

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.

334

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).

335

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.

337

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