

Nadal, Marita, and Mónica Calvo. *Trauma in Contemporary Literature. Narrative and Representation*. Taylor and Francis, 2014. 253 pages.

Maya Zalbidea Paniagua (mpzalbid@ucm.es)
Universidad Complutense de Madrid

Edited by Marita Nadal and Mónica Calvo, this volume offers a wide spectrum of updated essays dealing with representations of trauma in contemporary literature. The topics discussed in the book are organised into three sections, namely part I, entitled “Global Trauma and the End of History,” part II, “Trauma and the Power of Narrative,” and part III, “Trauma and the Problem of Representation.” After the rewriting of trauma theories by Freud (*Nachträglichkeit*, translated as ‘belatedness’), LaCapra, Derrida and Rothberg explore the notions of belatedness, silence, repetition and polytemporality in literary works that reflect the effects of individual and collective trauma in a globalised world.

The volume opens with a chapter by Cathy Caruth entitled “After the End: Psychoanalysis in the Ashes of History” where Freud’s (1907) essay “Delusion and Dream in Wilhelm Jensen’s *Gradiva*” and Derrida’s (1995) *Archive Fever* are studied to argue that in psychoanalytic discourse, “impressions” and “repressions” are unveiled and what has been inscribed is repressed again. According to Caruth, there are two dimensions in twentieth-century history to which psychoanalysis bears witness, namely the concept that gets repeated and the memory that erases it.

In the second chapter, “Apocalypses Now: Collective Trauma, Globalisation and the New Gothic Sublime,” Avril Horner examines how Gothic apocalypse narratives are used to explore the fragility of individuals, who are well informed and traumatised by either bombings or environmental disasters, in a globalised world. Horner analyses apocalyptic situations in literary works and films in the last twenty years: Danny Boyle’s *28 Days Later*, P.D. James’s *The Children of Men*, Cormac McCarthy’s *The Road*, Liz Jensen’s *The Rapture*, and W.G. Sebald’s *Austerlitz*. Horner groups apocalyptic fictions into three categories, namely “plague” narratives, environmental disasters, and war narratives relating to either terrorism or nuclear explosions. She

concludes alleging that the objective of trauma and Gothic horror is raising awareness of global responsibility in retrieving the sublime.

In the following chapter, “Not Now, Not Yet: Polytemporality in Fictions of the Iraq War,” Roger Luckhurst, relying on theories developed by Steven Connor and Michael Rothberg, argues that the reason why some of the most interesting Western world cultural responses to the Iraq war do not mention the war must be the fact that cultural narratives about it are often displaced. Luckhurst’s second thesis is that the refraction of polytemporality is the only way of grasping war in its contemporaneity.

The second part, “Trauma and the Power of Narrative,” focuses on narratives about trauma, including postcolonial narratives. In “The Turn to the Self and the History in Eva Figes’ Autobiographical Works: The Healing of Old Wounds?”, Silvia Pellicer-Ortín aims to prove that Figes’s realistic projection can be studied from the perspective of Trauma Studies, and that the writing-healing process of liberation that the author-narrator uses makes it possible to reconcile with the past.

In “History, Dreams and Shards: On Starting Over in Jenny Diski’s *Then Again*,” Bayer explains that in its approach to transgenerational memory and the Holocaust, the novel offers artistic and aesthetic work as a countermeasure to traumatic moments of crisis. For Diski, the novel transmits the idea that creativity and aesthetic work have a healing power.

In “Plight versus Right: Trauma and the Process of Recovering and Moving Beyond the Past in Zoë Wicomb’s *Playing in the Light*,” Dolores Herrero explores the traumatic experiences of the character called Marion Campbell in Zoë Wicomb’s *Playing in the Light*. The author explores the phenomenon of the ghost that Marion sees with Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok’s theory of the ghost as a figure that keeps the interpersonal and transgenerational consequences of silence.

Isabel Fraile Murlanch continues dealing with literary reflections on trauma in “Seeing it Twice: Trauma and Resilience in the Narrative of Janette Turner Hospital.” She considers that this narrative supports

the idea that people can recover from trauma through generating resilience, receiving affection and being able to reconcile themselves with their own history.

The last chapter in the second part is “The Burden of the Old Country’s History on the Psyche of Dominican-American Migrants: Junot Díaz’s *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*,” in which Aitor Ibarrola-Armendáriz studies the collective traumas of an immigrant family during the “Trujillato” regime in the Dominican Republic (1930-1961). The author highlights the common features of collective trauma narratives, such as fragmentation, displacement, hesitation, repetition, and resistance. He also highlights the special introspection of the Caribbean popular culture and applies Kenneth Thomson’s theories on social psychology to argue for the healing process of the community.

In the third part, entitled “Trauma and the Problem of Representation,” the use of storytelling as a therapeutic device is analysed by contrasting theories about psychoanalysis, affect, contemporary history and popular culture. In the first chapter of this section, “H.D.’s Twice-(Un)Told Tale”, Marc Amfreville analyses Hilda Doolittle’s “Writing on the Wall,” the first part of the volume later published as *Tribute to Freud*, as a literary adventure about the real nature of trauma. Amfreville’s hypothesis is that, although H.D. insisted on the fact that the conversations during her therapeutic sessions with Freud were directly taken from her notebooks, some creative elements must have been added to the text. As an imaginative speaker, H.D. transcribed these psychoanalytic meeting records not only transmitting her personal trauma but also showing that a whole generation shared the collective trauma of the two World Wars.

Within the field of collective trauma, Bilyana Vanyova Kostova explores the fragmented collective memory in Jeffrey Eugenides’ novel in “Time to Write them Off? Impossible Voices and the Problem of Representing Trauma in *The Virgin Suicides*.” Kostova analyses how the use of the uncommon first person plural narrator in this gothic novel dealing with teenage suicide produces empathy on the readers representing the cruel confrontation with reality of a group of teenagers who perceive sexuality and death simultaneously.

Analysing the topics of representation and death, María Jesús Martínez-Alfaro carries out a comparative study of two works related to the Holocaust experience in “Fugal Repetition and the Re-enactments of Trauma: Holocaust Representation in Paul Celan’s “Deathfugue” and Cynthia Ozick’s *The Shawl*.” Martínez-Alfaro finds parallelisms between Celan’s poem and Ozick’s story in the treatment of the silencing effects and the horror of violence, as well as in the symbolism and structure of both texts. The repetitions in both represent the madness characteristic of the effects of trauma that provoke paralysis and silence, which are finally contrasted with the need to address somebody to find relief.

In chapter twelve, “Of Ramps and Selections: The Persistence of Trauma in Julian Barnes’ *A History of the World in 10 ½ Chapters*,” Jean-Michel Ganteau argues that critics have not applied trauma theory to the novel except for Onega (2008) (356, 359). Contrary to Onega’s position that it is an individual type of trauma, Ganteau argues that it is rather the collective and historical trauma of the Shoah. Ganteau considers that this parody of a sacred text, the biblical chapter of Noah associated with the genocide, is a clear example of “traumatic realism.”

In “The Trauma of Anthropocentrism and the Reconnection of Self and World in J. M. Coetzee’s *Dusklands*,” Susana Onega sheds light on Rothberg’s perspective that *Dusklands* should be analysed as an instance of Holocaust fiction as well as Coetzee’s attempt to deconstruct the original idea of progress that the Enlightenment gave of the events of the Vietnam War and the colonisation of Africa.

Maite Escudero-Alías examines the effect of shame in a narrative within the field of trauma studies in the chapter “There’s that curtain come down: The Burden of Shame in Sarah Waters’ *The Night Watch*.” The author challenges the psychoanalytic accounts of human affects, chiefly mourning and melancholia, from Silvan Tomkins’ theory of affects, through Nicholas Abrahams and Maria Torok’s view of Freudian psychoanalysis, up to more recent notions of affects not only as spatial emotions, but also as structures of feeling which may provide a reflection of personal and communal identities.

The volume closes with Bárbara Aritzi's chapter dealing with the trauma of terrorism in contemporary history in "Welcome to contemporary trauma culture: Foreshadowing, Sideshadowing and Trauma in Ian McEwan's *Saturday*," which discusses McEwan's novel, set in London after the 9/11 attacks and a month before the invasion of Iraq. Aritzi uses Elena Semino and Gary Saul Morson's explorations of the treatment of trauma to analyse the forms of trauma and temporality in this novel.

To conclude, in this book writing is seen as a therapeutic mechanism to recover from traumatic experiences and the literary works express what history cannot tell. It is a highly recommendable book to acquire a global and postmodern perspective of contemporary trauma literary studies.

WORKS CITED

- Abraham, Nicolas, and Maria Torok. *The Shell and the Kernel: Renewals of Psychoanalysis*. Vol. 1. Edited and translated by Nicholas T. Rand, University of Chicago Press, 1994.
- Derrida, Jacques. "Freud and the Scene of Writing." *Writing and Difference*. Translated by Alan Bass, University of Chicago Press, 1978, pp. 246-91.
- Freud, Sigmund. *Delusion and Dream: An Interpretation of the Light of Psychoanalysis of "Gradiva," A Novel by Wilhelm Jensen*. Translated by Helen M. Downey, New Republic, 1927.
- Onega, Susana. "The Nightmare of History, the Value of Art and the Ethics of Love in Julian Barnes' *A History of the World in 10 1/2 Chapters*." *Ethics in Culture: The Dissemination of Values through Literature and Other Media*, edited by Astrid Erll, Herbert Grabes, and Ansgar Nünning, De Gruyter, 2008, pp. 355-68.
- Rothberg, Michel. *Traumatic Realism: The Demands of Holocaust Representation*. University of Minnesota Press, 2000.