

# 9/11, Trauma, and Literature

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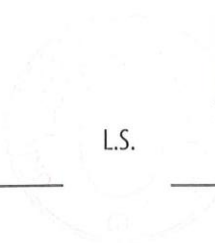
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## **ABSTRAKT**

Tato bakalářská práce přibližuje teorii traumatu ve vztahu k psanému textu na základě děl Cathy Caruth a Anne Whitehead. Vysvětluje jejich základní myšlenky a poukazuje na rozdílné názory autorek. Tato práce také blíže popisuje teroristické útoky z 11. září a zahrnuje analýzu dvou knih, které byly napsány přeživšími právě těchto útoků. Analýza podrobně zkoumá různé aspekty knih, jako je obal, volba slov nebo přístup autorů k útokům samotným.

Klíčová slova: Cathy Caruth, Anne Whitehead, trauma, literatura, posttraumatická stresová porucha, 11. září, Světové obchodní centrum, Sigmund Freud, historie, vyprávění, přežití, Erik O. Ronningen, Jean Potter

## **ABSTRACT**

This Bachelor's Thesis describes the theory of trauma and its relation to writing based on the books by Cathy Caruth and Anne Whitehead. The Thesis explains fundamental thoughts and points to authors' different opinions. This work also gives a closer description of September 11 terrorist attacks and includes an analysis of two books written by survivors of these attacks. The analysis closely examines various aspects of the books, such as their cover, choice of words or different approach to the attacks.

Keywords: Cathy Caruth, Anne Whitehead, trauma, literature, post-traumatic stress disorder, September 11, World Trade Center, Sigmund Freud, history, narrative, survival, Erik O. Ronningen, Jean Potter

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I hereby declare that the print version of my Bachelor's/Master's thesis and the electronic version of my thesis deposited in the IS/STAG system are identical.

# CONTENTS

<b>INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>I THEORY .....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>1 THE EVENTS OF SEPTEMBER 11.....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>2 TRAUMA AS A LITERARY TERM .....</b>	<b>15</b>
2.1 DEFINITION OF TRAUMA .....	15
2.2 CARUTH'S UNCLAIMED EXPERIENCE.....	16
2.2.1 Departure, History and Reference.....	17
2.2.2 Dream and Survival.....	20
2.3 WHITEHEAD'S TRAUMA FICTION.....	23
2.3.1 Haunting.....	24
2.3.2 Testimony.....	26
<b>II ANALYSIS .....</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>3 BY THE GRACE OF GOD .....</b>	<b>29</b>
3.1 RELIGION AND OPTIMISM .....	29
3.2 SEPTEMBER 11 AND TRAUMA .....	30
3.3 HEALING.....	32
<b>4 FROM THE INSIDE OUT .....</b>	<b>35</b>
4.1 DIFFERENT APPROACH .....	35
4.2 UNCOVERED REALITY .....	36
4.3 LINKING SIGNS .....	38
4.4 ABSURDITY.....	39
<b>5 COMPARISON AND EVALUATION.....</b>	<b>41</b>
<b>CONCLUSION .....</b>	<b>42</b>
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY .....</b>	<b>44</b>
<b>LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS .....</b>	<b>46</b>



## INTRODUCTION

Forgotten heroes. Those may be the right words for hundreds and hundreds of volunteers who did not hesitate to risk their own lives in order to save the lives of others. But it was not only volunteers who had showed courage on September 11, 2001. Thousands of people woke up on Tuesday morning unaware they would have to be bold so as to survive. They went through hell and yet they are more or less being ignored.

It may be a lack of attention by media or a feeling that the government is no longer interested in them. Alternatively, it could have been a simple need to share their story. Either way, many of these forgotten heroes decided to write a book. However, it is an interesting fact that you can hardly find poetry about these terrorist attacks. Theodor Adorno, a famous German sociologist, philosopher and composer<sup>1</sup>, said: “To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric.” It implies that disasters such as holocaust or September 11 are so traumatic and disastrous that writing something so beautiful and artistic like a poem would be inappropriate.

Nevertheless, writing a book is a common way how to cope with a loss or a tragedy. There can be found many books consisting of interviews with survivors or with people who arrived prior to the collapse or right after the collapse. As a good example a book called *We're Not Leaving* by Benjamin J. Luft should be mentioned, which is divided into five parts: before the collapse, after the collapse, recovery, help from the responders and renewal. The second type of books reacting to September 11, are written directly by the people who witnessed the tragedy themselves. There are many fictional and non-fictional books, but the main focus of this bachelor's thesis is trauma and writing, and an analysis and comparison of two books.

The first book is called *From the Inside Out* by Erik O. Ronningen. This book is structured differently because of its diary like form with time data. Moreover, apart from the author's own experiences, it includes those of fourteen other survivors. In contrast to other books, *From the Inside Out* describes only one day and it ends shortly after the collapse of the second tower.

The title of the second book is *By the Grace of God: A Survivor's Story of Love, Hope, and Healing* written by Jeans Potter. This author decided not to concentrate on September 11 only but as well on her life prior to the attacks on the World Trade Center. From coming to

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<sup>1</sup> “Theodor Adorno (1903-1969),” Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, accessed December 10, 2018, <https://www.iep.utm.edu/adorno/>.

New York to the recovering after the attacks, Jeans Potter shares her thoughts, experiences and memories in her autobiography.

Trauma in literature is relatively common and there are many books concerning this topic. Probably the most popular literature about this issue is *Trauma Fiction* by Anne Whitehead and *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* by Cathy Caruth, and these literary works are going to be used in this bachelor's thesis.

## **I. THEORY**

## 1 THE EVENTS OF SEPTEMBER 11

“(…) Nancy couldn’t help but notice what a clear and beautiful day was dawning. *It’s going to be a good day*, she thought, getting back into the groove of a familiar routine.”<sup>2</sup>

Most of the people from the emergency services and survivors from September 11 remember this day for its extraordinary beauty and perfectly clear sky. But the events that were going to happen overshadowed every single positive memory of the early Tuesday morning of September 11, 2001.

On Tuesday morning, nineteen members of the terrorist organization Al-Qaeda hijacked four passenger airplanes. The first airplane hit the North Tower of the World Trade Center at 8:46 a. m. Sixteen minutes later, at 9:02 a.m., terrorists hit the South Tower. After the second collision, the government knew it was not an accident. Experts claim that you can be sure it is a terrorist attack when there are two or more successive attacks. The substance of a first attack is not only to shock people but mainly to awaken the Emergency Medical Services, police, firefighters etc. The aim of a second attack is to disable them so that there is no one else to help.

At 9:37 a.m. the third airplane flew into the Pentagon, which is the headquarters of the U.S. Department of Defense in Arlington county, Virginia.<sup>3</sup> All passengers including the hijackers died after the explosion of the aircraft; moreover, this attack resulted in another 125 victims from the inside of the Pentagon.

Less than 20 minutes later the last of the hijacked airplanes crashed near Shanksville, Pennsylvania after the passengers had attempted to retake the control of the plane. All passengers including the four hijackers died.

Meanwhile in New York, there were hundreds and hundreds of people trapped on the floors above the area hit by the airplane. According to the recordings of 911 calls from the inside of the Towers, there was a dark heavy smoke and an escalating heat. Due to these conditions, many people suffocated. Nevertheless, most of these people were killed by the explosion of the airplane. However, some were blown out of the windows and, according to the experts, approximately 200 people had decided to jump out of the window rather than wait for their deaths. There is a photograph, a horrific evidence of this final choice,

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<sup>2</sup> Erik O. Ronningen, *From the Inside Out* (Quenzon City: Flipside Digital Content Company, Inc. and Welcome Rain Publisher, 2013), 8.

<sup>3</sup> “Pentagon,” Encyclopaedia Britannica, accessed December 6, 2018, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Pentagon>.

known as *The Falling Man*, which is a photo of a man in a free fall, taken by Richard Drew and first published in *The New York Times* only a day after the attacks.<sup>4</sup>

The South Tower collapsed at 9:58 a.m., trapping hundreds of people under its debris and killing people running for their lives with falling pieces of iron. The North Tower fell down just 30 minutes later at 10:28 a.m.

According to the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST), 2 735 people in total died in the World Trade Center attacks. In this number there are also included policemen, firefighters and doctors who died doing their duties. The Pentagon attack claimed 184 people and the crushed airplane took the lives of all 40 passengers on board. Despite the high number of victims, J. Roger Kurtz remarks that terrorism is not concerned with killing people but rather with harming political, cultural and social values.<sup>5</sup>

After these attacks, several investigations were launched. There are many conspiracy theories claiming that the U.S. government is responsible for the attacks, which is supported by the collapse of Building 7, which was not directly connected to the World Trade Center. The 800 pages long investigative document can be found on the official website of NITS. Most of the Americans consider the killing of Osama bin Laden, who was killed in 2011 under the Obama's government, as the end of this investigation.

It is important to understand that the effect of the September attacks was much wider than what people know from the media. Almost every anniversary, the U.S. president declares: "We will never forget." Of course, the big casualties should not be forgotten but it was not only the lives of the victims' relatives who were affected. Credit should also be given to hundreds of volunteers who had been spending their days working at Ground Zero. Not having proper equipment, they would come back every day only to find some survivors or at least some body remains. These volunteers, who nonetheless do not consider themselves as heroes, are, along with the victims, those who should never be forgotten.

As a result of working in such a dusty area and finding various parts of human bodies or on the other hand finding nothing at all, these people suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder and most importantly they suffer from lung damage. But why do we not hear about these people who sacrificed their health to help others?

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<sup>4</sup> "Photographer Richard Drew Remembers 'The Falling Man'," WNYC, accessed May 3, 2020, <https://www.wnyc.org/story/156882-falling-man/>.

<sup>5</sup> J. Roger Kurtz, *Trauma and Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 321.

Maybe we do not want to. If we search carefully there are many fictional and non-fictional publications written either by survivor themselves or by interviewers. Even before readers open the book and read it, they can tell that confronting and coping after such an event takes a long time. Most of the post September 11 books were published not earlier than five years after this tragedy. It shows how complicated this process of accepting the loss of loved ones and facing the truth is.

No matter how great an impact September 11 had on a mankind, no matter how many books and films and works of art it has influenced and no matter how many times people are going to say: “We will never forget,” people actually are slowly forgetting. Unless they learn from history, it will repeat itself. It seems that politicians keep arguing about when we are going to get hit again instead of how to prevent it. John, a retired captain with the New York City Fire Department, summarized this point nicely: “The world was a terrible place before 9/11, and it hasn’t changed since 9/11. We’re always going to find an excuse to kill each other. So I always laugh, (...) in every decade of my life, this country’s been at war with someone. I’m not saying it’s *our* fault. But man will always find an excuse to go to war.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Benjamin J. Luft, *We’re Not Leaving* (New York: Greenpoint Press, 2011), 96.

## 2 TRAUMA AS A LITERARY TERM

### 2.1 Definition of Trauma

Trauma is a common term used by people in everyday language. The word itself is originally Greek and refers to a wound caused on a body. In contrast to this definition, the famous German psychologist Sigmund Freud believed trauma was a wound caused on a mind.<sup>7</sup> The general interpretations of this word, however, is a highly nerve-racking situation an individual went through. According to Esther Giller who is a president and director of Sidran Institute, which focuses on helping people with PTSD, suicidality etc.<sup>8</sup> the definition differs. At her workshop presentation held at the *Annual Conference of the Maryland Mental Hygiene Administration* on May 1999 she described trauma as “*extreme stress that overwhelms a person’s ability to cope.*”<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, according to Giller trauma can be defined in different ways because it is a unique individual’s personal experience.

Additionally, there is one more term that should be explained when talking about trauma and that is a post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), which was already mentioned above. PTSD, a common part of trauma, is a state of mental health triggered by a horrifying event. It is taking control over the mind, both psychically and neurobiologically, by an event that the mind cannot handle. It is said to be one of the most damaging disorders.<sup>10</sup> This disorder affects not just those who experienced such an event but also those who witnessed it. Symptoms differ but they often include anxiety, depression, breathing problems or nightmares. The main sign of PTSD is that these symptoms are not temporary. They may last even for years and stop those who suffer with this disorder from living a normal, functioning life.<sup>11</sup>

Like most mental disorders, trauma, or PTSD, cannot be completely cured. Nonetheless, the symptoms can be moderated. There are countless clinics and institutions, which deal with people with these problems. They provide special treatments and programs for recovery, for instance, behavioural therapies, which help the patient to alter negative

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<sup>7</sup> Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 3.

<sup>8</sup> “Who We Are,” Sidran Institute, accessed January 8, 2020, <https://www.sidran.org/who-we-are/>.

<sup>9</sup> “What Is Psychological Trauma?,” Sidran Institute, accessed January 8, 2020, <https://www.sidran.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/What-Is-Psychological-Trauma.pdf>.

<sup>10</sup> Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 58.

<sup>11</sup> “Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD),” Mayo Clinic, accessed January 15, 2020, <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/post-traumatic-stress-disorder/symptoms-causes/syc-20355967>.

thoughts, exposure therapies, which focus on facing difficult traumatic memories, and narrative exposure therapies.<sup>12</sup>

Narrative exposure therapy has been most often applied with people who went through trauma as a result of political, cultural or social forces. Therefore, it is mostly used in refugees' communities.<sup>13</sup> The main sense of such therapy is that telling a story influences how a traumatized individual perceives his or her experience and wellbeing. When the therapy is over, a documented autobiography, which has been made by the therapist, is shown to the patient.<sup>14</sup>

It is generally known that two in distress makes sorrow less. Therefore, some of those who underwent this kind of therapy and considered it helpful published their stories, either to aid people with a similar problem or to encourage them not to be afraid to share what is worrying them. The exact term for this phenomenon is trauma narrative.

Whether it is an autobiography created during a special therapy or creative writing, trauma and writing are closely associated. The need to make sense out of the traumatizing memory should always start off some kind of narrative.<sup>15</sup> Some experts, however, claim the opposite.

The relation between trauma and writing was researched by many experts and university professors. Nevertheless, the biggest impact on this field was made by two books, which are actually rejecting each other. *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* written in 1996 by Cathy Caruth and, less theoretical *Trauma Fiction*, by Anne Whitehead published in 2004.

## 2.2 Caruth's Unclaimed Experience

Cathy Caruth, born in 1955, is a Frank H. T. Rhodes Professor of Humane Letters at Cornell University, which resides in New York, at the Department of Comparative Literature. Caruth is specialized in the language of trauma and testimony, in literary theory, and in contemporary discourses regarding the annihilation and survival of language. One of her latest books is *Literature in the Ashes of History*, published in 2013.<sup>16</sup> Caruth's most

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<sup>12</sup> "Is PTSD Curable?," Bridges to Recovery, accessed January 15, 2020, <https://www.bridgestorecovery.com/post-traumatic-stress-disorder/is-ptsd-curable/>.

<sup>13</sup> The American Psychiatric Association, *Anxiety, Trauma, and OCD – Related Disorders* (Washington: American Psychiatric Association Publishing, 2020), 547.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Michela Borzaga and Ewald Mengel, eds., *Trauma, Memory, and Narrative in the Contemporary South African Novel Essays* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2012), xx.

<sup>16</sup> "Cathy Caruth," Cornell University, accessed February 2, 2020, <https://complit.cornell.edu/cathy-caruth>.



popular book, as already mentioned, is called *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*.

The book consists of five chapters, each of which analyses different perception of people of various professions. Apart from Sigmund Freud to whom Caruth dedicated three chapters the author mentions the literary critic Paul de Man, dramatist Heinrich von Kleist, film director Alain Resnais, and others. Caruth focuses on four main figures: departure, falling, burning and awakening.

### 2.2.1 Departure, History and Reference

The beginning of the book deals with the first mentioned figure, departure, and Sigmund Freud, the famous doctor, psychologist and the founder of psychoanalysis. Caruth depicts Freud's understanding of trauma as an occurrence that is experienced too soon and too unexpectedly, to be fully understood and is thus not available to our consciousness unless it announces itself again, for instance in nightmares.<sup>17</sup> Knowing and not knowing are, therefore, frequently discussed terms when talking about this issue. According to Freud, it is not the event itself that causes the trauma but the way this event happened. That means that one becomes traumatised because of an unexpectedness and unpreparedness he had to face this event with.<sup>18</sup>

A great example of this thought is a train accident. The train accident can end up having two types of victims. Some of them are the true victims, which may sustain severe injuries. The other type is people who walk away seemingly unharmed, only to suffer the shock days or even weeks later.<sup>19</sup> Soldiers may be mentioned as an example from another area. When they witness something terrifying or become part of a tragedy, they turn into numb bodies whose only goal is to survive. Only later, maybe in their nightmares, do they relive the haunting reality.

It took the war to teach it, that you were as responsible for everything you saw as you were for everything you did. The problem was that you didn't always know what you were seeing until later, maybe years later, that a lot of it never made it in at all, it just stayed stored there in your eyes.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 4.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

The main problem seems to be the difference between a crisis of death and crisis of life.<sup>21</sup> Is trauma the shock of being so close to death or the fact that one must carry on living with the experience of having survived it?

Based on a study made by doctors at the Abarbanel Mental Health Centre in Bat Yam, Israel, and experimenters at Tel Aviv University, holocaust survivors are three times more likely to attempt suicide.<sup>22</sup> Taking the theory of the crisis of death and life into consideration, the outcome of the study can be understood in two different ways. Such a high rate of suicide attempts among the survivors can be caused by inability to cope with memories of petrifying acts witnessed in concentration camps and unavoidability of facing death every single day. From the perspective of the crisis of life, the main indicator would not be the death but the surviving. The survivors might have a sense of guilt towards those who were executed. In addition, there is this eternal “Why me?” question. Why one was given an opportunity to carry on living while the other one never got a chance to leave the extermination camp even though both were equally innocent and deserved to live? Such question appears to be unbearably tormenting, furthermore one can hardly find any answer. The answer for those who have not lost their belief in God may be an idea that their survival had a certain purpose, that they were the chosen ones. God chose them because he had a special task for them. In this case, religion can paradoxically exert pressure on these people for they might feel a necessity to achieve something in life because they owe something to someone.

At this point of the book, Cathy Caruth starts wondering about the relation between trauma and history. She argues that history may not possibly be directly referential, that is, it is not based on a simple pattern of experience and reference anymore. Caruth claims that to rethink a reference does not mean to erase history but rather to adjust it to our understanding.<sup>23</sup> The question of history is dealt with in one of the first books concerning trauma in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which is a work written by Sigmund Freud called *Moses and Monotheism*. Freud’s motive for writing this book was his interest in Jewish history. Freud, born in a Jewish family, was working on *Moses and Monotheism* in the times of increasing antisemitism and finished the book when the Nazi persecution was a common thing in

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<sup>21</sup> Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 7.

<sup>22</sup> “Study: Holocaust Survivors 3 Times More Likely to Attempt Suicide,” Haaretz, accessed March 20, 2020, <https://www.haaretz.com/1.4929773>.

<sup>23</sup> Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 11.

1939.<sup>24</sup> Whether it is his own origin or an effort to understand the hatred towards him and his family, Freud tries to explain the history of Jews, precisely what led to antisemitism. As he wrote in the letter to the German prosaist and dramatist Arnold Zweig in 1934: “(...) how the Jews have come to be what they are and why they have attracted this undying hatred. I soon discovered the formula: Moses created the Jews.”<sup>25</sup> It is known that Freud fictionalized the Jewish past, in other words, he adjusted the history to his own understanding and satisfaction.

The Holy Bible and Thora state that Moses was one of the captive Hebrews who revolted and became their leader who took them back to Canaan where they originally lived. According to Freud’s interpretation of history, Moses led the Jews out of Egypt for rather a selfish reason. Freud claims that Moses himself was not a Hebrew but an Egyptian, a supporter of a pharaoh and monotheism. After the pharaoh’s assassination, Moses wanted to preserve monotheism and, therefore, led the Hebrews out of Egypt as their leader. Nevertheless, the Hebrews killed Moses during an uprising and repressed his acts by substituting deeds of Moses for deeds of the priest called Yahweh, sometimes also called Moses.<sup>26</sup>

Freud puts a big importance on the figure of Moses, which means he puts a big importance on the act of liberation, the return to freedom. Freud thus, paradoxically, links the antisemitism to the point in history where the Jews finally escaped from captivity. He changes the very beginning of Jewish history. It is no longer understood as a return to the freedom from the past but rather a departure into the new future. In other words, it is no longer about preserving the liberty of the Hebrews but about preserving the monotheistic religion. Nevertheless, Freud also emphasizes the murder of Moses, which was repressed and marks it as the most important moment of their history. Or to put it slightly differently, he considers this repression of the assassination to be more important than the actual liberation.

(...) one section of the people passed through what may properly be termed a traumatic experience which the other was spared.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> “Moses and Monotheism, 1939 by Freud,” Sigmund Freud, accessed March 20, 2020, <https://www.sigmundfreud.net/moses-and-monotheism.jsp>.

<sup>25</sup> Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 12.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

The murder of the real Moses and the suppression, forgetting of his deeds and eventually their return through the priest named Moses as well, is a trauma that connects the past of the Hebrews with the new Jewish nation.<sup>28</sup> Leaving and return is, thus, the centre of the Jewish history. More precisely, it is the leaving of Egypt and return to Canaan and leaving of their leader Moses and his return in a form of a different priest. It can be said that Freud replaced the history of the liberation with the history of trauma, a traumatic departure.

This leads back to the question of reference and history. Caruth argues that Freud denied referential history twice. First, he changed some historical facts with his own thoughts and theories and second, he himself suggested that historical memory is a matter of distortion. It means that history is understood and filtered only through the traumatic experience.<sup>29</sup>

Further Caruth points out the relation between the Christians and the Jews and states that Jewish history will always be connected to the history of Christians. In other words, the traumatic nature of history signifies that “events are only historical to the extent that they implicate others.”<sup>30</sup> That means that the history of Jews involved also the suffering of others. Therefore, the history and trauma are never an individual’s own, they are always shared.

### 2.2.2 Dream and Survival

“What does it mean to survive?”<sup>31</sup> *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, an essay written by Freud in 1920, deals with the other aspect of trauma and that is survival, more precisely a mystery of survival. Caruth depicts survival as “peculiarly incomprehensible,”<sup>32</sup> which refers back to the previous subchapter. To be more precise, to the part about the crisis of life when one does not fully comprehend one’s own survival, which can eventually become a burden or even a trauma.

Freud makes an interesting point by claiming that trauma is not directly related to the experience of facing a life threat or a death. That is to say that it is a real injury on a body that preserves one from developing a neurosis.<sup>33</sup> Thus, when one occurs in a car accident or experiences a terrorist attack and walks away apparently unharmed, as Freud describes it, it is paradoxically more damaging and destructive to one’s psyche and life. Those who suffer some wound are basically awakened by the pain in the very moment of accident or

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<sup>28</sup> Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 15.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.

attack, but the seemingly lucky ones fall asleep. Their consciousness falls into a numb state and does not realize the danger until it creeps back in a form of a nightmare or, generally, PTSD.

Caruth argues, therefore, that what is fundamental is not the threat itself but the missing of having experienced it. It is so because it happened too quickly and the mind realizes it one minute too late, which leaves the individual unprepared. And this unpreparedness, the shock of something that is not yet fully known is the basis of repetition, which emerges in nightmares, anxiety or even a traumatic neurosis.

This may be compared to a film. *Awakenings*, directed by Penny Marshall and released in 1990,<sup>34</sup> tells a story about a patient who has been catatonic ever since he was a child. This catatonic state can be compared to the numb state, which is a period between the traumatizing event and the so-called awakening. The character, portrayed by Robert de Niro, spends the majority of his life unaware of the situation, the experience is not yet fully known. When he is given a new treatment and he is awakened, he is happy only until he looks in a mirror and realizes he is a grown-up man whose life was wasted. Only when he is awake does he suffer the trauma.

Another term that should also be mentioned in relation with this issue is death drive. The death drive, or the drive theory, is a conception describing a human tendency towards self-destruction. Such drive usually manifests itself with aggression, self-destructiveness or repetition compulsion. According to Caruth, the core of Freud's death drive is the survival and its incomprehensibility. Freud considers the beginning of the drive to be the awakening to life. He claims that life itself is the awakening out of death, for which there was a lack of preparation.<sup>35</sup>

Where there is awakening there is a dream that precedes it. Freud states that dreams are a tool of consciousness, which tries to confront with the event by putting one back to the situation. In this case, dreams cannot be understood as unconscious wishes but rather as the mind's inability to refrain from the unpleasant memory. The traumatized one is, therefore, doomed to relive the situation again, which is called a traumatic repetition.<sup>36</sup> It is a necessity itself to face the threat again and again, which can lead to destruction and be retraumatizing. And it is the repetition that causes trauma to an individual, which explains the high suicide rate of survivors of concentration camps or the war in Vietnam. The

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<sup>34</sup> "Awakenings," IMDb, accessed March 23, 2020, <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0099077/>.

<sup>35</sup> Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 65.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

paradoxical reason of such suicides is that these people commit them only when they are back at home in safety. Nevertheless, the haunting memories relive horrible events they went through every night.<sup>37</sup> Freud highlights that it is not just a dream but also the awakening in another fright, into consciousness.

The last part of *Unclaimed Experience* concentrates on one concrete dream, which was introduced by Freud in his work called *The Interpretation of Dreams*, published in 1900. It is a dream of a father whose little son dies in high fevers and after that he visits him in his sleep. When the father is asleep, a candle near the dead boy's bed falls and sets his corpse on fire. In the dream, the little boy stands near his father's bed and says: "Father, don't you see I'm burning?"<sup>38</sup> There are two explanations of this plea, one given by Freud and one by Jacques Lacan, a French psychoanalyst.

Freud offers a rational solution. He claims that the father spotted the glare in a light sleep and woke up. The sentence articulated by his son were linked parts of sentences the boy said when he was still alive.<sup>39</sup> At first, Freud is surprised that the dream does not fulfil any wish but corresponds with reality. The father, however, does not wake up immediately. His reaction is delayed, he prolongs his sleep, which is explained with the theory of wish-fulfilment.<sup>40</sup> The reason why the father wants to stay in the dream, despite the fact it points out to a horrible reality, is that it is pointed out through his son. In other words, the child is still alive.<sup>41</sup>

Lacan argues that the father is paradoxically awakened by the dream, which forces him to face death. That means that what his son said was rather a command than a plea. The son warned his father that he might miss a chance to help him again. He was not present at his son's death and now when his son needs his help for one last time, he is asleep. Lacan, therefore, supposes that dream and awakening create another level of trauma, and that is a repetition of a previous mistake to see in time, more precisely, an inability to respond to another's death.<sup>42</sup>

Lacan makes an interesting point by stating that from this perspective, the father's survival has a greater meaning and, moreover, a responsibility. It is no longer a story about his own survival but more importantly a story about the child's death. The son commands his father

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<sup>37</sup> Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 63.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 93.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 94.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 100.

to wake up, to face the reality, to see. Surviving his own son gives the father the responsibility to tell what it means to see or not to see.<sup>43</sup> Freud's explanation is more or less basic and poetic whilst Lacan points to something more thought-out and important. He understands survival as a responsibility. Caruth refers to it as an ethical burden of survival, precisely an ethical duty to prevent others from facing life threats.<sup>44</sup>

### 2.3 Whitehead's Trauma Fiction

Anne Whitehead was born in 1971. She is a Senior Lecturer in Modern and Contemporary Literature at Newcastle University in England. Whitehead specializes in modern and contemporary literature, more precisely in literary representations of mourning, grief and loss; theories of affect or for example trauma and memory. The last book published by Anne Whitehead in 2017 is called *Medicine and Empathy in Contemporary British Fiction*. Nevertheless, this thesis deals with a work published in 2004, which is called *Trauma Fiction*.<sup>45</sup>

Whitehead divided this book into two parts; the first part focuses on a theme and the second part analyses a style. In contrast to Cathy Caruth's *Unclaimed Experience*, Whitehead is less theoretical and supports each argument with a particular example from books such as *Another World* by Barker or the controversial work *Fragments* by Wilkomirski.

Anne Whitehead opposes Cathy Caruth and that is visible already in the beginning of this publication when she wonders how one can narrate a traumatic experience if it is so overwhelming that one can barely speak about it. She also claims that emphasis is no longer put on *what* is remembered but on *why* is it remembered, which produces political and ethical issues.<sup>46</sup> Unlike Whitehead, Caruth understands trauma as an indicator of history, which cannot be owned in a form of memories or narrative and, therefore, cannot be narrativized.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 105.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 108.

<sup>45</sup> "Dr Anne Whitehead," Newcastle University, accessed April 2, 2020, <https://www.ncl.ac.uk/elli/staff/profile/annwhitehead.html#research>.

<sup>46</sup> Anne Whitehead, *Trauma Fiction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), 3.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

### 2.3.1 Haunting

The beginning of the first chapter discusses referentiality and history. Since trauma is a form of a belated experience, which is not yet fully grasped, history cannot be understood as a complete knowledge but rather as something that defies one's understanding. From this perspective, the text changes from a reflective mode to a performative act. This basically means that one must involve emotions and empathy to comprehend the fictional text.<sup>48</sup>

Dominic LaCapra distinguishes structural from historical trauma. The structural trauma forms one's own psychological growth whereas the historical trauma represents trauma, which causes an emotional damage not only to an individual but also to generations.<sup>49</sup> LaCapra also warns readers against using too much empathy, which can make the reader a surrogate victim and raises the question of what is at stake for both authors and readers when telling someone else's traumatic story.<sup>50</sup>

Whitehead makes an interesting point when she points to Caruth's comment about a belated reaction to traumatizing event and questions the length of the period between the event and the realization of the event. She claims the delay can be so long that trauma becomes evident only one or more generations later. This phenomenon is called trans-generational trauma. Whitehead quotes Esther Rashkin who calls it a phantom and explains the origin of such trauma, for instance it can be a secret of parents, which creates a gap in the unconsciousness of their child. The child then bears an unrecognized knowledge, which comes back in a form of a phobia, madness or obsession. The unknown phantom can haunt and determine a family for many generations.<sup>51</sup> This idea resembles the Hebrews and the repression of the murder of Moses for this phantom represents a suppressed experience, which later returns as a trauma experienced by someone else in the past. More precisely, trauma that one is going through is not his own.

Anne Whitehead supports the trans-generational trauma theory with the book written in 1998 by Pat Barker called *Another world*. This novel puts a big importance on the First World War, overshadowing other historical events of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and shows that trauma from the Great War did not disappear with death of the last veteran.

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<sup>48</sup> Anne Whitehead, *Trauma Fiction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), 13.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.



Whitehead claims that Barker perceives history, precisely the First World War, as a trauma that needs to be admitted and overcome.<sup>52</sup> In other words, trauma that is a part of history, meaning it is shared by a large number of people, can be compared to a problem that simply needs to be accepted because an accepting is the first step in a solving process. Talking about the history, Barker probably did not refer only to the World War I, but to the history of 20<sup>th</sup> century, which left a great mark on mankind. Whitehead uses the novel *Another World* to demonstrate the trans-generational impact of the Great War across several generations. Literature uses ghosts as a tool to demonstrate a psychological possession of a haunting traumatic memory. The haunting ghost of this novel is a fratricide, which reappears across three generations. Nevertheless, such ghost does not have to necessarily be a metaphor for some crime or a sin. Whitehead mentions several examples of novels, in which there are soldiers haunted by real ghosts, meaning supernatural appearances of people whom they hurt or lost.<sup>53</sup> Authors who rather focused on the Second World War also used ghosts to embody the trauma from the war. For example, the main character in Remarque's book called *The Road Back* is haunted by a spectre of a dead soldier, which is so vivid that it makes him run away from it. Ghosts and hunting in general are a sign of intensive traumatic experience, which was repressed or unaccepted by one and thus passed on to the next generation.

Whitehead states that *Another World* raises a question whether it is possible to end the haunting.<sup>54</sup> The reason of this doubt is the fact that such trauma is not one's own and, therefore, cannot be fully understood and coped with. Whitehead also points to Barker's tendency to prioritize the First World War over other important events of 20<sup>th</sup> century, even though there were plenty of them. *Another World* discusses impact of the war on three generations, leaving out the generation directly affected by the Second World War. The author explains that it is difficult to understand this war, especially the Holocaust, without being part of it.<sup>55</sup> Nonetheless, this approach does not only overshadow other historical events, but it most importantly generalises the First World War itself and, therefore, replaces the particularity of historical trauma for it suddenly becomes a trauma of the whole century.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Anne Whitehead, *Trauma Fiction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), 15.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

Both Caruth and Whitehead refer to Freud's idea about a dream, more precisely a nightmare, which brings back an unpleasant memory. Freud also highlights the awakening, which does not suppress the memory, but brings another fright in a form of reality. He was interested in shellshock, which is a form of PTSD used in a relation to the First World War. Whitehead points to the fact that while Freud described PTSD during the war or return of trauma immediately after the war, Barker shows, through one of her characters, that such trauma can have a much longer effect and become evident years later. Barker's character suffers the symptoms eighty years later.<sup>57</sup> Symptoms show up in different periods of one's life, which may be caused by the power of experience but rather by the period of life itself. In other words, people are more liable to start feeling depressed when they are lonely and vulnerable, which is most probable in older age.

### 2.3.2 Testimony

Human memory is a marvellous but fallacious instrument.<sup>58</sup>

The next book, which is being analysed by Whitehead is called *Fragments*. This book, written by Binjamin Wilkomirski, is infamous for its falseness. The author presented this book as a collection of fragments he remembers from his childhood. Nevertheless, it was discovered that he invented the whole story. This leads Whitehead to a thought to what extent are testimonies based on a truth and reality because one cannot remember every single detail. Nonetheless, it is not detail that is important, but feelings, emotions and a message. Therefore, omission and errors are acceptable and expectable in this genre.<sup>59</sup>

One American historian said: "If [Wilkomirski] had told the same story in terrible prose, it wouldn't have been mesmerizing."<sup>60</sup> In other words, the story is more powerful when it is narrated by someone who personally witnessed it. A reader is, thus, willing to overlook inaccuracies because he focuses on survivor's perception of a situation.

Despite the criticism, *Fragments* was originally considered to be a testimony. Some argue testimony has to look like this because, as was already mentioned, traumatic experience becomes recognizable only after some time. Moreover, the human mind cannot fully grasp the occurrence and, therefore, a memory of such experience may break into pieces and become scattered.<sup>61</sup> This may be an argument for a statement that says Holocaust fiction is

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<sup>57</sup> Anne Whitehead, *Trauma Fiction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), 17.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

based on historical facts while Holocaust testimonies is rather based on inner truth and distortions of memory.<sup>62</sup> The inner truth and distortion is most evident in testimonies written by a believer who answers all of his questions and doubts, related to the traumatic event, with one word, that is God. In this case, inner belief helps survivors to cope with what they went through.

In the end, the most important aspect seems to be the message these testimonies carry. They are powerful in its effect<sup>63</sup> because when it comes to catastrophes like Holocaust or September 11, survivors usually do not want to share their experience to provide facts but to confide in all readers who are willing to take on a bit of the survivor's burden as soon as they open the book.

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<sup>62</sup> Anne Whitehead, *Trauma Fiction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), 30.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

## **II. ANALYSIS**

### 3 BY THE GRACE OF GOD

*By the Grace of God: A 9/11 Survivor's Story of Love, Hope, and Healing* was written by a survivor from the 81<sup>st</sup> floor of the North Tower, Jean Potter, with the help of author and editor Rob Kaplan. The book was published ten years after September 11 and focuses not only on the terrorist attack but also on the life before and after that.

Jean Potter had spent most of her life in Brooklyn, New York. She used to be employed at the Bank of America, but she is retired now and so is her husband, a former fireman, Dan. They decided to devote their time in the retirement to volunteer activities, which is evident in the very beginning of the book where there is a statement saying that a portion of the money from the sale is going to be donated to the chosen organization and foundation.<sup>64</sup>

#### 3.1 Religion and Optimism

They say do not judge a book by its cover but when one looks at the cover of this book it has to be immediately obvious that the main theme is religion. It is implied by the title itself and the usage of positive words, love and hope, which are not common in relation to the tragedy of September 11. One might also notice that the word *God* is the biggest one. Moreover, besides panorama of New York City the upper part of the cover includes two white doves, which symbolize love and the hint of a rainbow, which is generally perceived as a positive sign. Inside the book there is a Fireman's Prayer and each chapter has kind of a subtitle in a form of a psalm. This book is, therefore, a representation of a strong belief of the author.

Before reading the first chapter there is one more thing that should be noticed and it is the dedication to the emergency service and to those who died.

To the 343 members of the Fire Department of New York  
23 members of the New York Police Department  
37 members of the Port Authority Police Department and all the other innocent souls  
who perished on September 11, 2001 (...)<sup>65</sup>

It is interesting that she mentions a certain amount of people from the fire and police departments, but the victims are referred to as "all the other innocent souls".<sup>66</sup> The reason of putting the emphasis on police and firemen may be the fact that Potter's husband served as a New York City fireman. And it is again a positive sign because the number of victims

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<sup>64</sup> Rob Kaplan and Jean Potter, *By the Grace of God* (Bloomington: AuthorHouse, 2011), 95.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

is really high and reading it, therefore, provokes negative emotions. On the other hand, the numbers of rescue workers and police officers refer to alive people and, moreover, people perceived as heroes.

The first two chapters concern the history of Jean Potter's family and her husband's life and career. She tells a story of her family's origin, shares memories from her childhood and gives a very detailed description of her husband's career. Potter does not hesitate to share some of personal and private matter when she includes her late great grandmother's prayer, a poem written by her grandfather to his deceased wife. a memory on her brother who died due to drug abuse, or a short paragraph describing her life after she got divorced.

Dating is never fun at any age, but it's a nightmare when you have been married before. And I was finding it all really difficult.<sup>67</sup>

These three examples are probably the only indication of negative thoughts in these prior September 11 chapters. Potter's usage of so many positive words implies that this book should not be a sorrowful testimony but rather a guide to healing. She tries to induce such atmosphere by talking about her warm relationship with her relatives and co-workers as if she was trying to advise the readers to focus on good. This leads back to religion, which teaches people to see good in everything and everyone. Sometimes Potter's expressing can appear too nice and thus exaggerated, for instance when she remembers her colleagues.

And I worked with a great group of people. LT was the greatest boss, and his staff was a very tightly-knit group. It was like family. Yes, this was truly a job made in heaven.<sup>68</sup>

*By the Grace of God* gives an impression of a notebook made by someone who tries to avoid forgetting details of his life. The first two chapters do not imply that this book was written because of a terrorist attack. As a matter of fact, World Trade Center is mentioned only in a second half of the second chapter but not with connection to the attack but with the connection to the author's apartment, which was opposite the building.

### 3.2 September 11 and Trauma

The third chapter called '*September 11, 2001*' seem to be a dividing line between the positive and more or less negative part. Even though signs of positive thinking, mostly

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<sup>67</sup> Rob Kaplan and Jean Potter, *By the Grace of God* (Bloomington: AuthorHouse, 2011), 16.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

associated with God, can still be found, the negative thoughts and collocations dominate, for instance when she describes a terrifying sight of a stairwell filled with shocked people who were struggling to get down over 81 floors to save themselves. Potter tends to repeat how deafening the sound of the collapsing tower was, which implies that it was the collapse of the towers that affected her the most.

This chapter seems to have signs of narration especially because of the usage of direct speech and too many details. The direct speech is not important and, moreover, appears in a situation in which the author was not present.

“Hey, 31,” Mel said, referring to the number on Dan’s helmet, and Dan said, “Hey, Mel, its [sic!] me, Dan.” Mel said, “Danny!” and they hugged.<sup>69</sup>

The author seems to be a narrator who is present in every situation that is important for the story. The details are considered to be the monologues inside Potter’s head. She remembers thinking that she was lucky enough to get out of the building, but she might not be lucky enough to escape the collapse of the tower. Nevertheless, as it was argued in *Unclaimed Experience*, when one goes through a traumatizing event, the consciousness falls into a numb state. The only thing that works in such moment is one’s instinct. The author herself claims she may have heard the sound of dropping bodies, but she was not sure because she was “in a state of shock.”<sup>70</sup> These signs of fiction, however, make the story flow and make it more readable.

The beginning of trauma can be spotted exactly here, as Potter is not fully aware of the situation around her. As mentioned above, she shares a monologue, which was happening in her head the very moment after the first airplane hit the Tower and then she remembers hearing the voices telling her that it was not her time. After getting out of the building, she hid in the subway station and again recalls a voice in her head that advised her to go out and turn right. It is not very likely that someone would be able to remember this after going through something such unexpected and horrendous as September 11. Caruth quotes Freud claiming that historical memory was a matter of distortion and this appears to be the same case. After it was over, her consciousness attempted to grasp the whole situation but since it was asleep during the tragedy, it had to create some things to make sense of it. In other words, Potter probably makes something up for she wants to believe it is true. Because believing the fact that it was her late brother’s or God’s voice who was trying to calm her

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<sup>69</sup> Rob Kaplan and Jean Potter, *By the Grace of God* (Bloomington: AuthorHouse, 2011), 34.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

down and who saved her life, brings a light to the dark memory and, therefore, makes it at least a little bit more bearable.

Jean Potter naturally suffers from PTSD and admits it towards the end of the book. Nevertheless, PTSD can be recognized earlier in the book when she describes the falling of the Tower and its deafening sound and adds that ever since she has been uncomfortable when hearing any kind of similar noise.

The sound of the Tower falling was deafening, and to this day I am very uneasy with any type of rumbling sound.<sup>71</sup>

She also mentions a fear of being on high floors or in a skyscraper, a need to be close to an exit so that she can escape fast and getting scared after hearing even a little noise. But the most frequently repeated symptom of PTSD, Potter states, are dreams. All her dreams seem to have one thing in common and that is a struggle to get home. Interestingly enough, these dreams do not take place in the World Trade Center on September 11, but they rather reflect Potter's trauma when she was not certain whether she will make it out of the North Tower alive and the fear when she did not know where her husband was. She also suffers from nightmares where a shooter wants to kill her or a nightmare, in which the Taliban attack people, and she hides in her parents' living room. Unlike Freud's statement that dreams serve as a tool to confront one with the event by putting one back to the situation, Potter's dreams seem to ask the question: "Why me?" Even though the setting of the dream differs, the nature of it is the same, someone wants to kill her. Her consciousness tries to understand why it happened. More precisely, why did it happen to her because one's mind does not have the ability to comprehend a disaster such as this one. Paradoxically, in such dreams Potter managed to find the first hint of healing when her husband appeared and drove her home.

### 3.3 Healing

A big and an important part of Potter's healing is once again God because she believes that it was all part of God's plan. Religion also helps her to cope with September 11 for she is sure God was there with them.

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<sup>71</sup> Rob Kaplan and Jean Potter, *By the Grace of God* (Bloomington: AuthorHouse, 2011), 32.



But I also know in my heart that God, Jesus, and angel spirits were with all of those magnificent souls to ease their pain and suffering as they ascended into heaven.<sup>72</sup>

He helped the survivors to get to safety and made the suffering of those who perished easier and shorter. Apart from moving away from New York City, changing job and getting a cat, Potter mentions that what helped her most was talking about the event and sharing everything she went through. Unlike the majority of survivors, she did not undergo any therapy but preferred talking with her husband.

We could talk about what we experienced and what we were feeling with the knowledge that the other one understood completely. (...) unless you were there you cannot relate to the magnitude and horror of it.<sup>73</sup>

And here comes the question to what extent are therapies helpful? When one loses a loved one or becomes ill, it is probably easier for a therapist to put himself in one's shoes, but a terrorist attack is much more specific, and it is nearly impossible to know what it is like without ever experiencing it. It is really important for a patient to feel an understanding from the therapist that is why it was a blessing in disguise that her husband too witnessed the attack with his own eyes because they could completely identify with each other in this long healing process. Eventually, almost 10 years after the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center Jean Potter lacked purpose in life and decided to write this book.

Miracles were all around that day, along with the pain, heartache, and despair.<sup>74</sup>

While the majority of books with the theme of September 11 can give readers a feeling that everything in the world is wrong and dark, *By the Grace of God* does the opposite and yet does not overshadow or downplay the attacks. It is so because of the author's ability to see good in every human being and the presence of God on every page of her book. Just like names on memorials, Potter gives, in the name of survivors, September 11 a human dimension by telling a detailed story of her life and life of the close ones. It is certainly important to know facts but at the same time it should not be perceived as an empty term, especially by young generations who were either really small then or not born yet. An excessive media coverage causes people to think they know everything about the event, but

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<sup>72</sup> Rob Kaplan and Jean Potter, *By the Grace of God* (Bloomington: AuthorHouse, 2011), 85-86.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.

they do not know anything. It is important to understand that media tell people only what they want people to know. Books, like this one by Jean Potter, were written not just to share a story, but also for those who seek the real truth.

## 4 FROM THE INSIDE OUT

*From the Inside Out: Harrowing Escapes from the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center* is a collection of fifteen stories of survivors, rewritten from audio records and edited by Erik O. Ronningen, whose story is included as well. The book was published shortly before the 12<sup>th</sup> anniversary. In contrast to *By the Grace of God*, this book focuses only on the day of the terrorist attack, not on the life before, nor the healing. More precisely, it concentrates on the escape from the Towers. The events after the attack, as well as brief mention of their current lives, are described in short epilogues at the end of the book.

### 4.1 Different Approach

The cover of the previous book was, despite the topic, light and positive. Moreover, with a smiling woman on it, which corresponded with the atmosphere of the book. On the other hand, the cover of *From the Inside Out* implies that the content of this book is more depressing and negative.

Starting with the title *From the Inside Out*, it is neutral for it does not have any positive nor negative words. The subtitle containing the words “harrowing escapes,” however, indicates that the reader will read about a tragedy. Nonetheless, the most powerful part of this cover is the photo. It captures an explosion, heavy smoke and flying debris. This photo was taken by Jim Usher, whose story is included in the book, when he was falling unconscious and decided to photograph what he sees so that his daughters know what his last moments were like.<sup>75</sup> When one looks at the cover of the first book with the undamaged World Trade Center and doves flying above and then on the cover of this one with the crushing building burying thousands of people, the difference between them is obvious. While the first one serves as a guide to healing, *From the Inside Out* attempts to describe the horror survivors had to go through.

There is no lack of dedication in this book, either. Ronningen does not focus only on firemen and policemen but also on those who died and the survivors. Moreover, he thanks everyone who helped him cope with the event: “Those who kept me sane and balanced throughout the difficult years.”<sup>76</sup> Also, this dedication is more emotional than the previous one. The reason may be that Ronningen’s experience in the Towers was deeper and more affective. The dedication in the previous book gives an impression of something that

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<sup>75</sup> Erik O. Ronningen, *From the Inside Out* (Quezon City: Flipside Digital Content Company, Inc. and Welcome Rain Publishers, 2013), 69.

<sup>76</sup> Erik O. Ronningen, *From the Inside Out* (Quezon City: Flipside Digital Content Company, Inc. and Welcome Rain Publishers, 2013).

simply needs to be done, while this one seems to be more personal. “And all of my absent friends and colleagues (...)”<sup>77</sup> Additionally, he mentions his loved ones and colleagues not God, nor fire fighters and policemen he never met.

Even though Ronningen is the author, his story, along with the rest, is narrated in a 3<sup>rd</sup> person form, for instance: “Erik completed his morning ablutions, and dressed in a dark-blue pinstripe suit.”<sup>78</sup> A 3<sup>rd</sup> person form is usually used when an author does not intend to describe inner thoughts or feelings, but this is not the case, for this book includes inner thoughts, such as “(...) and he thought to himself, a great day for flying.”<sup>79</sup> A motive may be a need to fit in with other stories so that it does not look as if Ronningen wanted to put an emphasis on his own story. Thanks to a 3<sup>rd</sup> person point of view, the stories are equal.

## 4.2 Uncovered Reality

Before the first chapter there is a preface where the author claims that the idea to write a book came “out of the blue”<sup>80</sup> just one day after the attacks. He then decided to record interviews with several survivors. What makes this book a little bit different from the rest is a story of a woman, Ronningen’s wife, who was not present at Ground Zero. Ronningen apparently tries to raise awareness of trauma developed with people who watched the events unfold on TV to show how great the impact was. At the interviews he encountered “bravery, selflessness, and generosity of spirit that exists, often dormant, inside us all, rising to the forefront in times of crisis.”<sup>81</sup> In other words, he partially opposes the saying that wars and crises bring out the worst in people. Nevertheless, Ronningen also admits he heard contrary stories about cowardice and selfishness. Apart from most of the others, Ronningen is not afraid to say that the World Trade Center was not full of wonderful and heroic people as they are usually referred to. An argument for calling all the affected heroes is probably respect, on the other hand, Ronningen tries to give his readers a realistic picture of what was happening inside the buildings.

Already in the preface it is obvious the author was greatly struck by the event when he claims that on September 11 “all our lives were changed forever”<sup>82</sup> and describes the

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<sup>77</sup> Erik O. Ronningen, *From the Inside Out* (Quezon City: Flipside Digital Content Company, Inc. and Welcome Rain Publishers, 2013).

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., ix.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., x.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., ix.

beginning of the day as “most remarkable, certainly unforgettable, and completely exhausting morning”<sup>83</sup>. It is interesting that shortly before this statement he states that the fateful morning was actually beautiful. As a matter of fact, the majority of people remember the morning for a perfectly clear blue sky. Even though the author depicts one morning, he uses completely opposite words as far as emotions are concerned. The reason why they talk about it with nice words is because they refer to the times before the attack, when everything was all right. It is almost like a metaphor for their previous normal lives, which now seem perfect, just like clear blue sky, in contrast to September 11 and the life thereafter.

The strongest part comes at the very end of the preface when Ronningen encourages readers to become a part of his story:

(...) watch the American Airlines 767 fly into *your* office, feel the towers bend and twist, and hear the deafening explosion. Smell the smoke and aviation gas and be weightless in plunging elevators. Struggle for a breath of oxygen in acrid, smoke-filled stairwells. Run for your life as the fireballs chase you through the lobby. Hear the sickening sound of the poor unfortunates jumping into “safety.”<sup>84</sup>

The author wants readers to fully identify with each story for this might be the only way how to grasp the incomprehensible reality. Giving the emphasis on the word *your* makes it even more urgent and pressing, which can make empathic and sensitive individuals uncomfortable. Dominick LaCapra argued that it is important to feel empathy in order to understand what a victim went through, however, there is a risk of developing a muted trauma and making a reader feel disturbed.<sup>85</sup> On the other hand, one might argue that this is exactly what readers expect when buying a book with the exploding World Trade Center Tower on it.

This is not the only way how Ronningen offers almost a personal experience. The narration with time data provides a minute-by-minute telling and one can literally go through every second of the attacks. Also, the author is not afraid of horrific details, for instance when

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<sup>83</sup> Erik O. Ronningen, *From the Inside Out* (Quezon City: Flipside Digital Content Company, Inc. and Welcome Rain Publishers, 2013), xi.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, xii.

<sup>85</sup> Dominick LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), 71.

one of the survivors depicts a dead body as “distorted, as if all the bones were broken.”<sup>86</sup> Another example is a man who stumbles over corpses.

(...) Tony tripped on something soft and staggered like a drunk. He stepped on another soft object and instinctively knew what it was.  
*Don't look down*, a little voice in his head instructed.<sup>87</sup>

Such details can be perceived as inappropriate, too cruel or even disrespectful towards the perished ones. On the other, as long as there are no photos or concrete names, the usage of that kind of words is expectable. The most predisposed ones to be disconcerted are presumably survivors or the bereaved, but it is unlikely they seek out such books. Eventually, it is the reader who decides whether he keeps his distance or let the story under his skin.

### 4.3 Linking Signs

Between the preface and the first chapter there is a short description of a night on September 11, more specifically of a dream. It is, however, not evident which September is referred to for there is no year mentioned. On the one hand, it can be considered to be a sign of PTSD because the dream is about a fall of a tower. Moreover, the author uses the same words he uses when talking about the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center, such as “twisting, echoing rumble”<sup>88</sup> and also describes an infamous sight of “books, binders, and small articles (...) flying through the air”<sup>89</sup> known from documentaries. He also uses the same term he used in the preface, “quarter-mile-high structures”<sup>90</sup> instead of the Towers or the Twin Towers. On the other hand, the following chapters continue chronologically, and this nightmare may serve as a link between Ronningen’s and other stories because many responders admit they had a bad premonition too.

There are more linking signs, which connect these stories. For instance, the majority of survivors remember that day as “clear and beautiful”<sup>91</sup>, they remember the World Trade Center “brilliantly silhouetted by an azure-blue New Jersey sky.”<sup>92</sup> Such memories might be a distortion caused by trauma. One might fail to understand the reason of the attacks

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<sup>86</sup> Erik O. Ronningen, *From the Inside Out* (Quezon City: Flipside Digital Content Company, Inc. and Welcome Rain Publishers, 2013), 40.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 9.

since consciousness might still be in a shock and thinks in a different way, for example how could it happen on such a lovely day? On a day when everything was supposed to be great and bright, who let it happen? In other words, the consciousness is able to focus on basic questions only.

Another interesting link is employment. The majority of people, whose stories are in this book, used to work for the Port Authority. According to the web site created by the non-profit organization Voices of September 11<sup>th</sup>, 84 employees of Port Authority died, which makes it the fifth most affected company.<sup>93</sup>

And eventually, several survivors either meet or witness a situation concerning another survivor as in the following example. One of them was trapped in an elevator, which was forced down the shaft due to an explosion. Later in the book, a man hears “a loud, whooshing sound coming from the twelve express elevators”<sup>94</sup> and there is one more man who hears “alarm bells and realized that it was the elevator alarm.”<sup>95</sup> Thanks to the linking signs, the stories set in chaotic surroundings now seem more connected, moreover it is easier to orient in them.

#### 4.4 Absurdity

It was argued in *Unclaimed Experience* and proved in *By the Grace of God* that consciousness cannot recognize a danger or identify the seriousness of situation immediately. The way thinking in nerve-racking and highly stressful conditions works can be considered incomprehensible or even absurd. When the first plane hit the Tower One, precisely speaking the North Tower, there is one similar thought that went through minds of some survivors, that is that “repairs to the tower would take only a week or so to accomplish.”<sup>96</sup> In other words, they were not aware of a real danger or refused to accept that this time it may be worse than the bombing in 1993. When one’s mind starts to realize what is happening, it is overwhelmed and because of the unexpectedness, which causes unpreparedness, consciousness basically stops working. It is proved by a reaction of Sonia, one of the survivors.

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<sup>93</sup> “Victim Remembrances,” Living Memorial, accessed April 22, 2020, <https://livingmemorial.voicesofseptember11.org/victim-remembrances>.

<sup>94</sup> Erik O. Ronningen, *From the Inside Out* (Quezon City: Flipside Digital Content Company, Inc. and Welcome Rain Publishers, 2013), 32.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

She stood, mesmerized, unable to pull her eyes off the mayhem. (...) Instead of running, Sonia just stood there and watched, stunned.<sup>97</sup>

Paradoxically enough, one can find an indication of humour, which is probably the most absurd thing that can occur during the deadliest terrorist attacks ever. One of the survivors suspected it was a terrorist attack when he noticed burning paper flying behind windows, for he considered it to be propaganda leaflets. Nevertheless, when he noticed it was a *Time* magazine, he thought for himself: “Nah! (...) There’s no one throwing Time magazines at us.”<sup>98</sup> This individual experienced the state described above, more precisely, the state of irrational thinking caused by an unexpectedly stressful situation. He could, however, be the exception and belong among those who remained surprisingly calm and suffered the shock days or weeks later.

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<sup>97</sup> Erik O. Ronningen, *From the Inside Out* (Quezon City: Flipside Digital Content Company, Inc. and Welcome Rain Publishers, 2013), 35.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.



## 5 COMPARISON AND EVALUATION

The way both books are structured is a deciding factor in what it leaves in a reader after the book is finished. Jean Potter divided her book into seven chapters, each of which focuses on a different time of her life. That means that September 11 is a topic of one chapter only. Even though this chapter is the longest one, it does not contain many details, neither about surroundings nor about Potter's escape from the North Tower. The book also spares its readers horrific details of falling and dead bodies.

*By the Grace of God* is not a book that would offer information about events inside the World Trade Center that cannot be heard on television. The fatal day is described rather hurriedly, generally and briefly. This book, therefore, serves as an image of an average survivor rather than a closer look at the attacks. Probably the most important message of Potter's book is to show the importance of religion in one's life, and its impact on the process of healing.

Erik Ronningen, on the other hand, focused only on September 11 and it is evident already in the content for there are no chapters concerned with a life before or after the attacks. The book is divided into important parts of the day, such as *'Impact'* or *'Collapse'*. Each chapter contains parts named with time data. These parts offer experience of different people in various places of the World Trade Center happening at the same time. Such structure gives a reader a more or less complete depiction of the events in the entire complex. Moreover, a detailed description contributes to the better imagination of surroundings and the atmosphere in the Towers. Ronningen thus puts the reader on a high floor of the building and leads him out to the safety.

*From the Inside Out* is suitable for curious readers who want to find out the truth despite the risk of suffering a muted trauma. Its value is in the personal experience of each survivor. Due to the attention to detail, despite the horror of it, the book is catchy, and it is not easy to stop reading because if a reader stopped, he would stay trapped inside the terror.

## CONCLUSION

The first part of this bachelor's thesis aimed to explain the term trauma in general, its types and PTSD, which is a natural and important part of trauma. Nevertheless, the main focus was on its relation to trauma and writing. This issue was researched by several experts, but *Unclaimed Experience* by Cathy Caruth is considered to be the most substantive one. On the other hand, there is *Trauma Fiction*, which opposes Caruth primarily in the main idea, and that is that trauma cannot be put in a story, more precisely narrativized.

Cathy Caruth is more challenging to read because it uses many terms and it is written quite complicatedly. Nonetheless, she often refers to Freud, which makes the book interesting and raises many questions in its reader. Caruth wonders about history and referentiality and states that history is a matter of adjustment, which is supported by Freud's understanding of the Jewish history. Caruth also points to the fact that survival may not be as beneficial as it is believed to be because it can turn into a burden. At the end of *Unclaimed Experience*, she deals with dreams and nightmares and wonders whether it is a rescue to wake up or not.

Anne Whitehead is more reader friendly because her text is easier to comprehend, moreover she does not repeat herself throughout the book like Caruth. Whitehead supports her arguments with book analyses, which are less challenging than Freud's philosophy. She questions Caruth's claims, for instance a belated reaction to trauma and talks about a trans-generational trauma, which haunts a whole family line. Whitehead also deals with testimonies and its truthfulness and accuracy. It was argued that the human mind is not capable to remember everything, especially in a state of shock. Books written by survivors are, therefore, distorted memories adjusted to one's satisfaction.

Overall, this thesis concentrates on September 11 and that is why the first chapter describes in detail what happened and what the consequences were. The second part, the analysis, follows the first chapter and deals with two books concerned with this topic. It has been almost 20 years since the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, so it is no surprise that there are countless books to be found. The books chosen for this thesis stand out and differ from each other, one of them for its optimistic approach and the other one for its complex depiction of the situation inside the Tower, achieved by the number of narrators and detailed description.

Writing this Thesis made me research the events of September 11 more than I probably should have. I have found out that except videos filmed shortly before the attacks and

famous videos of the plane hitting the Tower, there are available, in my opinion highly disrespectful, records of trapped people calling 911. More precisely, there is a record of a phone call interrupted by the sickening sound of screaming people and the crushing sounds of the Tower. In other words, the man's last seconds of his life.

Apart from the two chosen books, I read some others and realized that even though I was only four years old when it happened, I feel affected and traumatized in a sense. I realized that although my generation can never truly know September 11, it has a great impact on us. When we watch the videos, we do not see it as a historical footage, we watch it with anguish, sorrow and anger. I have never been to New York nor known any of the victims and yet, reading the books about the attacks and getting to know the truth, which is not shown in media, made me feel empathy, sympathy and sadness, and that is why it is so important to read such books. This is how we will not forget.

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

- A NIST – National Institute of Standards and Technology
- B PTSD – post-traumatic stress disorder