Dolores Herrero and Sonia Baelo-Allué, eds., *The Splintered Glass: Facets of Trauma in the Post-Colony and Beyond*

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Dolores Herrero and Sonia Baelo-Allué, eds. *The Splintered Glass: Facets of Trauma in the Post-Colony and Beyond*. Cross/Cultures 136. Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2011. xxvi, 262 pp. ISBN (hb): 978-90-420-3388-7. €58 / US\$78

- 1 Multiple forms of what critics call “trauma” have long shaped the experiences of people living in colonial and postcolonial contexts and inform the literature that stems from them, but scholars tend to focus on individual trauma and to analyze its occurrence and representation through theoretical frameworks derived from “Northern” and “metropolitan” cases such as the Holocaust and US veterans’ response to the Vietnam War. The ambitious and engaging volume *The Splintered Glass: Facets of Trauma in the Post-Colony and Beyond* aims to address this gap by bringing together twelve contributions exploring representations of both individual and collective trauma from countries ranging from Haiti and South Africa to the Philippines and Australia.
- 2 In a comprehensive introduction that sets out the theoretical framework for the volume, editors Dolores Herrero and Sonia Baelo-Allué map the intersections and gaps between “trauma studies” and “postcolonial studies” and ask contributors and readers to think seriously about when and how metropolitan theory can elucidate postcolonial experience. They argue for a need to “world” or “postcolonialize” trauma studies by paying close attention to local specificities, to “different testimonial practices and

cultural languages of trauma” (xvii). They also foreground a second crucial but tricky interface – that between individual and cultural trauma. While this reviewer tends to be skeptical of fuzzy notions of group trauma, Herrero and Baelo-Allué explain why models of individual trauma “cannot be straightforwardly applied to whole communities,” (xii) lay out a clear definition of cultural trauma based on recent sociological theory, and show how attention to cultural trauma draws attention to questions of historical context and contemporary structures of power that an individual orientation can elide. They advocate a kind of dialectical approach for literary criticism, where one moves between the individual (psychological) and the collective (material) frames, and reflects on their relation to each other (xix).

- 3 Following on from this exemplary introduction, the volume is organized in three distinct sections, each of which explores more closely how postcolonial writers narrate trauma. The first (and least focused) section tracks the “close interaction between historical/official/cultural traumas and personal ones as reflected in texts pertaining to different cultures” (xxiii). It contains essays on writers Edwidge Danticat and Patricia Grace and by writers Merlinda Bobis and Meena Alexander. The second section dwells on the themes of women, gender, and trauma. It contains essays on novels by J.M. Coetzee and Shani Mootoo as well as an analysis of writing about men and women’s circumcision by Chantal Zabus. The final section explores Australia as a space of traumatic encounter, for the Aboriginal population, for white settler communities, and for new immigrant groups, as depicted in novels by Tim Winton, Andrew McGahan, Richard Flanagan and Janette Turner Hospital.
- 4 High points of the volume often come when individual contributors directly address the two key interfaces referred to above. In a vivid chapter explaining her own artistic engagements (be they fiction or drama) with the history of violence unleashed by Communist and anti-Communist groups in the 1980s Philippines, Bobis discusses the difficulties of exporting Western trauma models to rural Filipino citizens and of integrating multiple concatenated events that are and are not “trauma” into her own work (61-3, 67-73). Alexander juxtaposes her different processes of writing poetry in response to the September 11, 2001 bombings in the USA and the 2002 attacks on Muslims that resulted from the Godhra tragedy in India. Zabus tracks the ways in which immersion in European contexts can change the autobiographical narrative strategies of northern African women who experience excision and infibulation, thus pointing to a certain malleability in modes of expressing trauma and to the importance of geographical and cultural location in determining the forms in which we receive such expressions (156-9). Marc Delrez develops a theory of “settler envy” to explain the way white Australians specifically have confronted perceived challenges to their status in Australia resulting from the “Reconciliation” policies of the 1990s; he notes how many members of this group attempt to “possess” the trauma of the Aboriginal people in a way that displaces their pain and represses the need for restitution (198, 203). Bárbara Arizti picks up Delrez’s theory and uses it to analyze Winton’s novel *Dirt Music*, in the process drawing out the tensions between and interlacing of personal and cultural trauma. She notes that the protagonist’s “working through [of] his personal trauma relies on elements that both expose and play down the foundational trauma of the Australian nation: mainly, the appropriation of Aboriginal land” (176).
- 5 While the chapters can be a bit uneven, this volume as a whole makes an important step towards shaping the more particularized understanding of postcolonial trauma

necessary to this field. Drawing together complementary studies from different parts of the “postcolonial” universe, the book achieves a broad geographic reach that makes it of interest to a wide swathe of postcolonial and trauma studies scholars. By including engaging contributions from creative writers Bobis and Alexander, *The Splintered Glass* also takes part in an important trend of opening up literary criticism to wider reflective conversations.

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