

## BOOK REVIEWS

JACKSON, VIRGINIA, AND YOPIE PRINS, EDs. *The Lyric Theory Reader: A Critical Anthology*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2013. Print. \$49.95.

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### **Justin Kolb, The American University in Cairo**

Among my colleagues, much of the reaction to this anthology edited by Virginia Jackson and Yopie Prins hinges on the definite article at the beginning of the title. It is *The Lyric Theory Reader*, rather than *A Lyric Theory Reader*, and the “*The*” can be taken as a provocation. Jackson and Prins have assembled a book that both aims to be the definitive collection of critical work on lyric theory *and* defines lyric theory as an explicitly modern invention, thus placing classical, early modern, and enlightenment models of the lyric on the other side of an epistemic gap. The result is a collection of twentieth- and twenty-first-century theory and criticism that does not attempt to survey lyric theory beyond a tightly defined set of borders. If you are looking for an elegantly built and confidently presented collection of modern ideas about a particular definition of lyric, this is your book. If you want a broader treatment of lyric in its various historic guises, look elsewhere.

Jackson and Prins open their “General Introduction” with a paradox: “We take it for granted that we know what the lyric is [...] Yet it has become as notoriously difficult to define the lyric as it is impossible to define poetry itself” (1). Noting that “such problems of definition are also invitations to theorists,” Jackson and Prins immediately define the boundaries of their project, which “traces a critical genealogy of the modern idea of lyric as it has emerged in Anglo-American literary criticism in the past century” (1). Far from being one of the oldest forms of poetry, or a time-spanning category of poetry (perhaps even a synonym for poetry itself), the lyric is a

recent invention, deceptively antiqued by its modern creators:

To say that the lyric is a modern idea or theory rather than an ancient genre might surprise readers accustomed to thinking about lyric poetry as a given in the Western tradition—indeed, as the oldest form in the tradition, the origin of literature and civilization. It is true that if we think of choral hymns or Sappho's odes or even tribal chants or popular song as the roots of lyric, a critical genealogy of lyric as modern theory does not make much sense. But the concept of lyric as the oldest form of poetic expression is actually a relatively recent notion; specifically, it is a post-Enlightenment idea, developed steadily over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth century. (1-2)

Jackson and Prins see this modern notion of lyric as *ur-poetry* taking shape in the late eighteenth century, as neoclassical and popular verse genres intersected with the era's mania for classification. In 1819, Goethe suggested that all verse could be sorted among "the three natural forms of poetry" (3): the narrative (or epic), the lyric, and the dramatic. Using a formula derived from Aristotle, it became common to divide the genres according to who is speaking: in lyric, the poet speaks; in drama, the characters speak; in epic or narrative poetry, both speak in turn.

318 Among these three categories, lyric tended to be idealized and abstracted to the point that it became less a descriptive category and more an unattainable ideal of language and subjectivity. G.W.F. Hegel framed the lyric as the most difficult of modern genres because in it the poet must become "the centre which holds the whole lyric work of art together" in order to become "a self-bound subjective entity (*Totalität*)" (3).

In 1833, John Stuart Mill also defined lyric as an abstract ideal that may not have any real examples: "If for Hegel the ideal lyric poet would move civilization forward in his perfect self-expression, for Mill the ideal poet would have to represent both original nature and acquired culture, something no one had yet done perfectly" (3). The lyric poet thus became the hero of a poesy yet to appear (though Jackson and Prins wryly note that Walt Whitman volunteered for the job). Given this context, it is ironic that Mill's most influential definition of lyric—"eloquence is *heard*, poetry is *overheard*" (3)—occurs in an essay arguing that the true lyric poet is nowhere to be found. Mill's declaration, "Poetry is feeling confessing itself to itself in moments of solitude" (4), would become a talisman for the New Critics (with whom the historical arc of this reader really begins) and a commonplace about both lyric and poetry in general that has proven hard to dislodge.

These overlapping definitions of lyric—it is at once one of poetry's fundamental forms (perhaps *the* fundamental form), an idealized state of subjective self-containment, and "utterance overheard"—would prove both widely influential and irresistible targets for critique. Both traditions are well-documented in this reader. After a boundary-setting opening section on "Genre Theory," there is a "Models of Lyric" section that, perhaps too quickly, surveys examples of lyric theory applied to classical, medieval, early modern, and nineteenth-century texts. While these historical pieces, especially early modernist Heather Dubrow's judiciously historicist "Lyric Forms"

(2000), are well-chosen, the organization of the *Reader* places them inside quotation marks. The *Reader* suggests that these efforts to understand Shakespeare or Sappho are best read as applications of a modern idea. The idea that they might actually capture something about their subject era is presented skeptically at best.

The *Reader* then proceeds roughly chronologically, marching through sections on “Anglo-American New Criticism,” “Structuralist Reading,” “Post-Structuralist Reading,” “Frankfurt School and After,” “Phenomenologies of Lyric Reading,” “And Avant-Garde Anti-Lyricism.” The *Reader* is rounded out with sections on “Lyric and Sexual Difference” and “Comparative Lyric,” but its heart is in the historical progression at its center.

Jackson and Prins are tracing the rise and fall of a durable complex of commonplaces, and their selected essays—mostly well-known pieces by figures ranging from Northrop Frye to Harold Bloom to Jacques Derrida to Theodor Adorno to Jonathan Culler—make for a compelling story. The reader can see Mill’s lyric transmuted from distant ideal to straightforward descriptor in the hands of the New Critics, subjected to the linguistic rigor of the structuralists, pushed into self-negating irony by deconstruction, and returned, changed, to the dialectic in the hands of the Frankfurt school. As the reader progresses, certain landmarks and favorites emerge, and old chestnuts from graduate school theory classes return. I was particularly struck by René Wellek’s giddy demolition of the modern lyric in “Genre Theory, the Lyric, and *Erlebnis*” (1967) (a text that clearly influenced Jackson and Prins) and by Jacques Derrida’s “Che cos’è la poesia” (1988), with its playful image of the self-contained, ahistorical lyric as a *hèrrison* (hedgehog) “thrown onto the road, absolute, solitary, rolled up in a ball *next to (it)self*” (287). The implication is that the spiny little ball is going to get squashed.

Revisiting these old texts, and reading some of them for the first time, also cast more recent developments in literary theory in a new light. A selection from the New Critic I.A. Richards’s “The Analysis of a Poem and The Definition of a Poem” (1924) draws on neurology (and includes an eccentric use of neurons to graph a line of verse) in ways reminiscent of contemporary cognitive and neuro-scientific approaches to literature. Post-structuralism’s attention to the inhuman nature of language proved a reminder that the current vogue for “posthumanism” is not unprecedented. Essays which argue for empirical generic categories brought to mind recent digital humanities efforts to ground generic distinctions in quantifiable elements of the text, sifted by machine.

The non-English texts are provided in good, well-annotated translations, and Jackson and Prins write with admirable clarity and precision, even when introducing such notoriously dense or difficult writers as Adorno or De Man. This clarity and confidence is not as common as it should be in literary criticism. Their selections and supplementary materials would be quite useful in an introductory course on literary theory.

However, by the end of this behemoth I found myself unsatisfied. I remained

unconvinced that bracketing off the lyric as a limited, contested, even self-consuming modern artifact was the best approach to this style of poetry, or to larger questions of genre. The epistemic break the editors insisted upon seemed too sharp, and I am not sure the mutual incompatibility of pre- and post-Enlightenment definitions of the lyric can be maintained.

Jonathan Culler's essay, "Lyric, History, and Genre" (2009), also included in the *Reader*, gives us a way out of the impasse. While conceding the limitations of established ideas about genre, Culler argues for continuing to use generic categories as a period-spanning tool—a bridge, rather than a border:

320 Given the historicizing inclinations of criticism these days, it is important to stress that conceptions of genres are not just accounts of what people in a particular period thought; it is crucial to the notion of genre as a model that people might have been wrong about them, unaware of affinities or ignoring continuities in favor of more striking novelties, or recognizing only an attenuated version of a larger tradition. Genre study cannot just be a matter, for instance, of looking at what Renaissance critics say about genres and using only those categories for thinking about Renaissance literature, though of course one should try them out, while keeping in mind the possibility that more capacious and historically informed categories may be essential to grasping the full import and deepest resources of literary productions. (65)

In these lines, one can grasp a different approach to doing historically informed generic studies. The differences in periods and schools can be acknowledged, but seen as bridgeable gaps rather than impassable borders. There is a different *Lyric Theory Reader* implied in these words. Ultimately, that was the reader I wished I had.

EL-ARISS, TAREK. *Trials of Arab Modernity: Literary Affects and the New Political*. New York: Fordham UP. 2013. Pp. x+233.

### **Nadia Bou Ali, American University of Beirut**

Tarek el-Ariss's *Trials of Arab Modernity: Literary Affects and the New Political*, although a novel addition to the field of comparative literature for the scope of Arabic sources that it covers, pushes the limits of theoretical rigor and promises more than it fulfills. In a manner characteristic of postmodern and postcolonial cultural theory, the book brings forth a pastiche of Deleuze, Benjamin, Lacan, Foucault, Said, and Bhabha, amongst others, to the reading of Arabic texts. In its fervor for dismantling the "binary oppositions" (10) of colonialism and "Western modernity," the book argues for an essentially non-critical humanist conception of modernity: modernity is characterized as a sequence of non-contingent events, *ahdath*, and as an "ongoing practice that both suppresses and produces literary genres and experiences" (11). Characteristic of post-1970 cultural theory, *Trials of Arab Modernity* is a book about

difference, the instability of identity, the body, sexuality, the media, and the presumed end of representation.

In the book, modernity is perceived as emerging from a number of events [*ahdath*] rather than as innovation [*hadatha*]: events that are inflicted on bodies and from which emerge a series of affects loosely defined to include loss, confusion, melancholia, trauma, distortion, disgust, and other “breakdowns in the mechanisms of consciousness” (37). The author makes little effort to connect these affects to material structures of experience or to the historical conditions of capitalism that make them possible. They become the basis for the political, while universalism, morality, and collective experience are shunned as representational hegemonies. The political is perceived by el-Ariss as that which is constituted through the experience of the excluded, the marginalized, the hybrid, the vulgar, and the poetic, while class, ideology, culture, and any form of universal human knowledge are seen to have no purchase on politics.

The book begins from Tahtawi’s *takhlis* as a testimonial of the Benjaminian “shock experience” (13); it then takes us through Shidyaq’s aversions to civilization and his affects of “anxiety and collapse” (54) which lead to the disorientation and fragmentation underlying colonial trauma (103), in which affect performs an irretrievable loss. Next, it considers the “queer textuality” (120) that formulates a rebellious subjectivity (124) in present Arab societies; finally, it concludes with an account of the present encounters with the virtual and the new Arabic language that emerges from the sphere of social media. Counter-intuitively, el-Ariss reads Benjamin’s “shock experience” through Tahtawi’s writings as a mark of heroism: a willingness to be bodily scarred by the age. It is worth noting, however, that Benjamin juxtaposes his original concept of *Erlebniss*, immediate shock experience, to *Erfahrungen*, which is impartable or communicable experience. This is a strictly anti-humanist reading: for Benjamin, the task of the heroic figure is to reconstruct from *Erlebniss*, the world of experiential emptiness, a new communal experience that would exceed individual fragmentedness (Khatib). El-Ariss’s representation of modern Arab subjectivity as the embodiment of fragmented experiences draws out an Arab subject that is all too human in its domestication as civilization’s other. This is a move that does not fulfill the task of dismantling the East/West binary precisely because it accepts the humanist interpretation of that binary.

El-Ariss wishes to unsettle the binaries of tradition/modern, east/west, by analyzing the “fantasmatic” spaces of Nahda texts (45) and identifying the “narrative within a narrative” and affect as the other level of “articulation of knowledge and power” (45). The analysis begins with a re-reading of Tahtawi’s travel narrative of Europe as an affective testimonial of the trials of bureaucratization and the redrawing of the political in the late Ottoman Empire. The main thesis of this chapter echoes the aim of the book: “modernity no longer consists in material acquisition or artifacts or social structures imported from the West, but characterizes instead the experience involved in fulfilling the ruler’s desire or demand” (46). Hence, modernity emerges

as a “poetic modernity” (46-50), as a repetition of an Abbasid age, and one that is repeated in the various subversions of narrative structures that el-Ariss traces in the last chapter of his book to modern-day hacking practices in the Arab world. These hacking practices are analyzed as “the young generation’s attempt to speak with a new voice” within a ‘global’ world (168). Here again, el-Ariss confuses modernity with globality as a condition of external differences, multiple ‘agencies’, and natives who can and indeed do speak. However, we are not really told why Tahtawi’s “impotence and castration” (Ch. 2) and Shidyaq’s “aversions” (Ch. 3) are singular and intense affects. Ultimately, the reader is left wondering why it is no longer possible, since the nineteenth century, to distinguish a phenomenal state of being from the word by which it is named.

Al-Ariss’s trajectory from Tahtawi to the breakdown of narrative tools in current hacking practices confirms Fredric Jameson’s analysis of affect as one of the “chronological endpoints of realism” (Jameson 29) and as the point of dissolution of literary representation. However, it does not share Jameson’s prediction of the dissolution of the logic of affect, for the ultimate aim of affect is a battle to be waged “against the dominance of a point of view which seems to hold the affective impulses in check and lend them the organizing attribution of a central consciousness” (Jameson 31). Shidyaq, in his under-studied non-literary works, insisted on formulating anew “*ilm al-llugha*,” a study of the language that is adequate for modernity, released from the fetters of the grammarian tradition, and dialectically capable of carrying out thought in the world. For Shidyaq and many of his contemporaries, Arabic is a language that represents the world, but that does not on its own establish the possibility of that representation. The immense work done on language in this specific period complicates the assumed collapse of systems of representation and remains unaddressed in the book.

The central claim of *Trials of Arab Modernity* is that Arab modernity is constituted as a “somatic condition” that displaces the Enlightenment’s “oculocentricity” and its concomitant “Western gaze” (5-6), a condition that is essentially affective rather than representational. These affects and trials of Arab modernity are “activated at a variety of sensorial levels embodied in the texts” (6) which the book sets out to examine. The texts are, however, representational media for bodily affect which are the locations of modernity’s trials. This problematic presentation of ‘Arab modernity’ now raises the urgency for further studies to answer the following questions: Why is it that senses are mobilized when affects are nameless? How can alternative imaginaries be mobilized in light of the emergence of nameless bodily states, i.e. affects, in contradistinction to a qualifiable system of named emotions? Like many others before it, the book aims to unsettle, yet again, the Eurocentric account of modernity. It does so by focusing on affect—whose Arabic equivalent goes unnamed—and this is indeed novel in the field of Arabic literary studies. However, coupling this analysis to the sole aim of dismantling Eurocentrism pushes back its critical potentials. By persistently arguing against a Eurocentric definition of modernity, el-Ariss adopts

the ideological claim of a Western liberal bourgeois subject, and the book reiterates twentieth-century Western anti-Enlightenment philosophies.

While el-Ariss does address the turbulence that characterizes identity formation, he relegates it to an individual bodily realm and to a very specific conception of subjectivity: one that does not take note of collective shared experience or the aesthetic mediation of historical presents. Although el-Ariss's aim is to depart from narrative representations altogether, the affective states described in the book only call attention to the body and its states of feeling as quests for individual realization within the confines of history. This is effectively indissociable from the function of the realist novel and narrative structure itself. Affect is seen as "resistant to critique and signification" and as "force and duration" (7) that impinge on the body. Affect, for el-Ariss, is a "break with the dialectical engagement of texts and ideas" (7). This break with dialectical analysis leads to an analysis of affect based solely on the description of its content, with little regard for the attachments that generate affect. Lauren Berlant's *Cruel Optimism* is instructive in this regard because it shows that representation is much more than ideological bad habit, and analyzes affect as the mode of introducing a historical present-ness that simultaneously "blocks the development of historical sense" (Berlant 67). The affects induced by the urban sensorium of nineteenth-century Paris and analysed in Tahtawi's *Takhliis* are surely different from those described in Alaidy's accounts of present-day Cairo slums. The structural relations of alienation in today's world fail to satiate the sensorium as *fin-de-siècle* urban cities did.

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While el-Ariss remains faithful to Deleuze's influential rejection of historicism and contextualization and follows Deleuze in emphasizing processes of becoming as the means for transcending the historical conditions from which phenomena emerge, his book is not sufficiently attentive to qualitative transformations in the affective domain across historical time. El-Ariss uses affect to counter "teleological narratives of progress or anticolonial struggles" (8-9) precisely *because* affect appears as essentially a-historical and even trans-historical. While affect seems to be a non-historical category, it does indeed have a historical genesis within capitalist modernity. It is only as a result of the mid-nineteenth-century divorce between meaning and existence, which is arguably the fundamental feature of modernity, that affect takes on its "reality effect" (Jameson 79). It is only in the era of late capitalism, with its concomitant sense of eternal present-ness, that the category of affect comes to be counterposed to emotion. The privileging of the bourgeois body as the organ of perception of the world itself is the historical condition of possibility for construing affect as a category of analysis. Yet el-Ariss's narrative is devoid of any references to class, structures of alienation, or affective labor.

What ensues from the book's attempt to displace Eurocentric modernity is a strange marriage of romanticism and affect studies: the result of this displacement is a definition of modernity as a traumatic state born of travel, colonization, and exile; of "not knowing what was lost" (103) yet knowing that "what was lost cannot be located in a particular sight" (99). The analysis of affect ultimately "exposes moder-

nity as a poisonous ideological lie” (78). But the only thing we are left with in the face of the ideological lie is a fetishized conception of experience as embodied, contingent, and bodily. Arab writers appear as free-floating egos: fragmented, lost, and anxiously desirous; yet the object cause of their desire remains to be named; construed as egos they are confused with the subject of the unconscious.

It is through this affective state that cultural and literary politics are produced, and through it also that, according to the author, the political is formed, such that the political emerges from an “apolitical” site. This definition of the political in terms of affect allows el-Ariss to trace a fictive line from nineteenth-century Arab thought to the contemporary hacking practices and virtual spheres that are seen to have made the recent Arab uprisings possible. In his attempt to resist teleology, el-Ariss provides us with one of his own: “The social and political developments that gripped the Arab world in late 2010 create an urgency to investigate multiple sites of literary production in *Nahda* and contemporary texts [...] we move from the novel as a fixed and clearly circumscribed genre and from the revolution as a clearly identifiable and con-

**324** sorted political action to literary and political practices emerging at the intersection of social and political contexts, technological development, and new media” (181). Ironically, the antinomies of realism as Jameson defines them, the novel and affect, are conjoined by el-Ariss to represent the social uprisings as revolutions and the revolution as a means for the disruption of narrative structure.

*Trials of Arab Modernity* signals a new opening in the field of literary analysis, and pushes the reader to consider the frightful ability of affect to resist language. The book demonstrates how affect has the distinct capacity to colonize the expressed and shows how it can become a reifying naming process. It pushes the reader to ask: at what cost can we maintain such a separation of words from things, of names from the named? *Trials of Arab Modernity* sets the path for a number of epistemological and theoretical issues to be reckoned with in the fields of Arabic literary criticism and Arabic intellectual history.

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HOUPPERMANS, SJEFF, PETER LIEBREGTS, JAN BAETENS, AND OTTO BOELE, EDs. *Modernism Today*. Amsterdam & New York: Rodopi, 2013. Pp. 283.

**Verita Sriratana, Chulalongkorn University**

*Modernism Today* is not only a scholarly attempt to revise, as well as expand, the many shifting definitions of Modernism, but also a strong testimony to the transnational quality inherent within Modernism as an aesthetic and intellectual movement that thrives on the cross-fertilisation of ideas in different spatial, temporal and cultural contexts. In “What Modernism Was and Is: By Way of an Introduction”, Sascha Bru and Dirk de Geest offer a succinct overview of the past, present and even prospective trends in Modernist studies, charting and re-charting the critical and physical terrains which tend to be overlooked by scholars of Modernism. Central Europe’s shifting national borders and multicultural interrelationships form cases in point: “the rediscovery of that Other Europe, that is Central Europe, is slowly beginning to manifest the importance of notions like ‘transnational’ precisely by pointing at the capital importance of national differences and the cultural exchanges between them” (6). Jacqueline Bel, in “Intellectual Scepticism versus Avant-Garde Bragging: Modernism in Dutch Literature”, leads readers into the mellow jazz-resounding world of Dutch Modernism, in which the notion of “Modernism” has been interrogated and, at times, dismissed as obsolete as it fails to capture (if the use of this verb is possible at all) the sense of the just-now “newness” of modernity. The author of this review was also fascinated to learn that avant-gardism, in the case of the Netherlands, where the term was introduced only in 1984, is truly “a literary-historical construction” (77).

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The collection’s revisionary project, as outlined in the introductory section, puts on centre stage the concept of the “arrière-garde”: “Arrière-garde artists are not merely representatives of a conservative ideology or aesthetic, they deliberately attempt to renew literature, yet not by destroying its rhetorical foundations but rather by trying to re-interpret older and widely shared components from the literary tradition” (8). What the author of this review finds to be *Modernism Today*’s important contribution is the discussion of the ways in which the arrière-garde writers and artists venture to question even the tenets of the increasingly canonised avant-garde movement. Graham Greene, as Peter Liebrechts points out, is an example of a sceptical arrière-garde daring to criticise what the reading public of his time—and even to this day—perceived to be avant-garde writings: literary works by T.S. Eliot, James Joyce, Ezra Pound and Virginia Woolf. A discussion of Greene’s 1945 essay “François Mauriac”, in which he audaciously comments upon Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs Dalloway* (1925), a novel considered by readers and critics to be the quintessence of Modernism, confirms that the label “Modernism” as we know it today is a posthumous designation of the living, changing and contradictory literary landscape of his time:

Mrs Dalloway walking down Regent Street was aware of the glitter of shop windows, the smooth passage of cars, the conversation of shoppers, but it was only a Regent Street seen by Mrs Dalloway that was conveyed to the reader: a charming whimsical rather sentimental prose poem was what Regent Street had become: a current of air, a touch of scent, a sparkle of glass. But, we protest, Regent Street too has a right to exist; it is more real than Mrs Dalloway. (37)

326 It is made apparent in this volume that the writers whom readers often regard as prototypically Modernist *par excellence* form only one of the many artistic waves in the twentieth-century literary ocean. Peter de Voogd's essay tells the gripping story of the makings of James Joyce in his study of Joyce and the small magazines, particularly a magazine called *transition*, which earned the nickname *la maison de Joyce* [the home of Joyce] from the French critic Marcel Brion for publishing the later *Finnegans Wake*: "English literary Modernism manifested itself mostly through a large number of small and struggling magazines and journals which were part of an international network from Chicago to Paris" (237). The canonisation of Modernist works and writers should never be taken for granted. The sanctified grounds of Modernism's periodisation should always be trespassed. The sceptre of (Western) Eurocentric Modernism, which has unquestioningly been revered by academics and the reading public for many years, should be dismantled. This book's deconstructionist reading of the history and definition of avant-gardism through the notion of *arrière-gardism* is therefore a welcome feat. Discussions of *arrière-gardism* in the Netherlands between 1880 and 1940 (Koen Rymenants, Tom Sintobin and Pieter Verstraeten), Greece between 1910 and 1940 (Hero Hokwerda), France (Sjef Houppermans), Russia (Arthur Langeveld), and Portugal (Paulo de Medeiros) are treasures that make *Modernism Today* a well-deserved modern and transcultural appraisal of Modernism.

Apart from *arrière-garde* works and artists, religion as well as spiritualism within the Modernist context is also explored in this volume. Hans Bertens's "Towards Modernism" takes readers to the turn of the century and the First World War, when Modernism is said to be "a profoundly international enterprise" (11). It can be said that the most international of all the enterprises of the Modernist movement, particularly in the world in which it is believed that God is dead, is the occult—which first gained its popularity in France—and Madame Blavatsky's school of theosophy—which can be seen in, for example, the writings of T.S. Eliot and Katherine Mansfield. A fusion of Madame Blavatsky's interpretation of Buddhism and of Brahmanism, theosophy gained prominence after the founding of the Theosophic Society in New York in the year 1875. After Madame Blavatsky's death in 1891, Rudolf Steiner, the Secretary of the German Theosophic Society, "felt compelled to secede and started propagating a more Christian version of theosophy, called anthroposophy, that is still with us" (20-21). Moreover, as Geert Buelens asserts in "'The Final Catholic': Paul Van Ostaijen and the Catholic Réveil around the First World War", "[s]trikingly absent from many accounts about the avant-garde are the impact both religion and

nationalism had” (79). The seemingly unfathomable gap between spiritualism and secularism is only a myth, especially when one examines the pervading quest for spirituality in the *fin-de-siècle* artistic circles, which has led not only to the occult, but also to new interpretations of Christianity. Otto Boele’s paper on biocosmism in Russia delves into a movement that is secularly spiritual and at the same time spiritually secular, honed by the crucial discoveries and innovations in modern science and technology: “The isolation of radium by Marie Curie in 1911 was another milestone in modern science that seemed to confirm the feasibility of the biocosmist agenda” (141).

*Modernism Today* examines and investigates the many changing definitions of Modernism not only in literary texts, but also in cinema (Peter Verstraten) and music (Marcel Cobussen). The mainstream notion of postmodernism as the aftermath of modernism is challenged by Jan Baetens in his study of graphic novels:

Reducing postmodernism to a phenomenon that comes “after” Modernism in order to repeat, parody or radicalize it does not constitute the best way to do justice to the complex branching off which motives, structures, forms, insights and value judgments undergo each time a shift in cultural practice or context occurs. (205)

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A thought-provoking collection of essays, *Modernism Today* reflects the many admirable ventures to unseal the canonised and standardised “done deal” which has often been understood as Modernism, making this ground-breaking and fundamentally cosmopolitan movement refreshingly new and alive, as well as bringing it closer to readers in the twenty-first century.

KERSHAW, ANGELA. *Before Auschwitz: Irène Némirovsky and the Cultural Landscape of Inter-war France*. Routledge Studies in Twentieth-Century Literature. New York and London: Routledge, 2010.

### **Sarah Jefferies, University of Alberta**

As Angela Kershaw notes in the opening lines of *Before Auschwitz: Irène Némirovsky and the Cultural Landscape of Inter-war France*, the 2004 publication of *Suite française* thrust Irène Némirovsky back into the public spotlight over sixty years after her death (1). The international popularity of *Suite française* has led to the publication of numerous books, including new editions and translations of Némirovsky’s works, as well as biographies such as Jonathan Weiss’s *Irène Némirovsky*, Olivier Philipponnat’s and Patrick Lienhardt’s *La Vie d’Irène Némirovsky*, and *Woman of Letters: Irène Némirovsky and Suite française* edited by Olivier Corpet and Garrett White, which accompanied an exhibition at the Museum of Jewish Heritage: A Living Memorial to the Holocaust in New York (1, 2). *Before Auschwitz* is another important academic

book to be published on Némirovsky's work.

Part of the Routledge Studies in Twentieth-Century Literature series, which includes texts such as *Testimony from the Nazi Camps: French Women's Voices* by Margaret-Anne Hutton, *Cold War Literature: Writing the Global Conflict* by Andrew Hammond, and *Anglophone Jewish Literature* by Axel Stahler, *Before Auschwitz* explores Némirovsky's *oeuvre* not only within the context of its creation and reception in inter-war France, as the title suggests, but also within the context of the controversy that has surrounded Némirovsky's life and work after the Second World War (n. pag., 2). Kershaw, who previously wrote *Forgotten Engagements: Women, Literature and the Left in 1930s France* (2007) and co-edited *Women in Europe Between the Wars: Politics, Culture, and Society* (2007) with Angela Kimyongür, notes that while "Némirovsky has [...] attracted ideologically based criticism, both in our time and in her own [...] much of it has failed to take account of the historical and literary conditions of production of [...] her] fiction" (2). In *Before Auschwitz*, she aims to situate Némirovsky's books "in relation to the literary field in which they were produced" (2). In order to examine the factors that influenced the creation and reception of her texts at different points in time, Kershaw draws on the work of the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (2, 3). According to Kershaw, Bourdieu's stance is indicative of "the 'social turn' in literary and cultural studies," and, by positioning her writing on Némirovsky within the context of post-war theory, while she aims to "maintain a scholarly objectivity," Kershaw's choice of theoretical framework reveals her own critical stance on Némirovsky's texts (4, 2). In this way, Kershaw is able to examine the context "in which [...] Némirovsky] was writing," while situating her own work within in the wider context in which Némirovsky's writing has been, and continues to be, read (4, 3). Through a "close textual reading" of Némirovsky's books and an "analysis of larger cultural trajectories" of which they are a part, Kershaw comments on Némirovsky's role in inter-war France, the textual sources that allow scholars to reconstruct their understanding of the role, and the reception of Némirovsky's writing after the Second World War (5, 8).

*Before Auschwitz* begins and ends with analyses of the two books with which Némirovsky achieved her pre- and post-war fame, *David Golder* and *Suite française* (7). In Chapter 1, "The Making of a Literary Reputation," Kershaw explores the "literary success" of *David Golder* (8). Here, she focuses on the practicalities of the "marketplace" by discussing Némirovsky's relationship with her publishers Bernard Grasset and Albin Michel, analyzing the role of *David Golder* within a larger discussion of the role of the novel in France in the 1920s, and exploring the ways in which the reception of *David Golder* was influenced by the "politicization" of the literary scene in 1930s France (12, 16, 17, 28). While Kershaw contends that Némirovsky was not a political writer, she is quick to note that the political climate of the inter-war period influenced how *David Golder* was received, and it is this analysis that underscores her examination of how the contemporary reception of Némirovsky's writing has been influenced by the Second World War (29).

In Chapter 2, “Before *David Golder*,” Kershaw moves further back in time to explore the books that preceded Némirovsky’s initial success (41). According to Kershaw, “[r]eaders generally begin with the work which made the author’s name, and only then, if their interest has been captured, do they go back and trace the imaginative and intellectual journey which led to the author’s later reputation,” and it is evident from her analysis that, in different contexts, this is true of both *David Golder* and *Suite française* (40). In this chapter, in order to reconstruct Némirovsky’s “literary pre-history,” in addition to undertaking a close reading of *Le Malentendu*, *L’Enfant genial*, and other early works, Kershaw also examines Némirovsky’s own attitude toward her writing in notes and interviews (42, 45, 50, 44, 45). In this way, she lays the foundation for examining how Némirovsky constructed herself as a writer, and how our understanding of her life and work has been constructed over time (42).

In Chapter 3, “A Russian Soul,” Kershaw examines how the Russian subject matter of Némirovsky’s work affected her reception in inter-war France (68). Here, Kershaw explores the influence of Némirovsky’s training in Comparative Literature at the Sorbonne, analyzes works such as *Les Mouches d’automne*, *Le Vin de Solitude*, *La Vie de Tchekhov*, and *L’Affaire Courliof*, and explores the way in which the interest in the “mode russe” influenced literary reception in inter-war Paris (69, 81, 82, 84, 71, 86). This enables Kershaw to analyze “the interplay between Némirovsky’s fictionalisation of her personal experience of Russia and her awareness of, and ability to manipulate, the stereotype of the ‘Russian soul’” (68). Kershaw’s extensive discussion of Némirovsky’s education in this chapter will be of particular interest for scholars of Comparative Literature, not only because it reveals how her academic training affected her writing, but also because it allows readers to reflect on how their own training influences the ways in which they approach both Némirovsky’s and Kershaw’s texts.

In Chapter 4, “The Jewish Soul,” Kershaw builds on the themes and structure of the previous chapter in order to examine the implications of Némirovsky’s identity as a “French-Russian-Jewish novelist” in inter-war France (101). Here, she examines the role of Judaism in Némirovsky’s life and Jewish subject matter of works such as *L’Enfant genial*, *David Golder*, *Les Chiens et les loups*, and *Le Bal*, while also assessing how the controversies surrounding Némirovsky’s Jewish identity have been treated in numerous secondary works (113, 121, 118).

In Chapter 5, “Crisis and Conflict: Constructions of National Identity,” Kershaw moves away from what she calls “the fictional manifestations of Némirovsky’s multiple cultural and ethnic allegiances” in order to undertake an examination of the various themes in Némirovsky’s writing, including suicide, money, family, nation, and religion (135, 140, 152). According to Kershaw, it is “only through a contextual reading which respects Némirovsky’s typicality that modern readers can avoid bringing inappropriately anachronistic ethical judgments to bear on her work,” and so she provides comparative examinations of many of Némirovsky’s books, including *Le Pion sur l’échiquier*, *Le Proie*, and *Deux*, as well as *Les Biens de ce monde*, *Les Feux de*

*l'automne*, and *Suite française* (170, 140, 152). Through these close readings of books from different points in Némirovsky's career, Kershaw attempts to contextualize and assess the themes and ideas that have become regarded as particularly problematic in Némirovsky's work.

In "Second Flowering," the conclusion to *Before Auschwitz*, Kershaw builds on the thematic analysis in Chapter 5 by comparing the subject matter of *Suite française* to Némirovsky's previous writing, particularly *Les Biens de ce monde* (175). In this way, in order to explore "Némirovsky's identity as an Occupation writer, as a Holocaust writer, and as a literary success in the twenty-first century," Kershaw situates *Suite française* in the context of Némirovsky's *oeuvre* and of post-war France, as well as in an international context (171, 175, 185-188). Kershaw's wide-ranging analysis of Némirovsky's writing challenges the reader to understand how she "seize[d] the ambiguities of the situation of occupation in fiction" and how those ambiguities continue to influence the reception of her work, a strategy that raises important questions about the complexities surrounding "retrospective readings" of literary texts (170). Since the conditions in which *Suite française* was written, the circumstances surrounding the author's death in Auschwitz in 1942 after only the first two sections of the book were completed, and the story of the manuscript's survival have all contributed to the public's fascination with the book, as Kershaw notes the conclusion, and as her overview of critical responses to the text reveals, there are many layers that affect our contemporary understanding of *Suite française* (1, 194).

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Within the larger debate surrounding Holocaust representation, Kershaw's historical approach to Némirovsky's writing draws attention to the importance of examining not only the implications of "writing after Auschwitz," as Theodor Adorno and numerous subsequent scholars have asserted, but also of "reading after Auschwitz" (185). For, according to Kershaw, "we cannot simply affirm that Némirovsky has been rendered incomprehensible by the Shoah," we must come to terms with how the Shoah has influenced how she is read (101). *Before Auschwitz* will be of interest to Némirovsky scholars, to those examining inter-war France and issues related to the representation of the Holocaust, and to those who are interested pursuing future comparative inquiries in the field such as exploring "relationships between Némirovsky's texts and those of other inter-war writers" (5). Within the context of recent writing on Némirovsky, Kershaw provides an important reminder of what Némirovsky's work, and responses to her work, can tell us about the time in which it was written and the time in which it continues to be read.

WELDT-BASSON, HELENE CAROL, ED. *Redefining Latin American Historical Fiction: The Impact of Feminism and Postcolonialism*. London & New York: Palgrave Macmillan. 2013. Pp. 263.

**Jeffrey Herlihy-Mera, University of Puerto Rico**

Helene Carol Weldt-Basson's collection *Redefining Latin American Historical Fiction* re-questions some of the fundamental epistemologies, political implications, aesthetic discourses, and disciplinary histories of Latin American writing from the early twentieth century to the present. The ten essays explore the distinct modes of literary creation that have emerged from so-called historical bases, examining the distinct interpretations of the novel, its aesthetic development, and the use of events and circumstances that have been recognized and institutionalized as historically significant as points of departure in literary creation.

A common thread in the analyses, and a strength of the collection, is a reliance on postmodern approaches, including a close attention to multivariate perceptions and codifications of reality, gender, society, culture, and community; this sensitivity to the multiplicity of reality (and thus historical experience) allows the arguments in the chapters to recognize nontraditional centers of power and meaning. The analytical base in the collection, thus, is one that both diversifies and destabilizes the social prescriptions (including cultural norms, gender roles, economic models, and so on) that are tacitly imbedded in traditional histories.

In Chapter 1 (also the Introduction), Helene Weldt-Basson orients her discussion around the construction of history as a social and cultural referent through the novel; following a discussion of postmodern theoretical approaches, Weldt-Basson's analyses of Laura Esquivel's novel *Malinche* pose some deft reflections on literature and history, and introduce some of the key concepts that appear in later essays. Weldt-Basson is attentive to the nature of memory and history, as demonstrated through Malinalli, a female character in Esquivel's novel. Malinalli observes that "Sin imágenes, no hay memoria" [Without images, there is no memory] (27 in Laura Esquivel's *Malinche* 17) and Weldt-Basson unpacks an examination of how Malinalli "fills in many historical gaps" with her location as an indigenous, colonized woman, who can offer multiple perspectives of reality (15). In this way, Weldt-Basson introduces Malinalli as symbolic of broader trends in theory and criticism, as individuals "cannot be simply grouped" and "do not share a single perspective" (19). These affirmations, then, represent an "alternative national identity" and "plural national identities" (19).

In Chapter 2 (translated into English by Bruce Fox), Patricia Varas looks at how female authors employ historical and national discourses as aesthetic devices in order to undo "hierarchies imposed by patriarchal, colonial systems" (47). She argues that Claribel Alegría's novel *Cenizas de Izalco* "recovers a traumatic episode" in which 30,000 peasants were murdered. Varas focuses on multiplicity of vision,



of nonsystemic (and thus *nouveau* historical) perspectives, that enable Alegría and other female authors to achieve a form of “postmemory” (52), which gestures toward extricating the female from male structures in order to recover the past.

In Chapter 3, Víctor Figueroa takes on the “production of historical accounts” (67) through an interpretation of the Puerto Rican cultural histories that appear in Edgardo Rodrigo Juliá’s novels. Figueroa’s adroit approach to this corpus of texts departs from the way in which “novels invent order” (70), repositioning nationalism with skepticism. Figueroa offers some particularly insightful reflections on how the codified histories are those permitted in the environment, which lead into his look at how historical fictions and their role in deconstruction of authority can be complicated. In one of the most salient phrases in the book, he notes: “To oppose power is still to be defined by power” (77).

**332** In Chapter 4, Fernando Burgos’s argument (translated from Spanish by Tina Kosiorek) hinges on some of the most fundamental components of the human condition and cultural manifestations, such as time, nation, and canonization of ideas. In his analysis of *Ship of Fools* by Cristina Peri Rossi and *Hallucinations* by Reinaldo Arenas, he argues that time itself is an institutional construction built upon whatever “present” is most viable to those in power; history is, in this approach, the canonization of ideas convenient to authority (94). These concepts hinge on how communities are constructed through supposed histories, a notion that is often built on “atavistic perceptions of other nations” (103). The state necessitates these histories and justifies the grotesque by streamlining it into innocuous narratives (109). Burgos looks at questions such as “To whom does history belong?” (111), and expertly describes the production of history as “a social agreement and an infringement” (113), using two novels penned by dissidents in totalitarian regimes.

In Chapter 5, Elda Stanco examines two novels by Ana Teresa Torres (*The Exile of Time* and *Doña Inés Versus Oblivion*), noting the presence of an “enumerated anxiety” that results in “creation of identity” that is, in a sense, more attuned to post-modern realities in the ways that it offers “life and voice to a new subjectivity and its critical consciousness” (133). Stanco elaborates on these sensibilities through the literary analysis of, in one instance, Paris and Caracas—or, Caracas in Paris—engaging duality in the ancient and new sharing a physical space (125). In these examples, as she deftly explains, the past can be understood as a “mythical world” (131).

In Chapter 6, Marcelo Coddou interprets Tomás Eloy Martínez’s *Santa Evita*, raising the notion of truth as a “figurative discourse” (142) that is situated in specific sociopolitical contexts. Coddou argues that novelists destabilize these official and institutionalized concepts in their work, and comments that Martínez “harvests” the mythology of Evita in Argentina to “contribute to its re-elaboration, maintaining it alive” (143). Doing so, as Coddou points out, allows Martínez to “make relative the official histories” (143). These spring from a situation in which collective pasts are not derivative of facts or empiricism, but, rather, it is myth that “recounts history” (143).

In Chapter 7 (translated into English by Bruce Fox), Fátima Nogueira examines



Antonio Benítez Rojo's novel *Mujer en traje de batalla* through the emergence of chaos and order, and simulations of history. Noguiera's work also engages the multiplicities of reality, noting that "several truths" are co-existent (166) but it is one singularity (the institutionalized history) that is often "superimposed upon the universe" (167). She terms these as "uneven" stories, incongruent with many lived realities; the novel, therefore, plays with history as metanarrative (159). These structures appear in the novel through "repetition of historical situations" (164), which causes such examples to be instruments of "reterritorializing and deterritorializing" (171).

In Chapter 8 (translated into English by Javier González), Ester Gimbernat González highlights "complex and multiple identities" in her reading of Ángela Hernández's *Charamicos* (181). She situates the text as a form of "cultural memory" that informed readers can navigate through knowledge of the novel's historical circumstances (182). The historical significance of the text, together with some grammatical interventions—that of second-person singular, in particular—allows the plot to reach a "multiple historical presence" (196). One of the more interesting reflections in the article involves discussion of the novel as a "dissident space" in which emancipation and authority interplay (199).

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In Chapter 9, Maria Josele Bucco Coelho examines *Um defeito de cor* by Ana Maria Gonçalves with sensitivity to the women seeking "to reclaim the role of the feminine" (209). She notes that novels like this one, employ "history as a narrative discourse that represents reality and seeks to explain it" (213). Her insightful contextual commentary organizes the historical narrative genre as one whose many texts "share the same ideas and preoccupations" (213). Bucco Coelho's argument posits history as a "resignification of the past" (225) that can be reappropriated through "agency of female opposition" (225). These emerge in literature, Bucco Coelho adroitly argues, through reinvention of "forgotten temporalities" (210).

In Chapter 10, Helene Carol Weldt-Basson reads Vargas Llosa's *El sueño del celta* as an example of multiplicity and diversity amalgamated into one personage. She argues that the protagonist is a "postcolonial contradiction" and both "colonizer and colonized" (232). Weldt-Basson's concluding text also reflects on Latin American historical fiction as a genre, noting that the novels have "been influenced and shaped by the ideas and concerns developed by postcolonial theoretical discourse" (232).

As the volume deals with so-called historical facts and/or fictionalizations thereof, the overarching tone is counterintuitive in a sense—as the deconstruction and destabilization of traditional centers of meaning also re-institutionalizes the historical myths (albeit unintentionally), which is an inherent shortcoming, not to these analyses, but to the extant theoretical vocabularies. To reiterate Víctor Figueroa's comment, "To oppose power is still to be defined by power" (77). Many of the chapters reinterpret literary texts as agents of relational thinking, modeling current postcolonial spatial modes of reading toward the uncertainty of paradigmatic historical accounts.

Given these theoretical cues, a minor quibble with the collection is the perpetuation of the nation or transnation as a center of interpretation. This is a critical

tendency which (again, unintentionally) elides a move toward postnational mores and a more atomized form of cultural reading that would be more sensitive to individual agency. Sometimes the nuancing of national prescriptions as a theoretical aim, often toward more representative and democratic (but yet still *national*) ideals, can result in re-collectivization based on new (but often just as unstable) myths, which disallows conceptualization of a non-culturally-grouped person or text. These theoretical tendencies restrict the latitude of existence (and interpretation thereof) to the limits of the *a priori* categorization—albeit from a hybrid, multiple, and/or diverse cultural register.

Even with these very minor issues in mind, these essays are outstanding literary analyses. The readings challenge structural norms and are provocative takes on institutionalized prescriptions about community, gender, imperialism, authority, authorship, and literary creation. The novels discussed represent a broad scope of traditions and authors, and the interpretations are informed and sophisticated. My reading and note-taking have left me with many new ideas and avenues of thinking about history, literature, and Latin American aesthetics.

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CRAPS, STEF. *Postcolonial Witnessing: Trauma Out of Bounds*. Houndsmill: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.

### **Veronica Austen, St. Jerome's University**

Stef Craps's *Postcolonial Witnessing: Trauma Out of Bounds* serves as a wonderful starting point for anyone interested in recent critical paths in trauma studies. Not only does it give a good overview and critique of foundational early work by such scholars as Cathy Caruth, Shoshana Felman, Dori Laub, Dominic LaCapra, and Geoffrey H. Hartman, but it also brings together the work of many recent scholars who, like the author of this monograph, have noted trauma studies' exclusions of various groups and types of traumatic experiences. In covering this vast amount of critical territory and doing so with adept and cogent arguments, *Postcolonial Witnessing* proves itself a particularly useful and important introduction to the field for both students and other scholars seeking entry.

In a brief 140 pages (including Notes), this text offers six chapters (including the Introduction and Conclusion) that develop the critical framework, leaving the remaining four chapters to offer close readings of various literary texts, readings that thereby serve as examples of the "'decolonized' trauma theory" (5) that the author seeks to construct. The main purpose of this text is to critique the limits of early trauma studies, and by extension to function in 'out of bounds' spaces that will allow trauma studies to evolve away from its early Eurocentric roots. As the author observes, the preoccupation of early trauma studies with the Holocaust functioned to

limit the field and make it unable to account for non-Western experiences of trauma. *Postcolonial Witnessing*, by aligning trauma studies with postcolonial theory, identifies and seeks to address four key weaknesses in early trauma studies: the neglect of non-Western experiences of trauma (Chapter One); the assumption that Western definitions of trauma are universally applicable (Chapter Two); the assumption that modernist aesthetics, like fragmentation, is the sole means of representing trauma (Chapter Three); and the failure to approach trauma comparatively and thereby to observe connections/differences across cultures (Chapter Six).

Craps begins the body of this text with a review of trauma studies' preoccupation with the Holocaust. Focussing most extensively on Caruth's interpretations of such narratives as *Tancred and Clorinda* (characters in a sixteenth-century epic explored by Freud), *Moses and Monotheism* (Freud), and *Hiroshima mon amour* (a film), the author critiques Caruth's tendency to "turn violence inflicted on a non-European other into a mere occasion for the exploration of the exemplary trauma suffered by [...] European subjects" (17). In pointing out these flaws in Caruth's work, Craps casts early trauma theory as ironically hypocritical, stating that "Trauma theory's failure to give the sufferings of those belonging to non-Western or minority groups due recognition sits uneasily with the field's ethical aspirations" (3).

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From this opening critique, Craps moves on to address trauma theory's traditional figuring of trauma as individual- and event-based. As the title of Chapter Two—"The Empire of Trauma"—reveals, this definition of trauma, which figures the experience of the Holocaust as the sole model for traumatic experience, betrays the field's imperialistic undercurrents. As Craps elaborates, an individualistic model dangerously concentrates on curing the individual while the sociopolitical conditions that led to the trauma go unaddressed. By extension, the assumption that trauma is rooted in a singular catastrophic event excludes the more "insidious traumas," a concept Craps borrows from Maria Root, like racism, from consideration.

Chapter Three very briefly addresses trauma studies' assumption that trauma is non-representable. Although this chapter does not receive the kind of development that it could have, Craps does make the important observation that the privileging of an aesthetics which assumes that trauma cannot be narrated, problematically, offers the narrator of trauma "no place" from which to "speak[] as an expert about his or her own experience" (42). As such, Craps argues for the necessity of being open to various literary forms as effective expressions of traumatic experience, although he does not in this chapter nor in the later readings of his literary texts offer a specific sense of what those alternative forms might look like.

The final theoretical chapter—"Cross-Traumatic Affiliation"—argues for the necessity of cross-cultural considerations of trauma that acknowledge the similar experiences of precarity across different cultures and yet that respect the inherent unknowability of the experiences of others. Returning to a focus on the centrality of the Holocaust to trauma studies, this chapter addresses the conundrum of using the Holocaust as what Andreas Huyssen deems "a floating signifier" (qtd. in Craps

75). The comparison of other traumatic experiences to the Holocaust—for example, deeming the Middle Passage and slavery as the “African Holocaust” (75)—may have the benefit of bringing awareness to previously marginalized experiences, but as Craps argues, it also has the potential to “homogeniz[e] very different histories” (78).

The four chapters that address literary texts all function as interventions meant to alleviate the Eurocentrism of early trauma theory. The chapter on Sindiwe Magona’s *Mother to Mother*—a narrative which in part serves as a critique of South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission—both turns attention towards non-Western experiences of trauma and elaborates on the importance of expanding definitions of trauma to include more long-term experiences of systemic oppression. The chapter on David Dabydeen’s “Turner” and Fred D’Aguiar’s *Feeding the Ghosts*—both narratives addressing the Middle Passage, in particular the 1781 *Zong* massacre—uses the concept of mid-mourning—a state in which trauma neither is worked through nor becomes melancholic neurosis—to “unsettle triumphalist accounts [...] that deny the continuing effects of racial and colonial trauma” (71). Craps uses Caryl Phillips’s *Higher Ground*, *The Nature of Blood*, and *The European Tribe*—texts in which Phillips addresses similarities between the Holocaust and the African experience of colonialism, slavery, and racism—as models for acknowledging cross-cultural affiliations that still maintain respect for the distances between such experiences. And lastly, the chapter on Anita Desai’s *Bomgartner’s Bombay*, a novel which through its main character demonstrates continuities between the Holocaust and the violence of Partition in India, not only confirms the flaws in assuming the Holocaust as the defining experience of trauma but also warns of the dangers of remaining blind to the traumas of others.

While this book has excellent intentions in its desire to open the field of trauma studies to experiences previously marginalized, with two of its four literary chapters devoted to narratives that address the Holocaust, *Postcolonial Witnessing* remains largely centred on the Holocaust. While these narratives do address the Holocaust from non-Eurocentric perspectives, I imagine that the text’s desire to enact cross-cultural approaches to trauma could have been even better served if the narratives being addressed were ones that did not use the Holocaust as their touchstone. By devoting attention to even more diverse experiences, this text could have more effectively accomplished its goal of “decolonizing” the field.

For example, although *Postcolonial Witnessing* makes an important move in situating itself within postcolonial studies, what would happen if it better handled the complexities and nuances of postcolonialism’s scope? In this text, Craps has remained centred on examples in which British colonialism plays a key role in the resulting oppressions and traumas. He does not, however, name this focus as an intended or purposeful limit. As such, the problem here is that Craps critiques the limits of trauma studies, but ironically does not show awareness that postcolonialism too has a history of privileging certain experiences over others. As well, what too could be gained if this text did more to question the “post” of postcolonial by

including discussion of traumas impacting still colonized cultures, for example, the indigenous peoples of North America? Any one critical text must, of course, have its limits, but in a text designed to critique the limited scope of prior work, one would hope for a more self-conscious assessment of its own biases and blind spots.

Regardless, this text remains a vital contribution to the field of trauma studies and will no doubt be instrumental in inciting further scholarship. *Postcolonial Witnessing* at times becomes more a discussion of other people's ideas than a forwarding of its own (for instance, its conclusion merely repeats Judith Butler's argument that recognizing "shared precariousness" can be a "first step towards the amelioration of that suffering" (Craps 127)), but this quality is, in fact, a strength. In offering its readers such a full picture of the critical landscape while also offering readers a model for the kind of literary interpretation made possible through this approach, *Postcolonial Witnessing* gives its readers many jumping-off points from which to immerse themselves in this field of inquiry.

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ÅSTRÖM, BERIT, KATARINA GREGERSDOTTIR, AND TANJA HOREK, EDs.  
*Rape in Stieg Larsson's Millennium Trilogy and Beyond: Contemporary Scandinavian and Anglophone Crime Fiction*. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013. Pp. xi+219.

### **Annemette Hejlsted, University of Iceland**

*Rape in Stieg Larsson's Millennium Trilogy and Beyond: Contemporary Scandinavian and Anglophone Crime Fiction* is a collection of essays on one aspect of a trilogy of more than one thousand pages. The eleven contributors, from several Anglophone and Scandinavian countries, deal with subjects such as serial-killer narrative, rape and the avenging female. The book is organized as a movement from close readings of single aspects of Stieg Larsson's texts to broader readings that compare Larsson's texts with other crime stories and bring Larsson into dialogue with different contexts, such as Anglophone crime fiction, Scandinavian crime fiction, and the Scandinavian model of welfare.

The book shares a crucial problem with other books of the same kind: collections of critical essays disguised as monographs. The theoretical and the methodological-analytical grounds are unarticulated, and this requires the reader to figure out the premises and decide to which extent the investigations are comparable.

Because the chapters use rape as their common point of departure, the discussion is to some extent repetitive. This points out some crucial weaknesses of the book and the way it is organized. With the contributions in a numbered order, the book compels the reader to regard every essay as one step on the road to a conclusion. Unfortunately, the insight the book produces is fragmented, and all the valuable

interpretations of the trilogy—focusing on Lisbeth Salander, rape, sexual violence, revenge and crime fiction—are not put into one collective image. Despite my reservations regarding the design of the book, it is my point of view that, if each contribution is regarded and treated independently, the book is an important collection of essays. The interpretations of Stieg Larsson's trilogy and the other crime novels that are undertaken by these scholars are very qualified in every respect. They manage to draw connections from observations of minor details to issues concerning the genre of the crime novel and the organizing of gender in the Scandinavian model of the welfare state.

Although the main concern of the book is the representation of rape and violence, many of the essays manage to establish a high standard of insight in the literary aesthetic strategies in the *Millennium Trilogy* and the other crime stories they examine. One of the highlights of the book is Yvonne Leffler's contribution, "Lisbeth Salander as a Melodramatic Heroine." She shows how Lisbeth Salander, through the strategies of the melodramatic, becomes an enigma that fascinates the reader:

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As a melodramatic heroine, Salander is made to embody the purest moral and emotional conflicts and issues of the stories. Compared to the other characters she speaks very little. The reader very seldom shares her point of view. [...] As in melodrama, the plot centres on her in order to dramatize her nightmare struggle for recognition and her escape from primal horror. One of the reasons why she has become such a popular victim-heroine is [...] because she is an enigma: who is the emotionally complex Lisbeth Salander and why is she the way she is. (61)

Despite my enthusiasm for Yvonne Leffler's enlightening points on the melodramatic in Stieg Larsson's trilogy and in Scandinavian crime fiction, I believe that more scholarly works on this subject should have been taken into account. Peter Brooks and Gunhild Agger are, no doubt, experts, but others may have something different to say on the subject.

The key concept of the Scandinavian crime novel that the book promotes and relies on seems very narrow, for several reasons. First, most of the Scandinavian authors mentioned, or whose novels are analyzed, are Swedish; one exception is the Norwegian author Jo Nesbø. Second, most of the research articles and books that the contributors draw on are Anglophone, and only a handful of scholars with a Scandinavian background are referred to as sources. Third, the edition of Stieg Larsson's *Millennium Trilogy* used is the English translation. This is also the case when other Scandinavian crime novels are taken into account, such as those of Liza Marklund, Jo Nesbø, Åsa Larsson, Camilla Läckberg, and Håkan Nesser. Fourth, the version of the history of Scandinavian crime fiction that the book constructs seems to begin with Sjöwall and Wahlöö's novels on Martin Beck. In my opinion, this is a great mistake, because Sjöwall and Wahlöö had many forerunners, one of the most important of whom is the Swedish writer Kerstin Ekman, who contributed to the development of the psychological crime novel in Scandinavia in the early sixties.

In conclusion, the point of view from which Stieg Larson's *Millennium Trilogy*

is interpreted is exclusively Anglophone. When I started reading the book, I was expecting a meeting and a dialogue between Scandinavian and Anglophone research positions, but I was disappointed. The cross-cultural insight announced on the back of the book cover seems to be only Anglophone, and the knowledge of the Scandinavian crime fiction produced in Scandinavia by Scandinavian scholars is overruled by a powerful international Anglophone point of view.

I can recommend *Rape in Stieg Larsson's Millennium Trilogy and Beyond: Contemporary Scandinavian and Anglophone Crime Fiction* for the many inspiring analytical points on Stieg Larsson's trilogy, but I do not think the book gives a convincing overview of the dialogical relation between the trilogy and Scandinavian crime fiction.