

Almost all the publications I have cited focus on the text of the play and only briefly mention the images. Only Gade has analysed one of the posters in relation to the poster of the *Wars* it appropriates. She claims that Mroué investigates how martyr posters were used as political tools during the *Wars*, specifically for convincing men to join militias and ‘distributing competing ‘truths’ and histories’ by ‘taking the cynical ‘appropriation logic’ of political parties ad absurdum’. These truths and realities, Gade argues, are undermined in *Nancy*, as the posters are transformed from documents into an artwork, where Mroué questions whether the poster can be trusted as testimony.<sup>205</sup>

In summary, the existing writings on *Nancy* focus mainly on the actors’ speech, which is interpreted as revealing how difficult it is to achieve closure from the *Wars*, or as a comment on the instability of history and identity in post-war Lebanon. Individual publications also address peculiar aspects of the play, such as masculinity (Haugbolle), Murr Tower (Jallad, Naeff), or fact-fiction (Bellan, Gade). Most authors read *Nancy* primarily as a reflection on the memory and history of the *Wars*. In my understanding, which is informed by a background in art history—rather than Middle Eastern, cultural, or theatre studies—the play unfolds only when read not only via the text, but via the combination of text and image.

### 3.3 Reading *Nancy* as an Interplay of Text and Image

The above-mentioned publications, with the exception of Gade’s writing, tackle but do not analyse the combination of text and image. While Gade certainly provides a fruitful start to the discussion of *Nancy*’s visuals, her examination is limited to the appropriation of just one poster. In this book, I will scrutinise not only one image, but a substantial selection from the play.

In my reading, *Nancy* carefully and deliberately reflects on, questions, and appropriates the image and thus the figure of the martyr. I do not understand *Nancy*, as Bruzzi does, in the framework of trauma. This is because, as mentioned, I do not think it is productive to think of artists as traumatised victims. I also do not read *Nancy*, like Wilson-Goldie and Jallad do, as a historical documentation of the *Wars*. This is because the play does not cover many crucial events of the conflicts and because there are important historical figures, such as Mussa al-Sadr, who do not appear in the play. This also corresponds to what Mroué and Fadi Toufiq, who co-wrote the play, write in the script’s foreword:

The text narrates the history of our long and various wars; however, it does not strive to provide an alternative history to add or compare to the other existing histories of these wars.<sup>206</sup>

205 Gade, ‘Learning to Live’, 335–40.

206 Mroué and Toufiq, *How Nancy*, 9.

The authors clearly state that their goal was not to write an additional history of the *Wars*. By narrating fragmentary incidents of the conflicts in Lebanon, *Nancy* is not unearthing secrets of the past—the stories of the *Wars* are well known. I suggest instead that the play, when read as an interplay of text and image, analyses martyr posters and demonstrates that these images were and are used by all parties involved in the *Wars* in a similar mode and for similar purposes: political advertisement, the making of territorial claims, the marking of identity, and mobilisation. The images likewise serve as weapons against political rivals. *Nancy* also delves into the construction and dissemination of the martyr poster, which I will discuss in more detail in Chapter 4.

Throughout this book, I will argue that the martyr posters behind the four actors are, as Quilty mentioned, not merely decoration but a crucial component, since they, in combination with the words of the actors, constitute a critique of the construction of the martyr. My focus on the importance of the image is informed by my background as an art researcher, and I want to emphasise that my discussion is not based on a theatre studies approach. I believe that this focus is necessary because, as elaborated above, the writings on *Nancy* by scholars of other disciplines have emphasised more the speech than the visuals. As a result, the relevance of the posters as a crucial element of the stage setting of the play has been overlooked. By drawing attention to the visuals, I hope, I will be able to provide a new interpretation of *Nancy*, which cannot be achieved when only the text or only a few images are considered. The posters of the play are not illustrating the speeches but are incarnating concepts.

My research is informed by a close reading of a video of the staging of *Nancy*, which I repeatedly accessed in the audiovisual archive of Ashkal Alwan, and the book *How Nancy Wished That Everything Was an April's Fool's Joke* (2012), which comprises the Arabic version and English translation of the text as well as reproductions of the visuals. My Arabic is still a work in progress; therefore, I worked with the English translation (the parenthetical page references refer to this version). In addition to drawing on secondary literature and on interviews with Mroué, Maakaroun, and Toufiq, I will link *Nancy* to other artworks—both by Mroué and by other artists. Furthermore, I will identify the specific importance of the appropriations of *Wars* posters, which I have gathered from the library archives of the American University of Beirut and Maasri's collection, which she names *signsofconflict* and which can be accessed online.<sup>207</sup>