. The manufactured connection, despite vastly different material realities, emphasizes the text as a constructed space. The horsemen repeat refrains relating their own identities to the bedridden Mohammed until the final one exasperatedly interjects, "Fuck this good and faithful servant. He

is a non-Christian homosexual, for God's sake. You brought me all the way out here for a fucking fag, a heathen. I didn't die for this dingbat's sins" (1). The horseman's decrying interjection sharply shifts the passage in style and tone. The transition subverts expectations of a Jesus figure as forgiving and compassionate. Beginning with a subversion of Jesus exerts a heightened sense of awareness to audience expectations. The text upends expectations about Jesus as the epitome of compassion. His rhetoric dehumanizes Mohammad by weaponizing Islamophobia and homophobia. Slurs act as one piece of this. Slurs silence rhetorical force by imposing a limited negative image along lines of power. Slurs enforce and rely on dominant perceptions of particular groups of people, both exercising and reifying authority. This disciplining occurs in tandem with the general elision of Mohammad's voice in the scene. This simultaneity implies a relationship between the exercising of power on Mohammad and the invisibility of his voice. With awareness to narrative arc, the absences of Mohammad's voice tentatively function as a central conflict, to be resolved.

Even as the scene sets up future narrative arcs, it avoids delineating clear relational connections amongst characters and the form of narration. This withholding elicits a skepticism about the reliability of the four horsemen scenes. The scene builds Mohammad as someone to be looked at, a dynamic that subverts the expectations of the narrator's role as observer, voyeur, or participant. None of these roles are that of direct object. The tension generated by the opening probes the material and narrative conditions that have led to Mohammad being objectified: grammatically and medically.

The form that follows subverts reading Mohammad's position as exclusively subordinated. In a sharp transition the text closes the section with, "The irascible rider on the white horse leads the other three lemmings away. The hospital bed hurts my back" (1). In the

scene, "The" is the first word of every sentence, except the first. Repeating this article works to capture a specificity and a repetition. By beginning this way, the final sentence seemingly relates to the previous ones in structure, and implicatively also in content. The sentence breaks from this with every word, first illustrating a locale separate from the fantastical imaginings, then to a verb about bodily experience, and then to an owned body part. The final "the" also demarcates a transition to a first person narrator, a normative mode of narrating that when juxtaposed with the opening has a complicated illegibility. The repetition of "the" heightens the disjoint caused by shifting into a first person narrator. This effect combines with the transition to the next section across a page break to cause and express a temporal disorientation. The subject suggests an attitude towards time closer to epiphenomenal than linear. This passage illustrates an awareness to relationships between experiencing and narration without clarifying how the Jesus scene relates to Mohammad's process of narrating. Yet, the portrayal of power dynamics just sentences before still lingers. The opening of *Koolaids* foregrounds a series of material conflict only to disrupt the grounding narratological entry points, like who is narrating, how, and why. More centrally, the conflict illustrated in or demonstrated by the Jesus scene remains unarticulated and hanging.

By contrast, the opening of *An Unnecessary Woman* delineates clear connections and complications between narrating the past as mediated by observing, experiencing, and thinking about physical objects in the present. From the novel's opening, the narrator ties her mental and physical status to the act and purpose of narrating. She whimsically narrates: "I begin this tale with a badly lit reflection. One of the bathroom's two bulbs has expired. I'm in the midst of the evening ritual of brushing my teeth, facing said mirror, when a halo surrounding my head snares my attention" (1). The opening line relates a genre of narration to the optical associations of a

mirror. One way of reading centers the mirrors potential to distort. A mirror may be physically dusty, cracked, or poorly lit, but more critically, a narrator or onlooker strategically stresses certain observed characteristics. "Reflection" signals an awareness to the connotations of the mirror and the visually metaphorized process of thinking that Aaliya engages in during the passage. The use of "tale" and the focus on objects of waning light centers the misty visibility. Coupled with the multiplicities of "Reflection," as an act of pondering and a direct reference to the mirror, Aaliya's narration privileges reading the dim environment as an ocular metaphor for her storytelling. Her embellishments of poetic composition foreground tools for the audience to consider her complicated, and biased position as a narrator. The opening's form identifies her as a partially self-aware unreliable narrator, one prone to stylistic flourishes.

The openings of each text establish pervasive tensions and formulate how each narrative will engage with or deny narrative expectations and touchstones. *An Unnecessary Woman* foregrounds Aaliya's insecurity and skepticism about reflecting on the past. *Koolaids* denies access to a quick set of answers about the position of narrator in relationship to the narrative. The narrative centers the conflict between Mohammad's bodily objectification and his clear claims of bodily awareness. This simultaneity establishes a tension that could be addressed through the narrative arc. The manufactured atmosphere of the Jesus scene implies a continued conflict will persist in each scene of this type. The relegation of Jesus scenes to the present, in contrast with shifting temporal narrative frame, supports expecting this form of continuity. The opening of *An Unnecessary Woman* triangulates a more so-called traditionally unreliable, or at least selectively compositionally minded, narrator. But in both cases, the subjects and generators of tension remain omitted, avoided, and elided in the beginning, even though they manifest in Aaliya's simultaneous self-revision and indulgence as well as Mohammad's objectification and agency.

Sentimentality acts as one structure to access the imbedded conflict in each. The textual definitions ambiguously erected in *Koolaids* give a useful place to begin.

Mohammad's arguments with his lover Scott consider the reception of the writing he desires to produce. After several vignettes referencing the deaths of various queer men in the AIDS Crisis, Mohammad pensively considers a time when he contemplated writing about what he saw. His thoughts on the subject start with mistrust of his own writing. With this idea unresolved, he devises a book with explicit parallels to the opening of *Koolaids*: in plot, structure, and style, "where all the characters died in the beginning, say in the first twenty-five pages or so" (18). Centering his past thought process develops a causal connection between his artistic productions and witnessing his friends die. However, he leaves the type of relation un-enumerated, even as he appears to emotively revel in abstracting a grand creative project. The goals of his project are unstated. It stays unclear if he seeks to accurately depict what he witnesses or achieve another goal entirely. His imaginative work is quickly disrupted by Scott's criticisms, who expresses skepticism towards the availability, value, and accuracy of creative work about death. Scott's anxiety connects a status of being, sentimental, as an undesirable and unavoidable style of writing about death. Worrying about his lover's denials, Mohammad summarizes that "[Scott] said one could rarely write a book about death without being sentimental. He thought only Danielle Steel could write a book about the ravages of the AIDS epidemic and get away with it" (18). The phrase "being sentimental" reads as a mood incumbent on the process of writing about death and an interpretive description of a style of writing. This form of writing is differentially accessible based on positionality. Danielle Steele's access to

writing on death during the AIDS Crisis depends on a number of factors,[32] which Scott leaves partially ambiguous. "Ravages," as a word associated with putatively natural and extensive calamity, juxtaposes to the mundanity and casualness of "get away with it." Though the specific features that mark Steele to Scott remain not fully explained, she noticeably does not read as a figure culturally associated with the material consequences of the AIDS Crisis. Whether this division is real or imagined, Scott seemingly argues that she can access this subject and style precisely because the epidemic is understood as distant from her. The successful access to "being sentimental" firmly rests on understandings of particular narrators, which is noticeably dependent on their social privileges. The juxtaposition belies a narrating authority dependent on emotive sensation, even as the scope of "ravages of the AIDS epidemic" portends a scale supposedly oppositional to emotion.

Scott uses sentimental as a pejorative. Scott's use of "sentimental" remains complicated because the term holds a primary definition based on expressing emotion and a tertiary significance as a genre label. The sentimental genre partially relies on displaces of affect as unique incidents of emotion. Paralleling the constructed naturalization of grief, literary critic M.H. Abrams argues that "[t]he novel of sensibility, or sentimental novel, of the latter part of the eighteenth century similarly emphasized the tearful distresses of the virtuous, either at their own sorrows or at those of their friends; some of them represented in addition a sensitivity to beauty or sublimity in natural phenomena which also expressed itself in tears" (Abrams 283). This definition emphasizes sentimentality as a performative act. The narrator, as a distant and alos hyper present voyeur, transforms a situation into a personal moral test of virtue. This framework

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[32] One might look to her status as a wealthy white woman, accredited author, or as a culturally marked figure known to write sentimental fiction.

is deceptively complicated as the authority laden voyeurism of a narrator hinges on legible

performance of emotion. There persists a tension between performance and witnessing, as

putatively mutually exclusive, but actually co-defining terms that are hard to distinguish

materially or discursively.[33] This form assumes emotions can be meaningful quantified or

discretely identified. Sentimentality relies on and enforces similar assumptions that differentiate

and connect grief to and from mourning.

Grief and mourning govern the reading of Scott's anxiety. He is concerned principally

about the positioning of the narrator in discussing death, and how that does disservice to

adequately engaging subject of discussion, in this case the AIDs epidemic. An imagined book

written by Steele seems a clear exploitation, but Scott only partially differentiates her from

Mohammad's book project. His argument implies that the goal of writing about death on such a

macrocosmic level innately has negative consequences regardless if they may be closer to the

situation, like Mohammad. Given his tone, he appears to believe that writing on the concept of

death in general, particularly when wedded to the scope of the AIDS epidemic, becomes a moral

referendum on the narrator's ability to express appropriate grief in witnessing "the ravages of the

AIDS epidemic." Given the extensiveness of death during that epoch, this narration almost

unavoidably transforms into a performance decoupled from ones' own self knowledge and

experience. In other words, grief transitions to mourning.

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[33] John Beverley, "Anatomía Del Testimonio." *Revista De Crítica Literaria Latinoamericana*, vol. 13, no. 25, 1987, pp. 7–16. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/4530303.
Though I avoided direct engagement with the genre, modality, and/or narrative form testimony, I think this field of studies offers a potentially useful way to approach authority derived from witnessing and performing.

A perceived sentimental style works to enforce clear distinctions between mourning and grief. Sentimentality moves at the intersections of binary societal divisions of social spaces. Literary critic, in defining sentimentality, June Howard argues that "[this] term will remain charged and complex so long as our maps of the self and the world are divided between public and private, reason and emotion. . . swings between the social and the subjective" (Howard, June). As Howard's warning suggests, discourses locate sentimentality as moments of hysteric emotion. This act of identifying enforces imbedded distinctions, like the supposed divergence of feelings from reason. The distinctions suggest sentimentality as a framework depends not just on the perception of hysteric emotion, but also on the perceived transformation to rationality. Thus, sentimentality develops procedural narratives that do work on the presumably converted narrator and on the audience.

Scott's comment posits a perceived homogeneity of sentimentality that elides the complex features within the genre and modality. Even in his dismissiveness, Scott recognizes sentimentality as a political tool disguised as an apolitical one. His awareness to this, suggests an attempt at negating sentimentality rather than investigating it. Mohammad does not appear particularly convinced by Scott. His attitude makes sense considering Scott hardly explains his critique. Mohammad juxtaposes Scott's rejection with his lover's quick move towards accepting his narrative (19). This positioning undermines Scott's criticism. Still, Mohammad does not take a stance. The narrative leaves Mohammad's feelings about sentimentality as an unresolved tension. Consequently, sentimentality does not necessarily appear discretely in Mohammad's act of narrating.

Expanding this sense of narrative progression to grief considers how sentimental depictions of grief discipline by progressing to the supposed resolution of narrative tension.

Within this, sentimental resolutions happen in discrete sections and expansive arcs. In either situation, the objects of resolution can be difficult to identify. *Koolaids* and *An Unnecessary Woman* each blatantly manufacture discrete concluding scenes that offer tenuous resolutions for the tensions in the immediate scenes and novels as wholes. In *An Unnecessary Woman*, Aaliya explicitly engages in this production, while *Koolaids* has a less clear agent.

Aaliya's narration of her healing response to the destruction of all her translations, arguably her life's work, implies a far more confident temporary embrace of sentimental narrations of grief than done by Mohammad. In the final sections of the book, Aaliya lets in three neighbors in her tenement that she had quietly observed, briefly interacted with, and shyly avoided throughout the novel. They invade her home and notice the destruction of all her translated books, a life's work she had hidden from them. After continual verbal probing, she proceeds to shyly share parts of her life that had defined her relationship with the audience. In witnessing the help of her friends, Aaliya describes a sudden, and arguably performative, change in attitude about the situation. Quickly transforming she narrates: "My apartment is a hellish mess, damp boxes and loose sheets of paper. . . . The crazy witch is right in a way. This destruction is an opportunity to break free from the rules I've set for translating, or from some of them, at least. Maybe I can translate a book written in English for a change. . .If English and French are the limits of my language, the limits of my world, then still my world is infinite" (289-290). The passage progressively reduces Aaliya's perception of negativity or doubt, eventually moving to an imagining of boundless possibilities. The apparent textual impetus for any of this change seems tenuous at best. Her change in attitude appears spurred on within the revising done by stream of conscious narration. The barrage of advice offered by her newfound friends seems imbricated in this instance of catharsis, however real or imagined. Aaliya's self-

doubt and skepticism exists here, but is subordinated to a desire to tell a compelling narrative of transformation. It remains unclear how much Aaliya believes in her temporary catharsis or if she willfully, or not so willfully, indulges what she imagines audience's expectations to be about a compelling story. Without answering this question, the passage demonstrates a sentimental transformation from putatively hysteric grief to supposedly controlled, constructive mourning.

Depicting the tentative resolution in *Koolaids* is more challenging as the text allows less space to the resolution. Reading the end of *Koolaids* requires first attending to the mood developed in the latter half of the novel. The rising action suggests skepticism towards the possibility that Mohammad's situation with grief and all of his other entanglements will be resolved. This seems especially the case as narrative benchmarks like Scott proceed to drop out. In his place lies understated anecdotes that span an increasingly erratic amount of time and space. For example, an unnamed narrator mechanically gives an account of his mercy killing: "Sleep was almost impossible. He would sit in front of the TV watching talk shows. I killed him" (210). The passage describes the atmosphere when Mohammad kill Scott. The arguable climax of the novel leaves the characters unnamed. As a detective, one can glean from the narrator's voice and references incrementally that passage represents the killing of Scott. This absence of naming privileges reading formal connections with other passages rather than plot details. Parallel to their earlier conversation about writing, the passage rapidly transitions from a statement about the man's habits to a brief statement. The text juxtaposes seemingly insignificant details with the severity of intimately killing someone. Here, the text does not directly attend to the import of "I killed him." This tentatively communicates a rupture or stylistic break. The style invites a parallel comparison to the similar tension elicited earlier, but the formal component omits how the tone deviates significantly in each passage. The comparisons can potentially elide

31

a critical distinction, the example later in the text centers the trauma of killing Scott, whereas the first example charts a more ambiguous bereavement.[34] Focusing on the later example, within the scope of trauma theories understanding of healing grief and trauma, it seems unlikely that the tension brought to bear will be resolved thirty five pages later. This attitude primes a skepticism, when the conflict may appear to be too neatly resolved.

The novel's end ventriloquizes a compressed manufactured sentimental arc in the Jesus-like horseman against the ambiguous final words of Mohammad. Given, the Jesus-like horseman's cavalier and dehumanizing attitude towards Mohammad, his final acceptance of Mohammad appears unexpected. After commencing the final section with the same words of the opening, *Koolaids* states: "The rider on the white horse says, "I love you, Mohammad. The propitious rider on the white horse leads us away. I die" (245). The rider's words resolve the scene's tension, the expectation that the rider will reject Mohammad right before his death. The rider's unexpected compassion towards Mohammad subverts this expectation. Yet, in doing so the text fulfills the narrative expectations of resolution amongst alienated characters that had been set up in the beginning. A change has occurred, not just because Mohammad dies. Unlike the end of *An Unnecessary Woman*, it is difficult to understand what the text argues is the object of change. In an *An Unnecessary Woman*, the audience can understand Aaliya has a provisional change in self-perception and friendship. At the end of *Koolaids*, there lies a dearth of easily accessible tools to interpret the developments in the end

By ending with a parallel and chronologically similar place as the beginning, the conclusion emphasizes questions about what has changed and what remains. These questions

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[34] The unresolved tension in these readings will be returned to in this thesis' third chapter.

arise about form and content. In *Koolaids*, the ending's abrupt transition into a declarative sentence without obvious connection parallels earlier passages. The ending's liberatory and compassionate acceptance of Mohammad occurs shortly after the fantastic Jesus-like rider dehumanized Mohammad as a "non-Christian homosexual." Yet, this same person supposedly provides Mohammad a sense of community in his last moments. Regardless, of the reality of the Jesus figure's material existence, this scene acts as an intervention in the dominant skepticism throughout the text towards the possibility of resolution. The skepticism towards the possibility of resolution seems pronounced given the style, trauma, and material conditions. However, what resolution has been delivered remains vague. As fictive, fabricated, or imagined the end hardly changes material conditions and ends with a bleak death of Mohammad. But, even the possibility of reading hopeful emotive, intellectual, or personal changes for Mohammad seems resisted by the text's ambiguity. One might point to the ruptures and silences as evidence of a pervasive trauma that makes a linear resolution. Identifying trauma does not navigate trauma's textual texture. The argument that identifying trauma counts as complete analysis, implicitly homogenizes all trauma as the same or of equivalent narrative consequence. Despite depending on tension to function, the sentimental arc leaves what constitutes tension vague and undefined. In a sentimental framework it is unclear if the challenges Mohammad grapples with are resolved or the challenges he presents to narrow views of narrative theory.

The end of *An Unnecessary Woman* provides a clearer tentative resolution. By the end of the novel, Aaliya has represented and omitted large swaths of her life. *An Unnecessary Woman* presents several strands of severe trauma related to grief, particularly that of Aaliya's closest friend Hannah. The loss and simultaneous public discovery of her work represents an experience of grief potentially analogous to other threads of her life, and particularly privileged ones of

33

trauma. By expressing catharsis about finding new meaning after the partial destruction of her translations, it could be easy to read this as a broader positive acceptance of bereavements throughout her life. Making this connection obscures the tentativeness that pervades the novel's denouement. She ends at a period of waiting and uncertainty, but she builds to this moment with grand imagining. This is not to deny a radical change might have happened, but rather the import of the moment should not be over generalized. This partially happens, because a sentimental arc of grief has been condensed into fairly few pages within the potentially wider arc. Arguably, Aaliya permits herself this hopeful interpretation given the stress and trauma of the moment, an attitude that could be over generalized across the novel.

The conclusion of *An Unnecessary Woman* allows for a tenuous sentimental resolution similarly uncertain to the end denouement of *Koolaids*. These ending leave unresolved questions about the narrators' and texts' attitudes towards these resolutions. The uncertainty could both represent a hopeful doubt or a manufactured withdrawal. The ambiguity partially depends on the fact that the endings signal a resolution is happening while leaving the object and mechanism of resolution unclear. The endings indicate character transformation by finishing in similar material conditions as the beginning, but with changed projected attitudes of each narrator. Aaliya and Mohammad each reach a form transcendence, but the question remains, what status this transcendence opposes.

Chapter Two: Resisting Sentimentality with

Meta-Narration

In the previous section, I went incrementally through the interrelated, overlapping, but also distinguished definitions of grief and mourning. Moving from there, I established how trauma theory often figures centrally in conceptualizing narratives of grief. Acknowledging this tendency, I explained why this thesis will intervene, or at least complicate, readings informed by trauma theory with an approach towards disability studies that disrupts psychoanalytic binaries of reason and hysteria that encode differential agency. Using this framework, I read how the genre and modality of sentimentality tentatively appears in the narrative arcs' respective resolutions. I read this in both the immediacy of each scene and how they connect and align with the opening to form an overarching narrative arc.

This approach raises questions, including what tension has been resolved, what the object of resolution endures, and if the resolution seems legitimate or believable, within the textual evidence. Even if each text's concluding moments flag the existence of resolution, ending in similar material spaces and parallel emotive places, they offer little to clarify the objects of resolution. This ambiguity seems partially because each concluding segment questions its own veracity, but also because the objects of resolution seem entangled with the issues of sentimentality for discussing bereavement. Remembering the putative arc suggests grief itself might be one object of resolution. Centering grief as analytic anchor makes sense because the conations of the term are wedded to perceptions of unique displays of emotions. Moving with this analytic helps address the sense of resolution that comes coupled with lack of material

change.[35] Further though, the narrators invite this analytic as they critique their form of narration when discussing their personal bereavement. Specifically, they focus on how their description of grief fails to capture their experience of grief.

Simply identifying sentimental arcs from grief to mourning elides the undercurrents and explicit resistances to this framework within each text. Each text preoccupies themselves with the expectations held about the account of the narrator. By voicing explicitly voicing the tension between sentimental narrations of grief and the actual experience, they clarify and resist the burdens of normative narration placed upon them.[36]

The early sections of Aaliya and Mohammad's expositions imply their anxieties about narrating grief. Mohammad speaks around the issue by explicitly discussing the mistrust of his writing, while Aaliya revels in thinly veiled false comedy. The narrators unpack these tensions more explicitly in the context of grief, after a passage of time. Mohammad does after a few paragraphs later, with a self-critique consistent throughout, while Aaliya builds to a unique revelatory set of self-criticisms that disrupt her previous narrations.

Mohammad's description of his own insecurities ground the function of the form. Much like the opening scene, the first several sections chart a complicated relationship between the written text and the agent dispensing it. The sections shift rapidly in form, location, time, style, and syntax. Still, a choppy syntax and style predominates throughout much of the novel. Mohammad's clearly voiced feelings partially depart from the disorienting style, but

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[35] It is noticeable here, that part of what is it stake in this theory is that the endings complicate purported cleaves between the emotional and the material
[36] Given the unique characteristics of these explicit meta-narrations, it makes sense this chapter will delve into longer passages that seem to run against the grain of sentimental arcs.

implicatively match the disruptive effect the writing style had built. After describing several deaths of friends and lovers, Mohammad worries: "I wish I could write better. I have never been able to write anything because I don't trust my writing. I have had many ideas which could not translate well into painting. I wanted to write them down. I never really did" (18). His concerns offer one of the clearest articulations of how the audience can confide, or not, in his writing. The writing complicates the typical triangulations of trust that typically govern relations to narrator. Rather than placing himself as in control of his idea, Mohammad complicates the perception of agency he has over his writing. Likewise, the content of his ideas remains understated in the passage and he never explicitly share if they are fictional or nonfictional. In either case, he hopes the writing process is a space of replicating pre-imagined ideas, ones that he believes he can own, even if they do meet his standards of communication. Regardless of whether his ideas are fictional or not, it becomes difficult for the audience to fully align with his presentation of events. At the same time, this unreliability is not caused by malicious intent, but a, perhaps inconvenient, disclaimer. His disclosure subverts the narrative expectations that desire to triangulate a form of narrating place.

Unlike Mohammad, Aaliya tentatively fulfills narrative expectations by locating herself as a trustworthy narrator prone to editorializing. In a parallel place to Mohammad's distrust of his writing, Aaliya dramatizes the funeral of her husband. As a site that might be a peak location where mourning and grief converge, Aaliya considers the significance of her husbands' dead body as an artifice and a potential figure of tragedy. Aaliya blithely jokes in an extreme allusion: "He had died with an erection that would not relent, priapism in the final throes, an irony worthy of Svevo. In death, Eros triumphed, while in life Thanatos had. My husband was a Freudian dyslexic" (15). Aaliya does not move on to complicate her reading of the event. With the

pastiche of several influential artists, her reference may be partially inaccessible. Though there's a way that reading the comic irony depends on knowing about the basic theorizing of Freud, without this knowledge, an audience can still glean Aaliya's tendency to rely on references to interpret an event and communicate her interpretation to an audience. The passage also moves between several references without directly digesting any. As the materiality of the situation addresses witnessing personal, albeit with an estranged, death, this example serves as particularly illustrative of how Aaliya's textual voice gleefully distances herself from a complicated situation. Aaliya's dramatizing attitude more easily maps onto narrative expectations, even if the pastiche style reads as unique.

By contrast, Mohammad vacuums out his seeming proclivities towards exaggeration. The text's elision of time and shift in place juxtaposes Mohammad's understated voice[37] with his surroundings. Mohammad's temporal omissions within his own narration amplify this confusion. He frames seeing the death of his friends during the AIDS Crisis as the impetus for his book project. He speaks with imbedded stylistic tension: "When I started seeing my friends die, I wanted to write a book where all the characters died in the beginning, say in the first twenty-five pages or so" (18). His style can deceptively connote a consistent under-statedness throughout. Yet, the latter half shifts to dismissiveness. Recognizing under-statedness as a form, requires perceiving a disjuncture between content and form. As one might privilege the subject of death as extreme, the passage's first and second clauses describe broad passages of time that one might read as a set of repressed memories. Reading in this way hinges on interpreting a deviation from implicit norms of narrating bereavement. As the past participle "started" references a static beginning and the present progressive verb "seeing" a progression, the passage invokes the

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[37] That had begun in a complicated place of silence, beginning close reading in Chapter 1.

linearity of events incumbent in sentimental arcs. Yet, the combination of the casual "say" and

"or so" about time disrupts the temporal conventions of a sentimental arc. The tension also

suggests how Mohamad's voice has vacuumed out his tendency towards dramatic exaggeration.

Unlike Aaliya, Mohammad's writing voice is regularly understated. He can also bask in stylistic,

potentially editorializing, flourishes like Aaliya. With this context, this passage, which

tentatively reads as an artistic statement of intent, holds a tension between his oppositional

modes of speech. His voice in the first half adheres to a sentimental arc, even if it withholds the

temporal conventions and touchstones. He still moves from witnessing, grieving, to a discrete

constructive task, mourning. One could read the next passage as a flippant dismissal or

undermining of the sentimental narratives' integrity. I would argue this subtle tonal shift and

general compression of time indicates an unresolved ambiguity, rather than a firm position of

rejection.

The passage that quickly follows foregrounds his anxiety on sentimental arcs of grief

more explicitly. As the earlier passage suggests, Mohammad has a discomforting confusion

about accurately representing what he has witnessed. He feels a set of obligations, ones made

invisible by the compression of "when I started. . .," in his writing. This passage does not clarify

the goals of his proposed form, but rather just his stylistic conventions. The passage makes

ambiguous as much as it clarifies. He only further confuses the purpose behind the project as he

converses with Scott, just before sentimentality enters the text. Importantly, this entrance

happens ventriloquized in the selective privileging of Scott's critiques, a move which places

Mohammad's writing as a member in a broader discourse about the AIDS Crisis. Right before

Scott's criticism of sentimentality, Mohammad considers his first attempt at his project:

I thought it was great. I wanted to make sure sex and death were associated. Look at the words *shapes, sizes,* and *it always comes*. Sexual allusions galore. I showed it to Scott. He said I should stick to painting. I guess he thought my incipit was insipid. He did not like the idea of my book (18).

The passage opens with a statement of self-perception. Moving into a past wish, partially subjunctive, Mohammad primes an expectation for a future disruption. The use of italics for sexual allusions, seems fleeting given the sense that Mohamad's whims will become upended. The nature of the fantasy that Mohamad relishes in resists easy identification. He emphasizes stylistic features without purpose. This creates two levels of comedy. The audience recognizes he makes a series of sexual references in comic form, noticeable with the itemization of his list as "sexual allusions galore," but he withholds the in-joke, per say. One might read this as a jolly intervention in the interpretation of sex as the ultimate place of pleasure and death as a place of extreme pain. This could also be read as the way those two features were equated during the AIDS crisis. Each reading potentially works for his description. In either case, his style, on the surface, subverts dominant interpretations. The passage builds a sense that Mohamad's ideas will be disrupted. Scott's trite, questionably informed prognostication, admonishing not to write "a book about death," hardly resolves this tension. This passage reads as an explicit refutation of sentimentality, when contextualized by Aaliya's direct rejection of sentimental narration.

Near the novel's end, after having regularly embellished moments, Aaliya divulges a series of critiques about her narrations in a stream of conscious passage. Though the section disrupts her previous narrations, it seems clear she speaks with control. The aesthetic of stream of consciousness depends on attentive self-revision and connection. Aaliya's critique of herself about deployment of literature and direct navigation of grief gives this passage a uniqueness. As Aaliya often self-deprecates about her personality and avoids openly discussing grief, this

passage complicates her other discussions. After revealing the circumstances behind the suicide

of Hannah, a moment alluded to throughout, Aaliya returns to the epoch directly afterwards.

Returning to a past time, she reflects:

> After Hannah died, life became incomprehensible-well, more incomprehensible-
> than usual. I confess that I went through some hard time, hard years. I grieved-
> whether I grieved enough is difficult to gauge. . . I was a voracious reader, but
> after Hannah's death I grew insatiable. Books became my milk and honey. I made
> myself feel better by reciting jejune statements like 'Books are the air I breathe,'
> or, worse, 'Life is meaningless without literature,' all in a weak attempt to avoid
> the fact that I found the world inexplicable and impenetrable. Compared to the
> complexity of understanding grief, reading Foucault or Blanchot is like perusing a
> children's picture book. (253).

Aaliya's narration voices an internal tension as she repeatedly interrupts her own

thoughts to qualify, contradict, and dismiss them. The passage emphasizes this oscillating

conflict through the repetition of several words. The text flags these repetitions by utilizing

commas and dashes to signal interjection. This style of narration parallels the putative mystifying

import of the opening statement. Yet, the declarative structure of "life became

incomprehensible" encloses meaning rather than opening questions. This effect contradicts the

statement's purported confusion, hence the series of qualifying and mitigating statements just

afterwards. Contextualized by sentimental arcs, grief as an affective experience, and not

mourning, is the implicit subject of the opening. The passage critiques the assumption of

sentimental arcs' that grief is an unquestionable naturalized human condition that makes life not

understandable. Grief may be a challenging subject, but it alone does not make life

uninterpretable. The passage shows that grief functions as a socially constructed, and often

confusing, analytic framework, and not simply as a static subject of ambiguity and confusion.

The passage's criticisms of shallow synecdoche provide tools to skeptically reread Aaliya's characterizations of her bereavement experiences elsewhere. The latter part of the passage clarifies the skepticism that pervades the anxious tone of the first half. Though supposedly about separate subjects, Aaliya's disdain for her trite aphorisms about literature dialogue with "life became incomprehensible." She masquerades comforting philosophy about the innate value of books as a replacement for investigating the difficulties of bereavement. The condensed philosophical statements themselves do the labor of synecdoche: "Books became my milk and honey." It makes sense to read the former metaphors she made like, "life is meaningless without literature" as synecdoche for her investigations of grief's import. Yet, as the subject of grief is itself complicated these statements themselves only tentatively work to replace Therefore, the complication and revision of "life became incomprehensible" also disrupts Aaliya's use of references throughout the book. Her explicit rejection of the tenets of sentimental narration in this instant, upend its import elsewhere.

The passage's tension and anxiety about the sentimental declaration presents means to reread the concluding moments after Aaliya's supposed transformation. The previous passage rejected grief as the unique force that caused confusion in her life. This clarifies her relationship with literature. Literature functions as a part of her self-identity that she can conditionally overemphasize. She only recognizes this selectivity with critical attention when related to grief about bereavement where the trauma of the situation is more readily pronounced. She likely would not criticize her metaphorical usage of literature as milk and honey outside of the context of grief. This uncomplicated use of sentimentalized metaphor expressing transformation appears in the novel's end. Aaliya gloriously pontificates: "If I translate Yourcenar, I can be my own Hadrian. I can build my own city. I can be emperor for a year, ruler of the universe, arbiter of life

and death" (290). In moments like these, Aaliya relishes in the opportunity to embellish the significance of the event, losing her books and then changing her mind, as extensively far reaching in her personal development. She withstands this urge when discussing Hannah because the trauma of that experience of bereavement is more pronounced. Remembering the intervention of disability studies, that does not simply render her agentless in discussing the grief of that event, rather it changes the directness and extent that she intervenes in sentimental narration. This reading causes us to respect her rejection of the domination of sentimental arcs about grief as actually an act of agency in resistance.

Similarly, Scott implies his worries that Mohammad's personal narrative will be amplified, used, or co-opted as generalizable theory on the AIDS Crisis. Mohammad conceives of his grief in relationship to intimate partnerships and friends. The specificity of his witnessing is linked to the AIDS Crisis but could not hope to totally serve emblematically for the whole. The act of narrating regularly clashes with complexities like this. Creating a navigatable story can require moves towards legibility, which in the subject of bereavement often manifests as the discrete steps and stages of a sentimental arc. The stylistic tension imbedded in Mohammad's voice, between making a legible story and feeling unsure, disrupts his tentative accommodation of sentimentality. Though he has experiences with many who died from the AIDS Crisis, the concept differs as whole differs from his unique experiences as witnessing. This discrepancy manifests as a hyper awareness and self-critique of writing style, a tension that leads to a clash between his repressed and uncertain understatedness and evocative ideas. His seeming consistent uncertainty can read as an intentional withholding or as self-silencing. When he describes his "insipid" as "incipit," he utilizes noticeably self-aware alliterating words. The pensive "I guess," gives an attitude that can both endorse and undermine Scott's criticism by reveling in self-

deprecation or expressing confusion. He ambiguously positions the phrase as a self-deprecating agreement, a mocking recant, and a more ambivalent other. He expresses his uncertainty about Scott's advice even as he voices it. Mohammad leaves his feelings on the wishes and admonishments of Scott, both a lover and a partial representative of the AIDs crisis, unresolved.

The gaps, temporal, stylistic, and spatial, of *Koolaids* upend the potential for a sentimental arc. The end of the section that defines sentimentality and centers Mohammad's mistrust of writing, disrupts linear temporal expectations, in form and content. Mohammad reminisces: "He did like my idea of a book about Jesus meeting Mohammad- that is, the real Mohammad, the last prophet, not me. I never wrote that either. I miss Scott" (19). The section begins with a statement antithetical to the criticisms of the previous paragraph. The recurring interjections, signaled by commas and dashes, reminiscent of Aaliya's earlier passage, invites a staccato rhythm of self-correction and uncertainty. The first sentence's disagreement with the previous paragraph's argument supports reading the slow pace as tentative tone of revision in recollection. The section reads to complicate the articulation of earlier memories, as though Mohammad has momentarily realized he has made a regretful mistake. There is a rapid transition from this voice of correction to "I miss Scott." Right afterwards, the passage dramatically shifts again to a completely new narrator in Lebanon. This isolates the content of the declaration. The line break before and after the line visually supports this isolation. The brevity and levity of the statement implies the sentence's centrality, but also its lack of resolution. The statement's set up expects an explanation, one omitted or not directly apparent. The build's implied affective compassion invites a beginning of sentimental narration, grief, but also its withholding or elision. Missing Scott articulates a feeling towards a past person, a sentiment that appears to cause the halting of narration. The statement highlights emotion, uniquely, and then immediately ends,

implying some erasure. The choppy, stilted, and jolting innerworkings of each section upend the potential for reaching the clear linearities necessary for sentimentality.

This stylistic hanging rupture reframes the outright skepticism of *An Unnecessary Woman* about sentimental arcs of grief into sardonic critique. After a passage that does a queer rereading of Kant, the narrative moves into a confused interstitial dramatized space. In this scathingly self-aware area, a variety of the novel's characters' voices coalesce into an explicit critique and mimicry of sentimental, exploitative fictional depictions of the AIDS crisis:

> I love you, Mohammad. I love you, Scott. I love you, Scott. I love you, Kurt. I love you, Mo. I love you, Ben. I love you, Mom. I love you, Christopher. . . This is the ending of a book. *Longtime Companion* could have been called *The Waltons Do AIDS*. You're sick. Is this the last scene of a book? I think they are trying to get a movie deal, which is why we need a sentimental ending. I still love you anyway, Kurt. This is stupid. Is the book over? I love myself the way I am. (114).

The opening sequence's repetition of questions in a script form emphasizes it as a theatrically performative moment. The scene, in an ambiguous chronological and spatial locale, reinvites most of the novel's queer men to reminisce. Their statements are abbreviated and offer little resolution to the materiality of the AIDS Crisis for one another or the audience. This confusion is juxtaposed with references to movies and popular artistic productions that tentatively offer stability. Yet, the Greek chorus dynamic confuses the speakers' identities. The scene creates a pervasive sense of tension given the conflicting desires and focuses of the characters. Their ideas demonstrate a heterogeneity of queer identities that get flattened in the artistic productions they reference. The performative aspect mixed with explicit commodification causes a sense of exploitation. The characters' divergent attitudes get funneled through the demands of the scene, specifically the explicitly stated need for a sentimental end. Under this project's framework the end constitutes resolution, a desire clearly coupled with the characters' focus on monetary

compensation. In this explicit linking, the scene helps to clarify the consequences, previously described as "objects," of resolution that had previously been unclear. Namely, the passage putatively resolves the heterogeneity of queer communities into discrete commodified story. This process also requires fixing this into a linear narrative that can be recyclable and putatively representative of the whole community.[38] What the "whole" refers to partially remains unclear. As much as a sentimental progression clarifies, it also leaves vague as the subject of resolution is a person or group of people rather than a visible tension, which allows for the audience to selectively generate what has been resolved through the artifice of another a person. The lack of substantiality of sentimentality melds with the interpersonal strife of each character so that the sentimental performance quickly collapses into disarray.

The narrators' comic attitude towards valorized artistic work depicting the AIDS crisis, marks a resistance to erasing violence of normative, sentimental, cultural productions invested in enforcing norms. Sentimental narrations produce norms like linear stages. These narrations also have specific tropes in the context of AIDS such that the narrators can rename the *Longtime Companion* as *The Waltons Do AIDS*. Part of this statement's weight is that the particular cultural referent is almost inconsequential. Given the title and contextual build, one can imagine that the text and text's characters read the *Longtime Companion* as a superficial and self-congratulatory agonizing over the gradual death of a diseased or several diseased queer men who die from AIDS complications, without having to know the film's specifics. Similarly, though *The Waltons* refers to a specific USA familial drama, one can glean this aspect and imagine its general temporal import among white cishet US audiences, without knowing this specifically. An

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[38] Rather, than for example, plural queer communities. Especially, as even the term "queer" is tentative stand-in that can be used with a falsely universally applicability.

audience can understand attend to this given the preponderance of valorized and commodified sentimental narrations about AIDS and other violent watershed moments.

Still, the style's emphasis on interchangeability supports readings that do not readily address the specificity of the listed cultural touchstones. The usage of "do" as a verb does not immediately align with AIDS related illnesses as diseases. Being sick with AIDS is not something one does, or at least not something someone chooses to "do." This creates a disjuncture. The text's highlighting of cultural productions suggests "do" means producing work about AIDS. The brevity and banality of "do" when juxtaposed with the specificity and severity of the AIDS Crisis causes a tense imbedded flippancy. The general usage of "do" gives a sense of replicability, even when it discusses a subject meant to be intimate. Hovering on and opening on the repetition of "I love you" centers this tension. Each time the declaration refers to specific interpersonal dynamics, even though the wording continues in a seemingly same manner. The pervasive privileging of sameness both erases and highlights how "do" is being applied to a calamity. As a label, this event becomes understood as occurring to distanced, marginalized, and Othered subjects. This discussion represents the flattening of the AIDS epidemic as a digestible and replicable story not distinct from other pieces of marginalized histories. The text's criticism is both directly wedded to the specificity of the AIDS crisis and interested in exploring how this context becomes extricated. This form matches the content of critique, the assumption that a putatively universally accessible narrative is both creatable and desirable. To make this critique, the scene both must firmly be divorced from the particularities of the AIDS crisis and question the veracity of that supposed fragmentation.

Subliminally, this dynamic weds sentimentality to normative practices of narration under critique. Again, the normative practices of narration read as both specific to the AIDS crisis and

tentatively more generalizable. The explicit decrying of sentimentality locates it as part of and an example of the normative narrative forms rejected. This argument invites returning to Scott's initial use of the term. As he warns about the difficulty of "writ[ing] a book about death without being sentimental," his argument does not appear exclusive to the specificity of the AIDS epidemic. The preposition "about" indicates the narrative expectations that govern sentimental form. Sentimental form has a theory of knowledge that becomes transported to particular events. This move pretends that the specific event is the subject, hence, "about" rather than the theory of knowledge that sentimental tones enforce. As the next sentence suggests that "only Danielle Steele could write a book about the ravages of AIDS. . ." the recycling of the phrase effectively argues a metonymic relationship between the "ravages of AIDS" and "death." Scott's condensed argument effectively illustrates the collapsing work of language that sentimentality does. The material specificity that Scott and Mohammad observe has effectively been vacuumed away. The text deploys *Longtime Companion* in connection to *Waltons* as an example of how sentimentality works to collapse context. As much as sentimentality can be applied to discuss the AIDS epidemic, the object of resolution encompasses more and less at the same time. Sentimentality articulates a theory of knowledge that extricates a narrow slice of a larger discussion. Specifically, sentimentality assumes an issue can be resolved by reading about in and being emotional, per say. Effectively, this form attempts to resolve that specific issue, by obscuring it.

The obscuring of boundaries navigated by queer people invites an intervention of queer theory about aesthetics. Though sentimentality functionally acts to conceal distinction, a sentimental arc about grief depends on narrowly reading characters based on boundaries. The emphasis on interchangeability deceptively makes ambiguous rather than clarifying, so it makes strategic sense to reconsider this passage with incremental reference to the previous chapter and

48

An Unnecessary Woman. Remembering the complication of trauma theory with disability studies, the text also explicitly asks to criticize and consider sentimentality as a normative narrative about the AIDS crisis. In this intensely manufactured scene, the character's foreground the need to fabricate a sentimental end. This deinvizibilizes the narrative expectations governing how the scene becomes read. Meta-narratively the actors, characters, and narrators voice their frustrations with these expectations, which they principally relate to sentimentality. With reference to my definition of sentimentality in the context of grief, the characters' comically perform affective for one another, despite their general confusion. Effectively they are grievers, or in a stage of grief. Yet, achieving mourning remains inaccessible to them. This valorized position remains unattainable even when the scene takes the creative license to revive dead characters and stage a script. Even in a hyper aestheticized thematic absurd, a clean sentimental resolution, where the characters become constructive mourners, seems absurd. By coopting the dominance of sentimental narration, the scene foregrounds the inefficacy of sentimentality to grasp more complicated material aspects of grief.

The latter of this chapter centered *Koolaids* without much regard for *An Unnecessary Woman*. This is partially because Aaliya rarely meta-narrates and because exploring meta-narration requires direct attention to how texts self-define so that they can be re-brought together.

Koolaids' move to define sentimental resolutions as both dominant and inaccessible clarifies Aaliya's intervention later in the novel. The narrative development posits a sense that the circumstances behind Hannah's death will be revealed and there will be a direct coming to terms with that trauma. Yes, the circumstances behind Hannah's death arise, but Aaliya primarily complicates how she had previously discussed grief, both in regard to moments already mentioned within the text and ones beyond it. By complicating her past speech about grieving

49

Hannah, she reframes that subject and also disrupts the validity of her current claims. When the subject of Hannah dissipates on the surface, parallel questions about the accessibility to sentimental resolutions arise. Yet, contemporary material barriers strike less obviously in her case. The unarticulated and haunting aspect of Hannah's death suggests that access to narrating resolution hinges on absence of trauma. This imbedded argument, might imply why Danielle Steele's distance from the personal trauma in the AIDS crisis allows her access to sentimental resolution. Effectively, sentimental narration differentiates a subject of discussion into delineable narrative stages and distinguishes narrators based on how much trauma they have. However, this analysis potentially reinscribes trauma as a stable and homogenous category.

This chapter has identified sentimental narration as an invisible normative mode of narration specifically about grief, but also a category with more expansive consequence. Narrators like Mohammad and Aaliya are judged by conformity to these standards, ones' which are arguably inaccessible based on trauma's regulation of their voices. This analysis risks naturalizing trauma as an undifferentiated and homogenous experience. As argued earlier, it also falls into the pitfalls of rendering traumatized people as in a binary of agency or objectification. This partially lies in the privileging of trauma as a framework to describe narrations that do not conform to invisible standards. This analytic mode homogenizes trauma in the universalizing of it as an unquestionable universally pitiable experience. Though this chapter delineated the stakes of sentimentality and grief more clearly, it raises further questions about what sentimentality does and how and why it is accessed.

Chapter Three: The Theoretical Troubles of Sentimentality

The previous chapters discussed sentimentality and grief primarily in the context of a set of narrative expectations. This argument hinged on an assumed narrative arc of bereavement from grief to mourning. The previous sections demonstrated how each respective narrator momentarily complies and situationally resists this framework. The first section defined this narrative arc and then moved through its patterns in the text. The latter chapter illustrated how reading each text through the other illustrates the resistance of sentimental arcs about grief in each novel. The previous sections left trauma under explained albeit a potential reason as to why sentimentality is resisted. In this framework, trauma regulates access to sentimentality, where absence allows and possession prevents.

This section will complicate that theory by illustrating why sentimentality as a framework does not hold up to the scope of grief, when grief is not as readily wedded to trauma. This section will grapple with grief not as an example of trauma, but as a separate category entirely. The experience of witnessing and bereaving a loss is often interwoven to traumatic experiences, but it also encompasses distinct forms of ambiguity. Attending to this distinctions begins to open up productive conversations about defining grief not as a vague metaphorical repository. Doing this works, helps open up broader understandings of grief and grievers as well as allows more attentive investigations of death.

Specifically, sentimentality erases places in *An Unnecessary Woman* where grief functions parenthetically to Aaliya's narration. In these instances, grief detaches more readily

from trauma. Privileging these moments clarifies that the narrative form in each text is regulated

by trauma, even as it also complicates trauma. Rather than necessarily a singular event, trauma

can also constitute a series of events or an atmosphere. These features can have characteristics

difficult for trauma theory to discuss. In these spaces, Aaliya's remembrance about her father

conveys neither sentimental resolution nor anti-sentimental skepticism. The static deployment of

her father as a figure showing blurriness shows a wider variety of possibility for representation

of grief. Aaliya's perceived and material isolation allows her to interpretatively intervene as an

act of agency about her own grief. In style, content, and context *An Unnecessary Woman* allows

for a clearer parsing between grief and trauma, as often overlapping but distinct categories. They

are both part of the past, and inundated with the ability to narrate, but distinct. Whereas trauma

can refer to objects of the past made materially inaccessible by self-silencing, grief refers to the

shifting ambiguous interpretations of a past significant loss. Trauma can often amplify the

challenging elements of grief, but they are neither analogous not innately connected.

By contrast, the form of *Koolaids* connects the experiences of unique narrators,

regardless of material overlap, to build a perpetual emphasis on the travelling of linked grieving

and processing of trauma. In a scope where personal narration can be obscured by a cacophony

of voices, *Koolaids* can more tentatively work with sentimentality in explicit rejection.

Aaliya's first mention of her biological father centers an insecurity about inaccessible

memories. Of her family members, Aaliya's father appears most infrequently. Yet, she

introduces him first, just after detailing her initial experiences with translating. This past time

often serves as a bedrock for her verbalized self-conception. The passage establishes the

centrality of language in crafting identity, a clear point of anxiety for Aaliya, who works as a

once removed translator. Operating under a sentimental framework, one would expect mentions

of past death to either be unresolved histories generating extreme contemporary strife or resolved histories of constructive mourning. The tentative omission and abbreviation of discussing her biological father falls firmly outside of this dynamic. Ending with self-affirming confidence, Aaliya shifts into a juxtaposition of family history: "My father named me Aaliya, the high one, the above. He loved the name and, I was constantly told, loved me even more. I do not remember" (11). Names can serve as central part of self-identification. By placing herself as the grammatical object receiving naming, Aaliya expresses anxiety. The appositive underscores the purported significance of the name. Centering the title foregrounds Aaliya unsettled skepticism. Further, "constantly" juxtaposes the repetition of a supposed truth with a lack of material archive. The text emphasizes Aaliya's lack of affinity with her name's meaning in opposition to the passage just prior, which showed personal satisfaction in creatively translating. Yet, the passage neither explicitly denies the possibility of the name's significance being valid nor implies an opportunity for linear resolution.

To get to this interpretation, it follows to contrast with a *Koolaids* passage representative of the texts' divergent treatments of sentimentality. These passages can seem deceptively similar. Early in the novel, Mohammad also discusses grief and naming in the context of Scott's final words. Mohammad reminisces: "That first night he started calling me *Habibi*, which means "my love" in my native tongue. . . . He never used my real name. . . I had always assumed he found it difficult to pronounce. I was wrong. His last words before he took his last breath were, 'I love you Mohammad.' An impeccable pronunciation" (13). In a parallel place in exposition, Mohammad discusses the meaning of his name in context of its use. Like Aaliya's, the passage also ends with a brief declarative statement of fact. Yet, the potentially similar elements read with an inverted function. The memories discussed are all materially accessible to Mohammad,

the complication comes from how the moment persists in his memory as an unresolved interpretative change in their relationship. This lack of accessible memory depends not on lack of memory, but on absence of forthright time with Scott. This moment, forces Mohammad to reconsider his relationship with Scott, and also his histories of renaming and Anglicizing that took place for him in the United States. As a mostly discrete event with complicated import, this more cleanly reads as a trauma, unlike the histories Aaliya hears. *Koolaids* can offer a firmer rejection of sentimentality because it reveals trauma in a way more tentatively consistent with uncomplicated notions of narrating trauma.

Reading from this context, Aaliya's first mention of her father primarily implies an absence of memory not a navigation of repressed traumatic memories. A sentimental framework of narration, would predict that complications of the past, often trauma, have either been addressed and resolved, or not. In this yes or no schema, the narrator is either fully an agent or not. Aaliya reveals her father's life history in a manner that reflects her general lack of knowledge about the situation. After mentioning her father's death, at age two, she recounts the events of his life that slip between heard stories, uncertain conjecture, and documented factoids. At the end, she synthesizes the importance of the stories to her broader narration: "My father was barely nineteen when he married and twenty-one when he died, my mother a widow at eighteen. They were supposed to spend aeons together. It was not to be" (11). The adverb "barely," describing her father's age, connotes an innocence or immaturity of youth. When coupled with a series of significant life events, marriage and death, the passage portrays a rushed attitude, of both her narration and her parents' experiences. The mood of compression clashes with a past subjunctive sentence about a hyperbolic elongated futurity. The preceding declarative interruption highlights this tension by explicitly drawing in Aaliya's apparent dismissiveness.

54

Her editorializing voice acts to falsely resolve the imbedded tension. The declaration helps her

quickly move from her father's marital life and death to the story of her first divorce (12). This

allows her to draw thematic connections to another blurry father figure, her step-father, a person

who significantly influenced her first marriage. Her statement of deflated ambivalence marks the

passage with an act of narrative agency over the events listed, even if her father's life story

remains a discarded or largely unexplored history. Effectively, Aaliya's simultaneous agency and

unresolved past locates herself outside of sentimentality's binary of narrator agency.

Sentimentality also works as a narrative arc. Therefore, it follows to interpret the

progression and stagnation of Aaliya's grief about her biological father. Much later in the text,

Aaliya's biological father remains hazy and undefined. Aaliya's continued command over the

memory of her father as a static indistinct image, well suited for self-reflection, shows narrating

agency. The absence of narrative progression destabilizes the fundamental tenet of sentimental

arcs' travelling from grief to mourning. After revealing the death of Hannah and unpacking her

fallacious narratives about grieving Hannah, Aaliya considers her aging body in a mirror as

nondescript and unrecognizable. The faint image of her biological father serves as an abstract

anchor for her worries about herself. Aaliya's progressively perceives her appearance as dismal

and destroyed. She wonders if "I should ask my mother if she has a picture of my biological

father- must do so before she dies. I want to know whether I look like him. I must. I have my

mother's nose, which these day look like a scimitar buried in slain flesh. I try to reconstruct my

father's face, but nothing seems to work, of course. I was much too young. I may have seen a

picture of him at some point, but I have absolutely no idea" (255). The passage begins with a

personal admonishment produced by visiting her mother, an experience which also exhumed her

complicated grief on the death of Hannah. The proximity of these events highlights a correlation,

but not causality, between experienced mood and selective narration of memory. A sentimental arc resolves the causality as simply a fixed pathology of grief to be eventually cathartically removed.[39]

Investigating a parallel but diverging example in *Koolaids* will draw out the distinction. Aaliya's attempts to reconstruct the face of her father, serves as analogous for how narrating can serve as an intervening act of agency on a complicated material past. The import of her father as a specific person, remains subordinated to his fixed perfunctory role as blurred image. Though she does not have access to memories about him, she uses his image with some sense of interpretative agency. Scott's static rejection of Mohammad's creative ideas renders Mohammad as someone grappling with a complicated set of unresolved memories. Here, the static image of Scott's begrudging disapproval rejects the possibility of Mohammad achieving a so-called total resolution of his grief. Mentioning a completely different example from his first book idea, Mohammad discloses a reimagining of a modern gay Jesus: who is eventually killed dramatically in front of his father. In clear correlation to the end of *Koolaids*, Mohammad writes: "The book is written in the first person. It would be interesting to write, as the main character, the description of the knife stabbing me. I die. . . Scott did not like the idea. He thought it was obvious, axiomatic" (171). In reference to Mohammad's creative work, Scott generally acts dismissively. Unlike Aaliya's references to her biological father, Mohammad issues no control over Scott's voice. The novel's recycling of phrases throughout the novel illustrates this stagnancy and complicates any linear sense of narrative progression, especially when wedded to sentimental arcs of grief.

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[39] See introduction for Body Chapter 1.

Access to sentimental arcs of grief largely depend on absence of trauma, even if studies

of trauma deserve complication. Equating grief with trauma, as an example of rather than an

experience often wedded to, risks falsely homogenizing experiences of griefs, especially the

ambivalences. The arc of sentimentality neither works with Aaliya's biological father nor with

the death of Hannah. In the latter case, Aaliya explicitly rejects the possibility of reaching some

easy resolution about the effect of grief on her life. In the former, she does not even engage with

a sentimental framework. By contrast, *Koolaids* rejects sentimentality consistently. Without

erasing the specificity of each narrator and character, linking collective traumas offers less space

to read ambivalences. In isolation, aspects of Mohammad's grief could be read as ambivalent,

but this type of reading would clash with the text's mood throughout. Similarly, emphasizing

Mohammad's reflections as ambivalent would presumably run against the repetition of material

traumas and his narrating position itself. Mohamad's voice is mediated through his sickness and

progression towards death. A sentimental framework can be tentatively useful as an oppositional

foil to highlight the navigation of linked collective traumas.

Aaliya and Mohammad's respective experiences of betrayal contrast how form does and

does not relate their experiences to collective traumas. The narrative form of *Koolaids* allows for

reading Mohammad's filicide of Scott as potentially emblematic of traumas throughout the

Lebanese Civil War and AIDS Crisis. By contrast, the growth and exodus of Ahmad, a friend

from Aaliya's early adulthood, reads as a more isolated event in her life.

Without expected narrative touchstones, the aesthetic narratological norms of

sentimentality characterize the passage where Mohammad kills Scott as a place of trauma.

Throughout *Koolaids*, Mohammad mentions killing his lover and friend Scott. The most explicit

description occurs towards the end of the novel in a series of short stilted phrases that neither

identify Scott nor Mohammad. The scene separates two sections occurring in Lebanon. The first, narrated in first person, worries over identical hordes of Americans and the latter, by a seemingly omniscient narrator, focuses on the death of a taxi driver, Haj Omar, without much description beyond his profession. Despite the disparate contexts, death acts as a tentative place of relief parallel to mourning wishes expressed by the omniscient narrator towards Haj (210). Mohammad expresses his restlessness: "Sleep was almost impossible. He would sit in front of the TV watching talk shows. I killed him." (210). Being awake persists as a connection between Mohammad, Scott, and Haj. Though potentially deceptively straightforward in its triteness, Mohammad's narration leaves unclear who he refers to as insomniac. This ambiguous referent allows for multiple simultaneous readings. Despite the centrality of the moment to Mohammad's narration, he only describes a specific aspect of the situation: rest, in sparse evocative detail, which, again, can also refer to multiple characters. Privileging rest in context of killing, an idea centering the strain of embodied labor and not social ramifications, evokes a hallmark of narrating traumatic experiences. Mohammad privileges details that an audience might understand as incidental or irrelevant. This nonconformity with invisible narrative expectations codes Mohammad as struggling with repressed or withheld memories. Mohammad's previous frequent references to the import of Scott's death heighten the scenes brevity and the pervasive absence of identified people in the passage. Normative pressures wedded to sentimentality characterize this narration as indicative of unresolved trauma.

Similarly, Aaliya's description of Hannah's death diverges from sentimental resolved sites of mourning. Aaliya and Mohammad's respective feelings of responsibility about the deaths of their respective best friends govern their narrations. After revealing the circumstances of Hannah's suicide, Aaliya considers what she should have done. She carries this interpreted

burden into the present: "I blame myself. When I wish to feel better, I blame other people: her family. . . I blame Hanna herself. I blame me again. These memories-these memories make keen the pain that time has blunted" (249). Repetition has a stabilizing effect, as each reiteration acts as a reassertion of agency. This assertion of personal agency happens even while the repetition itself refers to fluid and seemingly contradictory interpretations. Aaliya's act of narrating on the subject articulates her agency in relationship to the challenges posed by bereavement. The stabilizing repetition happens in dialogue with deep feelings of insecurity that trauma potentially exacerbates.

Despite the parallels between these individuals' passages, the form of *Koolaids* connects disparate traumatic events thematically, while Aaliya constructs interpretative links between personal events. The enclosure of Scott's death within anecdotes from Lebanon draw thematic connections and differences amongst each. The following elegy about Haj, a Lebanese taxi driver, ends with "May he rest in peace," (210). This wish resonates with the rest that Mohammad and Scott desire. Mohammad's physical need for rest is literal, unlike Scott whose hopes match the utterances aimed at Haj. This longing, although of variate significance, connects similarities amongst these distinct situations. By contrast, Aaliya distinguishes personal moments of trauma by contextualizing them with varied points in her life. The brief final arc of Aaliya's friendship with Ahmad, a friend of hers during the beginnings of the civil war, reappears in contrast with extensive description about the death, grieving, and mourning of Hannah. Aaliya voices a tone of resignation towards the final realization of his conformity: "He and his cohorts seemed neither defiant nor ashamed, more resigned, their heads drooping like sunflowers. That was the last I saw of him" (250). Like the description of killing Scott, Aaliya's voice rapidly transitions to a sentence that amplifies the implications of the occasion. Though a similar shift

59

exists in both, Aaliya's turn more apparently addresses the event's emotional consequences for the relationship to Ahmad she had previously constructed. Still, the description's brevity coupled with Ahmad's gives the appearance that Aaliya leaves much unspoken or elided. The distinction among the treatments of these events implies that though trauma is not necessarily quantifiable or homogeneous at all, form influences how texts can privilege reading trauma as individual or collective.

Koolaids not only connects trauma in discursive links made, or not, but also in material connections. Her feelings of guilt over inaction differ from Mohammad performing Scott's death wishes. Despite these differences, responsibility governs Mohammad's limited verbalizations about the death of Scott. Imbedded between two sections about Samir, Mohammad attempts to speak: "I struggle. The words come out in Arabic. 'I killed him.' 'Let's go home.' My sister leads me out by the hand. I weep" (132). Intransitive embodied actions without explicit objects enclose the passage. The second sentence and third sentence imply that "struggle" refers to the act of speaking, to the point that Mohammad does not have agency in the act itself.[40] Mohammad acts as the invisible subject of the second sentence, implying that he does not have control over the utterance. Further, the dialogue between Mohammad and his sister relies on brief statements of fact. They appear to talk past each other rather than with one another. The stilted dialogue emphasizes the way that the subject of discussion, performing a filicide, seems unapproachable or unspeakable. The travelling of "I killed him," as the concluding phrase of the scene depicting the atmosphere of Scott's death, implies how the interpretative phrase both grounds Mohammad's knowledge of the event, haunts his recollection, and renders unspeakable pieces

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[40] For an argument about how, native language serves to differentiate the significance a particular moment read. Syrine Hout. "Homesickness and Sickness of Home" pg 38.

beyond statement of fact. This travelling phrase encompasses a material processing of trauma that Mohammad and his sister collectively navigate, a theme throughout the book. That event is innately and unambiguously tied to the structure of the AIDS epidemic. By contrast, Aaliya rarely negotiates trauma with other people on subjects beyond her inner family circle. Mohammad and Aaliya's personal understandings about responsibility anchor how they approach grieving Scott and Hannah.

The texts' respective material links lead to convergent conceptions of the agency in narrating grief. In each, Aaliya and Mohammad have ambiguous amounts of agency in narrating their past. In each, they have narrative command, more explicitly in Aaliya's case, but still do not operate in a dynamic of agency legible under a sentimental framework. Aaliya's separate explorations of traumatic experiences associated with grief appear concurrently to inform one another. Revealing her final encounter with Ahmad happens just after she reveals the way that the shifting guilt about Hannah's death travels in the present. She also connects this instance to the understanding her body in relationship her dead biological father. Reading this connection with awareness to the psychoanalytic aspects of trauma would argue the centrality of an unspeakable event as networked intimately to a person's process of self-identification. By finally disclosing and narrating the circumstances of the death of Hannah, Aaliya can move to discuss other aspects of her life. This reading ignores more complicated questions of agency in Aaliya's act of narration. Her explicit interventions in her younger sentimental narrations about Hannah's death show an awareness to the pressures of narration levied onto her. Yet, her engagement with the past is mediated by physical interludes where she has experiences in the present and

refocuses on moving in the world.[41] She neither acts as a passive victim of repressed memories or a completely controlled agent of narration. *Koolaids* allows for a similar ambiguity about narration within the scope of Mohammad's. AIDS related disease and hospitalized medicalization frequently figure in dialogue with the narrative Mohammad presents. The allegorical image Mohammad interacts with at the start is interrupted and concluded by his assertion that, "The hospital bed hurts my back" (1). The text leaves open how the audience might read the agency of Mohammad in his surroundings. Though not a binary, the images might serve as potentially allegorical imaginings or a haunting delirium. A unique example, later in the text, builds this tension explicitly after developing the history of Kaposi's Sarcoma. In a matter of fact, concluding, and abrupt aside Mohammad states, "I did contract toxoplasmosis and I fucking hate cats" (182). Thematically related to the historicizing of the passage, Mohammad describes his own AIDs related illness. Yet, the seemingly tangential qualitative assertion about cats builds a stream of conscious style at odds with the measured historical constructing Mohammad does only sentences prior. The question of how much this demonstrates the agency, or lack thereof, hinges on what normative assumptions of narrator credibility the audience holds. Interpreted agency partially relies on the demonstration of knowledge, and what constitutes valuable knowledge is heavily contested.[42]

The texts' complication of agency illustrates the limited utility of the framework of sentimentality for Alameddine's fiction. The term carries a series of assumptions not always well

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[41] Pages 235-238 serve as a useful example of how the revelation of the circumstances of Hannah's is mediated by Aaliya's family visit and then observing, walking through, and feeling through Beirut.

[42] For an analysis of how the characters of *Koolaids* contest medicalized sites of knowledge by advocating their embodied awareness: Therí A. Pickens, "Feeling Embodied and Being Displaced: A Phenomenological Exploration of Hospital Scenes in Rabih Alameddine's Fiction." *MELUS*, vol. 38, no. 3, 2013, pp. 67–85. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/42001239.

born out in the text. As discussed in the first two chapters, it assumes characters can clearly travel from grief to mourning, while still defining the terms as co-constitutive. This framework provides a useful backdrop to organize the texts' skepticism around. However, as navigated in this chapter, sentimentality assumes, reductively, that grief is an example of trauma. As this chapter investigates, the texts have different treatments of trauma when connected with grief. Their discussions tentatively overlap if one exclusively looks at the relationship between Mohammad and Aaliya's connections to Scott and Hannah, respectively, and ignores how these relationships are contextualized by other instances of grief for these characters. Expanding the narrow frame further, show how sentimentality ignores stylistics connections drawn between specific moments and other places in the novel. This move to complication asks serious questions both about the homogenizing analytics of grief and trauma, which, in part, show some of the harmful vestiges of psychoanalytic theory. These unsettled can both be usefully limited to discussion of Alameddine's texts, grief and trauma in literary theory in general, or moved to questions about the theoretical assumptions of the complicated agency invested in narration.

Conclusion

The last section ended with several subjects that could be further explored, especially given the unresolved questions from the last sections. This conclusion will discuss one potential avenue for further exploration in Alameddine's fiction.

Parsing grief and trauma as separate terms and categories, though often interwoven, more rigorously from the beginning likely offers a more generative approach to *Koolaids* and *An Unnecessary* Woman. By forcing the analysis so closely to the narrative structures or terminologies each narrator explicitly resists, perhaps as partially representative of each of their novels, the analysis perhaps foolhardily left little space for each text to brief. Rather than simply rejecting reductionistic and harmful views of grief and mourning, as oppositional and binaristic, this thesis could have looked to see how these texts constructed useful ways to consider grief and mourning. This problem perhaps reveals the issues of being too wedded to intervening as a primary methodology.

Several of the concerns raised by scholars about the frequently limited ways that Arab American literature becomes read comes to mind.[43] Jarmakani's criticism that simply opposing dominant discourses by creating counter discourse raises a pitfall that this paper partially fell into. It is perhaps difficult to do this when imagination of grief and mourning have been so wedded to sentimentality, and *Koolaids* regularly centers skepticism towards sentimentality. That said, Jarmakani's warnings help to articulate a new approach. Her argument to avoid engaging

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[43] From the end of the lit review.

with dominant narratives implies an attentive return to form, a particularly fruitful part of Alameddine's work.

Rather than negotiating his texts' in the terms of narrative expectations, a framework that struggles to diverge far from psychoanalysis, one might approach textual silences as not absences but productive moments. Historically, identifying a narrator as negotiating trauma depends on identifying narrated silences in a comparative with an invisible dominant style. Instead of characterizing this as an absence or lack, a value laden move, one can instead negotiate this as a decision with unique characteristics. The former psychoanalyzes a narrators' intent whereas the latter prioritizes the function of language. Though these forms of analysis are not so cleavable, subordinating the former to the latter likely yields more constructive results for considering Alameddine's fiction. This approach considers how heterogeneous so-called silences are, a framework that in this thesis was often considered under the parameter of trauma. Considering these narrative moments as silences also opens a more complicated set of questions about the agency of narration. Given that Alameddine's work often eloquently traverses this ambiguity, operating from a system that leaves this question has useful interpretative flexibility. This type of reading more accurately captures how the complications of Alameddine's offer unique outlooks on narration.

Subtly, this type of analytic attitude disrupts sentimentality, and other dualistic readings of trauma, grief, and mourning, without explicitly defining itself in this way. Silences as a location populated with meaning disrupts the fundamental normative logic that underpins sentimental narration. This argument undercuts the idea that silences indicate problems that need to be resolved. It also allows for a greater attention to the diversity modalities defined by silence. Though the third chapter partially laid out how grief and mourning diverge, each can often be

aesthetically wedded to silence. Aaliya's simultaneous usage of silence in the treatment of her biological father and the death of Hannah through silences, the latter being more clearly wedded to trauma, illustrates the multi-faceted potential of silence as an aesthetic theory to approach Alameddine's work.

Briefly approaching *I the Divine* with an attention to silences demonstrates the ideas analytic potential to navigate distinctions between grief and trauma. As briefly mentioned in the literature review, the novel moves through a series of the narrator's, Sarah Bernhardt's, divergent stylistic approaches, in content and form, to writing a set of first chapters in her memoir. Through the course of the attempts, that focus on different parts of her life, it becomes clear that she navigates a series of traumas. One could read the fragmented style as a result of this. As suggested earlier, this would completely homogenize *I the Divine*'s noticeable formal divergences, in overall structure, from *Koolaids* and *An Unnecessary Woman*. One could also identify an unresolved central tension about her complicated grief over her grandfather, who simultaneously idolized her and vitriolically harassed her mother. Yet, again, as illustrated throughout this thesis these complicated histories allow for complicated webs of reading that the slippages between trauma and experiences understood as traumatic homogenize. Approaching this novel from aesthetic awareness to silences would likely the pyschoanalytic impulses of viewing trauma and instead offer a theoretically constructive approach.

Returning to Alameddine's work, after engaging in that momentary thought experiment, shows an attention to the complications invested in narrating the past. Though it would be reductionist to argue about his intent, his work charts the difficulties in narrating histories where the material record is not necessarily entirely accessible or legible. This may imply why Alameddine's work often deals with grief and trauma as subjects. The invisible standards that

govern narrative expectations offer little to understand experiences related to grief or trauma. Investigating grief and trauma as separate categories illustrates a variety of potentials for the imaginative possibilities of narration.

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