

Introduction

Nicole Simek

The study of trauma, a concept first developed within medicine and the emerging field of psychoanalysis in the late nineteenth century, has intensified and expanded throughout a number of disciplines over the last few decades. In literary studies, trauma has drawn the attention of critics for the questions it raises with respect to the nature of language and representation, and as a problematic through which to interrogate and expand on poststructuralist conceptions of subjectivity. Yet, as a phenomenon involving putatively universal physiological structures and bodily responses, as well as specific personal and historical causes, interpretations, and reactions, trauma has also become a privileged object of study for what it reveals about various academic disciplines and their ability—or failure—to account for the multiple individual and social, personal and collective, psychological and political dimensions of a widespread but diversely manifested experience. If trauma has been described as a characteristic experience of (post)modern life, and most frequently examined in its modern occurrences, its conceptual origin in biology and continued categorization as a largely physiological event demands that critics expand the study of trauma to include earlier manifestations while also questioning whether historicizing trauma might also require reconceptualizing the aspects of trauma previously deemed ahistorical and universal.

From Michel de Montaigne's struggle to represent the loss of his idealized friend La Boétie through his sublime alexandrine "parce que c'était lui, parce que c'était moi" to Derrida's reflections on the work of mourning, the narratability of trauma and the necessity of its representation have occupied a significant place in French language literature and criticism. The following articles approach this history from multiple—and sometimes conflicting—directions and theoretical positions. Together, they demonstrate the extent of trauma's presence in French and Francophone literary traditions and shed light on the place, limitations, and potential future importance of trauma studies within the discipline of French.

The volume begins with an exploration of genre and traumatic narratability in Part I, Traumatic Forms. Treating texts from the Early Modern period to the present, the articles in this section analyze the challenge of narrating trauma and the ways in which authors have made use of traditional or reconfigured generic forms in their attempts to translate traumatic experience. In "Histoire(s) du cinema and its Relation with the Polemical Image," Tom Conley examines Jean-Luc Godard's affiliation with a militant artistic tradition that took shape in response to the French Wars of Religion. Situating Godard's attempt to "resurrect" a cinematic mode of traumatic apprehension within this context reveals tensions between the author's aesthetic intent and the traumatic effects born of the film's form. The fairytale genre is the object of Siobhan Mcilvanney's study, "'Il était une fois...': Trauma and the Fairytale in Amélie Nothomb's *Robert des noms propres*." The fairytale provides a narrative form particularly suited to the articulation of trauma for its capacity to accommodate at once a graphic literalization of the improbable or unbelievable and an allegorical mode of coping or cure. Investigating Nothomb's use of the fairytale as traumatic performance, Mcilvanney's cogent article focuses on the genre's function and limits as a therapeutic tool. Turning to Renaissance poetry, Zahi Zalloua analyzes the construction of poetic persona and the autobiographical narration of trauma in "From *Le Printemps* to *Les Tragiques*: Trauma, Self-Narrative and the Metamorphosis of Poetic Identity in Agrippa d'Aubigné." Examining d'Aubigné's renunciation of lyric poetry in favor of epic, Zalloua asks what motivates this poetic conversion, whether it is as absolute as d'Aubigné claims, and what type of ethics of witnessing can emerge from such a shift. Maïr Verthuy pursues similar questions in

“The Changing Shapes of Trauma in the Fictional Writings of H el ene Parmelin (1915-1997).” Verthuy’s thorough discussion of the journalist’s extensive but little known fictional works sheds light on Parmelin’s literary engagement with the trauma of war, as well as the intersection between her literary practices, politics, and life experiences. **Metka Zupan i c**’s “Nouvelle  criture « engag e » de Chantal Chawaf : th erapie contre les guerres et les souffrances ?” also takes as its object of study a haunting “mal initial” and resulting attitude towards violence that form both constants and evolving themes in a body of novelistic work. Zupan i c’s article focuses, however, on the efficacy of literature as personal and social therapy, raising, through an analysis of Chawaf’s specific form of committed literature, larger questions regarding the role of the literary in the 21st century world. Finally, in “The Wounds of Algeria in Pied-Noir Autobiography,” **Amy Hubbell** takes up the traumatic inception of *Nostalgie*, an autobiographical genre founded on the collective trauma of separation from a communal homeland. Analyzing the construction of *Nostalgie* in the work of authors such as Marie Cardinal and H el ene Cixous, Hubbell interrogates *Nostalgie*’s role in the preservation of a community who has defined itself through trauma and whose pain must be continually acted out and sustained in order to maintain its coherence.

The five articles gathered together in Part II, Trauma’s Subjects, continue to explore the relation between trauma and literary form, but do so with an eye to elucidating traumatic subjectivity. These contributions consider specific subject positions traumatized subjects occupy in order to better understand both the subjective and the socio-historical dimensions of trauma and its literary representation. **Elizabeth S. Scheiber** bridges these concerns in “*Tout cela n’est que souvenir rapport e*: Representing and Reconstructing Memory in the Work of Charlotte Delbo.” Noting that scholars of Shoah literature have often viewed aesthetic analysis with caution, fearing that it eclipse pressing content issues, Delbo’s work, Scheiber argues, points instead to the ways in which memory, writing, and form are deeply intertwined and must be attended to in any attempt to understand trauma and its written representation. **Marianne Legault** turns our attention next to seventeenth-century discourses about trauma whose aims and function differ widely from those of most testimonial literature. In “*Iphis & Iante : traumatisme de l’incompl tude lesbienne au Grand Si cle*,” Legault examines the representation of lesbians as subjects traumatized and tormented by their “deficiency,” demonstrating how these seemingly sympathetic portrayals of trauma, by locating its source in the subject’s ontological condition, served to exculpate and reinforce social mores and prejudices regarding lesbianism. Language and subjectivity are the focus of the following article by **Loraine Day**, “Trauma and the Bilingual Subject in Nancy Huston’s *L’Empreinte de l’ange*.” Drawing from the work of Donald Winnicott, Clare Britton Winnicott, and Silvan Tomkins, Day keenly probes the relations between trauma, language, affect, and artistic creation through her close study of Huston’s bilingual protagonist. Finally, **Christa Jones** and **Nancy Arenberg** provide two different perspectives into Maghrebi literature. Jones focuses on postcolonial subjectivity and trauma in an Algerian context in “Exploring the Depths of Trauma: Identitary Instability in Mokeddem’s *L’Interdite*.” Arenberg turns to Tunisian writer Nine Moati for insight into the intersection of the cultural and the personal in “Resurrecting the Lost Mother: Postmemory and Mourning in Moati’s *Mon enfant, ma m re*.”

The final section of the volume, Trauma’s Scripts, investigates most explicitly the theoretical frameworks underpinning trauma studies and the relation these frameworks hold with the discipline of French. **Susan Ireland** engages with such scripts in “Textualizing Trauma in Samira Bellil’s *Dans l’enfer des tournantes* and Fabrice G nestal’s *La squale*.” Ireland’s study scrutinizes various cultural discourses surrounding gang rape in the Parisian *banlieues*, and examines authors’ attempts to reform these discourses in their textualizations of violence. Situating her close analysis of

autobiographical testimony and film within a political, and heavily mediatized, context, Ireland explores trauma writing's function as political act, ending with a discussion of critical approaches to these texts that the reader/spectator might adopt. **Pascale Perraudin** follows a related line of inquiry in "Production testimoniale: « je » de témoins, enjeux de victimes dans *L'Ombre d'Imana. Voyages jusqu'au bout du Rwanda*." Focusing on testimonial literature, Perraudin contends that while cultural production has arguably failed to register past mass traumas or prevent their reoccurrence, new forms of testimonial literature such as Véronique Tadjó's Rwanda project, which models a relation of contact and connection between observers and victims, can offer more adequate modes of representing and responding to mass violence. The three final articles take a critical approach to trauma studies, investigating the assumptions that have become dominant as the field has grown and imposed itself. In "'Child in the Water': The Spectacle of Violence in Théodore Agrippa d'Aubigné's *Les Tragiques*," **Kathleen Long** undertakes to historicize the concept of trauma, questioning its common association with modernity and the tendency of critics to focus on modern texts in their study of traumatic phenomena. Long's examination of d'Aubigné's epic poetry sheds light on the cultural dimensions of trauma and the purportedly natural responses to its effects. **Marie-Pierre Le Hir** probes trauma studies' current definition of the Shoah and the influence of this dominant paradigm on literary criticism in "Lit. Crit. Traumatized: the Case of Romain Gary's *Autobiographical Fiction*." Using Gary's work and its reception as Shoah literature as a test case, Le Hir argues that dehistoricization of trauma literature, as well as reliance on a model of trauma theory that positions the lector, like the psychoanalyst, as interpretive authority over an author's work has hindered much critical investigation of both Gary's fiction and Shoah memory. Critical authority and post-traumatic knowledge are the subject of the volume's final piece, "Psychoanalysis, Trauma, and the 'Little Secret': The Resistance of Elie Wiesel and Anne-Lise Stern." Here, **Colin Davis** returns to trauma studies' roots in psychoanalytic theory in order to assess the epistemological frameworks underpinning claims to interpretive authority, claims that have prompted much heated debate among scholars. Davis provides an overview of this debate, before turning to the work of Wiesel and Stern, who explore and question the psychoanalysis of trauma and the limits of post-traumatic knowledge.

The multiple perspectives represented here do not come together in a clear synthesis. We hope that this volume will, however, provide the reader with a clearer understanding of trauma studies' impact on the study of French language literature, as well as varied critical approaches and lines of inquiry to pursue in future studies of the topic.

Whitman College