In *Regarding the Pain of Others*, Susan Sontag opens a discussion of the photography of suffering with a reference to Virginia Woolf’s *Three Guineas*, described by Sontag as Woolf’s ‘brave, unwelcomed reflections on the roots of war.’ Woolf claims therein that the shock of horrific pictures cannot fail to unite ‘people of good will’; that photographs of war will invariably create a ‘we’ that is opposed to the atrocities before ‘our’ eyes. Susan Sontag begs to differ. ‘No “we” should be taken for granted when the subject is looking at other people’s pain.’

In the last twenty years, a new ‘we’ seems to have emerged with respect to horrific histories and their deeply disturbing forms of representation: the unifying field of trauma studies. Other people’s pain has become one of the core interests of literary and cultural studies. While narratives of loss, oppression, marginalization, and physical and psychological trauma are by no means new to readers and viewers, the particular dedication of the humanities to these issues has reached a new quality. ‘[W]e inhabit an academic world that is busy consuming trauma [...]. We are obsessed with stories that must be passed on, that must not be passed over’, writes Patricia Yaeger, and asks, ‘What happens when we “textualize” bodies, when we write about other people’s deaths [...] as something one reads?’

This new interest in pain and death, in the suppressed histories of persecuted and annihilated peoples – not only a trend but also a method

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2 Ibid., 6.
that Peter Middleton has called ‘New Memoryism’—draws especially on insights from psychoanalysis and psychotherapy, fields that are still very much influenced by Sigmund Freud and his followers. Sigmund Freud, who himself often resorted to literature to explicate his concepts of psychosexual development and their possible connection to neurosis, formulated the first steps towards a theory of trauma together with Josef Breuer in *Studies on Hysteria* in 1895. As Craig Piers summarizes nearly one hundred years after Freud’s and Breuer’s study, the idea that ‘hysterics “suffer from reminiscences” or the return to consciousness of an anxiety-provoking idea/memory or “exciting event” in symbolic and symptomatic form’ is now at the core of recent debates on the nature, transmission, treatment—and telling—of trauma. Piers found it necessary to return to these first attempts at classifying and explaining the traumatized condition in order to systematize contemporary trauma theory within the framework of psychoanalysis and psychotherapy, where Freud’s theorizing, ‘in many respects is as much the source of debate now, as it was during his own times.’

At that point in time, trauma studies had already been taken up by literary scholars who quickly appropriated the findings of memory studies and psychoanalysis for their discussions and analysis of what became known as ‘trauma texts’, in particular survivor testimonies from the Holocaust and the Vietnam War, but also from the Rwandan Genocide, South African apartheid, and, more recently, the attacks on the World Trade Center of 9/11. Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub first addressed the earlier cases in their 1992 study on the crises of witnessing, in which they explored the role of testimony in literature, psychoanalysis and history and where they addressed the possibility—and necessity—of participatory re-creation of trauma. Teaching traumatic texts and histories, ‘teaching as such, takes place precisely only through a crisis: if teaching does not hit upon some sort of crisis, if it does not encounter either vulnerability or the explosiveness of a (explicit or implicit) critical and unpredictable

dimension, it has perhaps *not truly taught*,\(^6\) writes Shoshana Felman. In this view, a permutation of Virginia Woolf’s thoughts on war photography, only the re-creation of trauma (‘creating in the class the highest state of crisis that it could withstand’)\(^7\) can form the ‘we’ that has truly understood the nature of trauma and can adequately address the crisis of witnessing. This rather bold idea is still very prominent in the academic discourse on trauma within the humanities; it found its way into the highly influential volume *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, edited by Cathy Caruth in 1995, as well as Caruth’s later monograph that expanded the scope of the project into narrative.\(^8\)

The re-creation of trauma as proposed by Shoshana Felman raises an ethical question. As Anne Whitehead has stated in an article on Geoffrey Hartman’s place in trauma theory, the reader’s/viewer’s position and perspective on traumatic events unavoidably leads to ethical considerations. Questions regarding ‘*how we see and from where we see*’\(^9\) determine all ‘efforts to confront and remember the past.’\(^10\) ‘Prior to all efforts at commemoration, explanation or understanding,’ Ulrich Baer writes, ‘we must find a place and a position from which we may then gain access to the event.’\(^11\) An ethical vantage point has to be found from which those not directly affected by the traumatic event itself can access the stories and histories of pain. Again, there is no ‘we’ to be taken for granted when looking for access to these narratives of trauma.

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\(^7\) *Ibid*.


\(^10\) *Ibid.* (emphasis in the original).

When neuroscientists Bessel A. van der Kolk, Alexander C. McFarlane and Onno van der Hart wrote on the nature of traumatic memories, they did so with the clear aim of treating a psychological disorder: ‘Traumatic memories need to become like memories of everyday experience, that is, they need to be modified and transformed by being placed in their proper content and restructured into a meaningful narrative. […] Thus, in therapy, memory paradoxically becomes an act of creation rather than the static (fixation) recording of events that is characteristic of trauma-based memories.’

In her brilliant *Trauma: A Genealogy*, Ruth Leys criticizes this approach to trauma, particularly the notion of ‘a literal imprint of an external trauma that, lodged in the brain in a special traumatic memory system, defies all possibility of representation.’ Nevertheless, following the works of van der Kolk, Felman, Laub and Caruth, the integration of literally imprinted traumatic memories into narratives of trauma has become the focal point of trauma literature and art.

Where cultural work engages with other people’s trauma, it does so with a double emphasis on contradictory terms: the impossibility of fully grasping the traumatic moment and of translating it into language (especially in regard to the Holocaust), and the necessity to transmit knowledge of these traumas and to translate them for new audiences. Roger Luckhurst has called these two sides to the study of other people’s pain the ‘trauma paradigm’: ‘Given the narrative/anti-narrative tension at the core of trauma, aesthetics might step into this area because its task is (like that of the cultural critic) to “play with contradictions”.’ Cultural forms, he argues, have provided ‘the genres and narrative forms in which traumatic disruption is temporalized and rendered transmissible. Trauma has become a paradigm because it has been turned into a repertoire of compelling stories about

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the enigmas of identity, memory and selfhood that have saturated Western cultural life.\textsuperscript{15} In light of Judith Herman's highly significant findings, this breadth of issues is not surprising.\textsuperscript{16} When Herman introduced the concept of complex post-traumatic stress disorder, she emphasized that the manifestations of trauma are much more varied than commonly thought and underlines her argument with the findings of eminent psychiatrists who first worked with Holocaust survivors. William Niederland found that “the concept of traumatic neurosis does not appear sufficient to cover the multitude and severity of clinical manifestations” of the survivor syndrome. Further, Emmanuel Tanay observed that the ‘psychopathology may be hidden in characterological changes that are manifest only in disturbed object relationships and attitudes towards work, the world, man and God.’\textsuperscript{17}

Such disturbed relationships to the world, man, and God are very much at the core of modern and especially postmodern literature and art, with postmodernism particularly suited to address the fragmentation and breakdown of ordering principles in a post-Holocaust world. The enormous ‘repertoire of compelling stories’ about trauma, however, is, as Luckhurst himself admits, ‘at odds with some of the most influential cultural theories of trauma, where the term trauma can be defined \textit{in opposition} to narrative.’\textsuperscript{18} Most prominent of these positions on trauma as a point of narrative impossibility is Jean-Francois Lyotard’s definition of the traumatic experience. ‘What art can do, is bear witness not to the sublime, but to this aporia of art and to its pain. It does not say the unsayable, but says that it cannot say it.’\textsuperscript{19} This leads Luckhurst to conclude that ‘[t]rauma can therefore only be an

\textsuperscript{15} \textit{Ibid.}.
\textsuperscript{16} Judith Herman, \textit{Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror} (New York: Basic Books, 1997).
\textsuperscript{18} Luckhurst, \textit{Trauma Question}, 86 (emphasis in the original).
\textsuperscript{19} Jean-François Lyotard, \textit{Heidegger and ‘the jews’}, trans. Andreas Michel and Mark S. Roberts (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), 47.
aporia in narrative, and any narrative temporalization is an unethical act.\textsuperscript{20} Severe trauma, he writes, ‘can only be conveyed by the catastrophic rupture of narrative possibility.’\textsuperscript{21} Thus, if not only the participatory re-creation of trauma compromises ethical boundaries, but also any representation of other people’s pain that goes beyond stating narrative impossibility, what is left for literature, art and their critics to do?

Roger Luckhurst soon changed his mind about the ‘unethical act’ of narrating trauma: Looking back on \textit{The Trauma Question} in a journal article in 2010 (notably a journal on English literature),\textsuperscript{22} he realizes that his earlier study was heavily influenced by the images of Abu Ghraib, images that defined ‘an era saturated with the question of torture.’\textsuperscript{23} Whereas Jean Améry described his torture by the Germans in 1943 as incomparable and therefore indescribable, marking ‘the limit of the capacity of language to communicate’,\textsuperscript{24} the infliction of bodily pain in Abu Ghraib (the place that imprinted itself as the image of the ‘war on terror’) was not met with speechlessness but with immediate reappropriation. ‘The images were not diluted or disrespected; that their meanings were continually de- and re-contextualized was part of their explosive power. In this phase, at least, an aesthetic of unspeakability or unrepresentability would fail to register how cultural forms have actually responded to our torturous times’,\textsuperscript{25} writes Luckhurst. Art is no longer only to bear witness to the aporia of pain. Luckhurst concludes: ‘I would rather move beyond that, and follow the extraordinary flowering of cultural work that is using every register to assess these torturous times.’\textsuperscript{26}

\textsuperscript{20} Luckhurst, \textit{Trauma Question}, 81.
\textsuperscript{21} \textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{23} \textit{Ibid.}, 13.
\textsuperscript{24} Jean Améry, \textit{At the Mind’s Limits: Contemplations by a Survivor on Auschwitz and its Realities} (London: Granta, 1999 [1966]), 33.
\textsuperscript{25} Luckhurst, ‘Beyond Trauma’, 15.
\textsuperscript{26} \textit{Ibid.}, 19.
This would lead back to Cathy Caruth’s idea of trauma as a means of connecting with the other, of ‘a speaking and a listening from the site of trauma’27: ‘In a catastrophic age, that is, trauma itself may provide the very link between cultures: not as a simple understanding of the pasts of others but rather, within the traumas of contemporary history, as our ability to listen through the departures we have all taken from ourselves.’28 Just as the translation of concepts from psychology and the transfer of the psychologist–patient relationship to that of art and its readership and audience pose ethical questions, so too does this configuration of trauma as a link between cultures. As Nancy Miller and Jason Tougaw observe, ‘in a culture of trauma, accounts of extreme situations sell books. Narratives of illness, sexual abuse, torture or the death of loved ones have come to rival the classic, heroic adventure as a test of limits that offers the reader the suspicious thrill of borrowed emotion.’29

A ‘culture of trauma’ is in danger of losing contact with history, fears Dominick LaCapra: ‘the significance or force of particular historical losses (for example, those of apartheid or the Shoah) may be obfuscated or rashly generalized. As a consequence one encounters the dubious ideas that everyone (including perpetrators or collaborators) is a victim, that all history is trauma, or that we all share a pathological public sphere or a “wound culture”’.30 Necessary distinctions are blurred in the all-encompassing ‘wound-culture’ approach to the trauma paradigm. Jean Améry wrote as the traumatized victim of torture; the reactions to the images of Abu Ghraib on the part of journalists, film-makers, and the public are, in contrast to this, at best a case of secondary witnessing. Notwithstanding the fact that ‘torturous times’ might in themselves be able to wound the national psyche or harm the personal and private sets of beliefs and convictions of readers and viewers, a clearer distinction on the one hand between primary victims

28 Ibid.
30 Dominick LaCapra, Writing History, Writing Trauma (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 64.
who, in Freud’s terms, ‘suffer from reminiscences’, and people influenced by this pain, on the other, has to be upheld. For LaCapra, the necessary boundary is that of ‘empathic unsettlement’: ‘At the very least, empathic unsettlement poses a barrier to closure in discourse and places in jeopardy harmonizing or spiritually uplifting accounts of extreme events from which we attempt to derive reassurance or a benefit (for example, unearned confidence about the ability of the human spirit to endure any adversity with dignity and nobility).’

Otherwise, if all engagement with horrific events is subsumed under the equalizing term of trauma, there will be no ‘we’ left at all to talk about other people’s pain. The tendency to welcome empathic understanding (as opposed to unsettlement) as a way to experience the pain of the other, thereby assuming at least in part the position of the traumatized victim, might in fact disavow the victim of his or her most personal experience and history. Psychiatrist Dori Laub, for example, claims that ‘the listener to trauma comes to be a participant and a co-owner of the traumatic event: through his very listening, he comes to partially experience trauma in himself’.

While this may be true in the case of the psychiatrist listening to his patient’s trauma in a psychological sense, it becomes ethically problematic when transferred imprudently and without distinction to literature and literary and cultural criticism.

Literature can indeed engage with trauma. It has always done so. Yet the narratives of trauma that ‘we’ are being offered about other people’s pain in literature, film, photography and art are, in the overwhelming number of cases, not the same ones that psychologists and psychotherapists are dealing with in their treatment of real victims and witnesses. Distinguishing


33 As, for instance, Heather M. Moulden and Philip Firestone have pointed out in their review of descriptive and empirical literature examining vicarious traumatization: ‘Vicarious Traumatization. The Impact on Therapists who Work With Sexual Offenders’, *Trauma, Violence & Abuse* 8/1 (2007), 67–83.
between the two would seem, therefore, to be not only a question of proper procedure, but of ethics. Art can mirror the nature of traumatic memories and their ‘need to be modified and transformed by being placed in their proper content and restructured into a meaningful narrative’, but this ‘act of creation’ should not be a claim to co-ownership of real trauma. Art, in particular postmodern art, can navigate brilliantly the territories of trauma, but it should be careful not to succumb to voyeuristic and arrogant spectatorship.

At the end of Regarding the Pain of Others, Susan Sontag takes up this idea of the unified spectatorship, of the ‘we’, again in a passage describing Jeff Wall’s photograph Dead Troops Talk (A Vision After an Ambush of a Red Army Patrol near Moquor, Afghanistan, Winter 1986), a digital montage of a ‘made-up event in a savage war that had been much in the news’. In the style of a nineteenth-century history painting, Wall arranges the ‘antithesis of a document’, a disturbingly ‘real’ picture of the face of war where the dead talk to each other. Yet these dead ‘are supremely uninterested in the living: in those who took their lives; in witnesses – and in us. [...] “We” – this “we” is everyone who has never experienced anything like what they went through – don’t understand. We don’t get it. [...] Can’t understand, can’t imagine.’ If this is true, all engagement with trauma literature and art is pointless. There must be something left that literature and art can do in the face of trauma; if not offer understanding, then at least a perspective on that which ‘we’ have not experienced. It is this question of the possibilities and limitations of narratives of trauma in regard to other people’s pain and the question of ethics that this volume sets out to address.

The following contributions approach the vast – though not unlimited – field of trauma studies and its complexity by examining a variety of literary trauma narratives and the ethical implications involved in the production, reception and analysis of other people’s pain from a multidisciplinary perspective.

35 Sontag, Regarding the Pain of Others, 111.
36 Ibid.
37 Ibid., 113.
perspective. Examining the theoretical framework of trauma studies, its place within academic discourse and society, the following articles explore the representation of other people’s pain from the viewpoint of cultural studies and provide critical readings of literary texts from the disciplines of French, German, American and English studies, which link the theory of trauma studies to individual in-depth analyses. These case studies engage with a variety of distinct forms of collective/historical and individual traumatic experience, such as persecution and mass genocide in the Holocaust, the atrocities of forced labour concentration camps, the Second World War, the Vietnam War, the 9/11 terrorist attacks, slavery, European imperialism and colonialism in Africa, apartheid in South Africa, sexual abuse, racism and racial segregation, and anti-Semitism.

In his expository article ‘Trauma and Ethics: Telling the Other’s Story’, Colin Davis explores the dangers of secondary witnessing and the temptations of participating in the story and trauma of others. ‘Who should speak for those who do not speak for themselves, the dead, the mute, the traumatized, those who cannot or will not tell their own stories, or those who have no story to tell?’ Davis’s question draws attention to the fundamental dilemma of speaking about other people’s pain. If to speak for the other inevitably involves participation in the other’s pain, and if to remain silent perpetuates the initial violence and neglects the memory of the other, speaking about other people’s pain turns into ‘an ethical minefield’. Davis’s analysis of Giorgio Agamben’s Remnants of Auschwitz and of Shoshana Felman’s account of a class in crisis shows that these two seminal texts of trauma theory seem to lack an adequate understanding of this ethical dilemma. Pointing out that Agamben’s identification of the Muselmann, the ‘living dead’, as the ‘principal figure for the understanding of Auschwitz’ is based on a misreading of Primo Levi, Davis shows how Agamben elevates his own position and ‘asserts his authority as interpreter over subjects who can no longer speak for themselves’. In Levi’s account the survivor can speak for the Muselmann ‘by proxy’ and ‘in ignorance and incomprehension’ of his experience. There is nothing to learn from the figure of the Muselmann. In contrast, in Agamben’s account ‘the witness speaks for the Muselmann, and Agamben speaks for the witness’, thus emphasizing his general ‘view of the human subject as lacking intention and agency’. The ethically problematic
nature of Agamben’s appropriation of the other’s trauma is reflected in Felman’s approach to teaching narratives of trauma in the form of ‘participatory re-creation of trauma’. Davis criticises Felman’s ideal of teaching trauma by forcing her students to identify with the victims of traumatic experience, turning them into secondary victims, and to ‘work through’ the pain that has become their own. Instead of creating a state of ‘trauma envy’ and participating in the pain of others, Davis argues ‘that witnessing the other’s trauma is precisely not to share it’. In the third section of his essay, Davis provides a literary example that avoids these dangers of ‘secondary trauma’. Here, Davis gives an analysis of Charlotte Delbo’s *Measure of our Days*, which tells the stories of other people’s pain from a first-person perspective, but refuses ‘to exert authority over the stories of the survivors by imposing a coherent meaning on them’.

**Aleida Assmann** in her essay ‘From Collective Violence to a Common Future: Four Models for Dealing with a Traumatic Past’ draws attention to the ethics and politics involved in the processes of remembering and forgetting a traumatic history of violence both at the individual and at the collective level. In contrast to the recent development of a ‘Culture of Remembrance’, the first model, which Assmann presents as ‘dialogic forgetting’, considers the ability to forget as a ‘cultural achievement’ that has been used since antiquity to achieve the ‘closure of a violent past in a symmetric situation of power’. It is a way of ‘shared forgetting’ that can provide a basis for a common future. The atrocities of the Holocaust and the radically asymmetric experience of traumatic violence, in contrast, demand a radically different way of dealing with the past. The closure provided by the first model is here ‘exactly what had to be prevented by all means’. Instead, only a pact of ‘remembering in order never to forget’ that achieved ‘ethical recognition’ of the victims could provide for an appropriate answer to the ‘historically unprecedented crime of the Holocaust’. Yet in contrast to this ‘semi-religious memorialization’ of the past, the third model Assmann presents, ‘remembering in order to overcome’, also aims at the ethical recognition of the victims of a traumatic past, but intends to achieve reconciliation ‘in order to be able to imagine a common future’. The fourth model, which Assmann terms ‘dialogic remembering’, applies to nations which share a history of traumatic violence and mutually acknowledge their
own responsibility for the suffering that each has inflicted on the other. From Assmann's perspective this last model especially, although it is not a practised reality yet, could provide future possibilities for overcoming international conflicts about the ethics and politics of remembering and acknowledging other people's pain.

In her article 'Trauma Studies: Contexts, Politics, Ethics', Susannah Radstone provides a critical analysis of the development and the place of trauma theory within the humanities today. Radstone approaches trauma studies from the perspective of its ethical and political implications, its mechanisms of exclusion and inclusion, and its inherent danger of inferiorizing the victims of trauma from an outside perspective of secondary witnessing, as described by Dominick LaCapra. Defining the notion of a fundamental 'lack of agency' on the part of the primary witness and victim as a central characteristic of traumatic experience, Radstone draws attention to the normative element involved in the construction of the victim of traumatic experience as 'helpless' that might easily turn secondary witnessing into pitiing spectatorship and voyeurism of other people's pain.

By identifying trauma studies within the humanities as a 'kind of tertiary witnessing' Radstone raises awareness of the 'necessity of interrogating' the ethics and politics involved in the practice of trauma studies itself. Rather than perpetuating an, at least ethically, questionable notion of witnessing, Radstone's approach demands 'an active, engaged and agentic practice that intervenes in and practices a politics and an ethics open to critique, negotiation and transformation'. Taking its cues from Laplanchian psychoanalytic theory and object relations theory, Radstone's article furthermore critically examines the concept of the subject underlying canonical texts of trauma studies by Cathy Caruth and Dori Laub and Shoshana Felman. In Ruth Leys's criticism, Radstone identifies the model of a mimetic variation of trauma theory that focuses on the dissociation of the self and an anti-mimetic variation that focuses on the traumatic event. Examining the connections between trauma studies and history, memory and testimony, as well as theories of referentiality and representation, Radstone offers a critique of the tendency in trauma studies toward emphasizing the antimimetic event, thus contributing to the construction of a strict dichotomy between the autonomy of the subject and the externality of the traumatic event. Instead of perpetuating these binary oppositions, thus advocating
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‘cultural and political Manicheanism’, Radstone concludes that trauma studies should not extend its boundaries but should rather self-reflexively engage with its own mechanism of inclusion and exclusion and the ‘inevitability of ethical impurity’.

María Jesús Martínez-Alfaro in her essay ‘Narrating the Holocaust and its Legacy: The Complexities of Identity, Trauma and Representation in Art Spiegelman’s Maus’ explores the limits of representing the Holocaust in the form of a radically different and seemingly disconcerting literary genre, the comic book, which subverts the traditional idea of decorum. Taking its cues from Marianna Hirsch’s concept of ‘postmemory’, which describes the transgenerational transmission of traumatic memory from the victims of trauma to their descendants, Martínez discusses Spiegelman’s struggle in his Maus: A Survivor’s Tale to recover the ‘absent memories’ of his own family’s traumatic past. Spiegelman’s textual and graphic narrative tells the story of the protagonist Artie, who serves as the author’s persona, and who tries to cope with his father’s traumatic past as a survivor of Auschwitz. The after-effects of traumatization and the traumatic memories of persecution and the Holocaust not only invade the present life of Artie’s father himself, but also result in Artie’s struggle with his identity as a survivor’s descendant and the moral responsibilities of the second generation of survivors in general. Spiegelman’s narrative manages to negotiate the representation of the Holocaust, Martínez shows, by explicitly and self-consciously reflecting on the act of textual and graphic narration, on the representation of the unspeakable events, on the ethical dilemma of using other people’s pain as a source of artistic expression and the risk of commodification involved in this. It is precisely this awareness of the limits of representation, Martínez concludes, that enables Maus to represent the unspeakable events of the Holocaust. Spiegelman achieves this by laying bare the silence and absence of those who did not survive, by showing the unbridgeable gaps and paradoxes of traumatic memories, and by avoiding the imposition of closure on the textual and graphic narrative of this Survivor’s Tale.

In her essay ‘Zero – A Gaping Mouth: The Discourse of the Camps in Herta Müller’s Atemschaukel between Literary Theory and Political Philosophy’, Bettina Bannasch analyses Müller’s account of the deportation of a young Romanian German to a labour camp by the Soviet Union and his struggle to survive the camp, an account based on the life stories of
survivors, in particular that of the writer Oskar Pastior. Drawing on Roland Barthes’s writing about ‘the ideal case of narration’ Bannasch explores the significance of the ‘ineffable’ zero point in *Atemschaukel* that marks Müller’s ‘critical engagement with the discourse about the literary depiction of the camps’ surrounding Theodor W. Adorno’s pronouncement about literature after Auschwitz and Paul Celan’s remarks on the zero point of history. Yet, as Bannasch points out, Müller’s novel makes a ‘different kind of claim to universal validity’ that is not concerned with the question of the legitimacy of storytelling after Auschwitz but which ‘pursues a fundamentally different question, namely that of a *politically relevant ethic*. The narrative composition of *Atemschaukel*, Bannasch argues, manages to avoid such comparisons as continue to dominate the literary discourse of the Shoah, using instead the mathematical precision of equations, in what Barthes terms the ‘honest’ stance of the writer, to express the ‘gaping mouth of the zero’, and thus emphasizing the ‘existential quality of the narration’. The ‘zero’ is the hunger of the camp inmates that challenges their sense of personal identity and, Bannasch emphasizes, represents the ‘ethical centre of the novel’. It creates a ‘state of emergency’ that, in contrast to the notions of Giorgio Agamben and Carl Schmitt, is not depicted from the external perspective of the sovereign power that determines the ‘state of emergency’, but rather from the first-person perspective of the narrator who experiences this situation. By its ‘precision in dealing with language’, also reflected in Müller’s use of metaphors, the text manages to resist ‘the construction of a beautiful world of art that promises refuge from an ugly reality’, depicting the ‘state of emergency’ and the ethical dilemma of camp life, whilst maintaining, Bannasch concludes, a distinction between ‘right and wrong’, between the ‘state of emergency and normality’.

**Hubert Zapf** in his contribution ‘Trauma, Narrative and Ethics in Recent American Fiction’ explores the significance of trauma as a narrative topic and ethical challenge in selected works of recent American fiction, with a particular emphasis on Leslie Marmon Silko’s *Ceremony* and Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*. Taking Torquato Tasso’s epic *Jerusalem Liberated* as a starting-point for his analysis, Zapf emphasizes the importance of trauma and traumatization as a literary topic. The special function and status of imaginative literature, its ‘metaphorical and mythopoetic mode of textualizing experience’, calls for a supplementation of ‘psychoanalytic or
psychocultural’ trauma theory by a ‘poetics of trauma’. American literary history, Zapf argues, from Nathanial Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter* to William Faulkner’s *The Sound and the Fury*, and twentieth-century literature in particular, offers a variety of trauma narratives. Although Silko’s *Ceremony*, which connects the protagonist’s traumatic experience of the Second World War with the traumatizing loss of his cultural identity as a Native American, and Morrison’s *Beloved*, which is set against the background of the historical experience of the enslavement of African Americans, draw on diverging forms of historical trauma, Zapf shows that both narratives refer to traditional story-telling and ecocultural counter-discourses as regenerative means for the individuals, who act as representatives of traumatic historical experiences. The connection of various forms of traumatic experience, as Zapf points out in his survey of trauma narratives in recent American literature, also marks one characteristic feature of twenty-first century fiction. The novels of Philip Roth, Richard Powers, Siri Hustvedt, Jonathan Safran Foer and Don DeLillo link ‘public and private, extreme and everyday, physical and psychological traumas’ in their fictionalized accounts of other people’s pain and experience of the Holocaust, the Second World War, the Vietnam War, racism and anti-Semitism, or the 9/11 terrorist attacks. It is precisely the ‘fictional status’ of all these narratives of trauma, Zapf argues in conclusion, their setting in ‘a depagrmatized and metadiscursive space’ that makes these narratives ethically relevant for the reader, thus contributing ‘towards a collectively experienced historical reality’.

**RUDOLF FREIBURG** in his essay ‘Trauma as Normalcy: Pain in Philip Roth’s *The Human Stain*’ explores the negotiation of personal and national identity in its relation to pain and trauma in Roth’s ‘American tragedy’ from a perspective informed by the literary history of catastrophe and traumatic experiences and dominant positions in contemporary trauma studies. Drawing particularly on the literary tradition of Greek tragedy, Freiburg shows how the multifarious forms of individual traumatization, represented in the novel by the traumatic life stories of Nathan Zuckerman, Coleman Silk, and Faunia and Les Farley, not only affect significantly the continuous construction and revision – the ‘performance’ – of personal identity, but are also reflected on the collective national level of American history which then comes to be seen as a sequence of atrocious events. *The Human Stain*, the third part of Roth’s ‘American Trilogy’, examines
American society against the backdrop of its recent history, in particular the Clinton–Lewinsky affair, which, as Freiburg points out, mirrors the human stain – the ‘inevitable result of typically human weakness of character and nature’ – on the level of the individual characters in the novel. Roth’s narrative uses his traumatized characters who suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder as a consequence of the Vietnam War, sexual abuse and racial discrimination to portray the ‘genetically predetermined habit of all human beings to create evil, to torment each other’. Identifying this omnipresence of pain and trauma as the central characteristic of the text, Freiburg argues that The Human Stain challenges the exceptionality usually ascribed to traumatization, thus inverting the standard definition of trauma. In Roth’s disillusioning depiction of the American ‘wound culture’, Freiburg concludes, other people’s pain is likely to turn into one’s own suffering and the condition of traumatization then becomes normalcy.

In the concluding essay ‘Trauma, Shame and Ethical Responsibility for the Death of the Other in J. M. Coetzee’s Waiting for the Barbarians’, Susana Onega draws attention to the limitations of trauma studies, which are revealed by its primary dedication to the analysis of historical catastrophes from a Western perspective, thus often neglecting other cultures and literary fields. Onega enlarges the scope of other people’s pain by analysing Waiting for the Barbarians as an example of contemporary postcolonial African literatures and the challenge of ‘providing healing narratives’ for the atrocities of colonialism and the after-effects of a traumatic history of genocide, civil war and oppressive dictatorship. Coetzee’s third novel, which engages with the dominant individual and collective trauma of contemporary South Africa, the institutionalization of racial hatred and violence by the apartheid regime, Onega argues, serves as a paradigmatic example of the ‘ethical demand and of the extraordinary difficulty’ of creating narratives of trauma that manage to incorporate the pain of the victims and the shame of the perpetrators. Drawing on the ‘cathartic effect of abreaction’, described by Freud and Breuer, Onega stresses the ‘crucial role of narrative in the healing of trauma’ and the rejection with which postmodern and experimental writers, such as Coetzee, are confronted when they engage with the historical ‘truth’. Contrary to these ‘realism-biased’ expectations, Coetzee’s narrative manages to give voice to ‘the barbarians’, ‘the white minority’s absolute other’ and their experience of
‘structural’ and ‘manifest’ violence through the perspective of an unnamed country magistrate, whose quiet life and harmonious coexistence with the local community and with nature in a remote fort on the border of the Empire comes to an abrupt end with the arrival of the cruel and pitiless Colonel of Police, Joll. Traumatized by the extreme physical torture and the death of ‘barbarian’ prisoners, ordered and executed by Joll himself, the protagonist gradually comes to realize his shame and responsibility as an active participant in the apartheid system and as a complicit witness of extreme violence. Identifying the mutual gaze of colonizer and colonized as ‘the definitive humanizing event’, Onega argues, informed by Emmanuel Levinas’s ethics of alterity, that the protagonist assumes responsibility for the unjust death of the other, thus overcoming his shame and trauma. Yet, as consoling as it might be, Onega finally warns against an interpretation of the text which ignores ‘the troubling fact’ that the protagonist tries to speak for the ‘barbarian’ other, the victims of his own crimes. Although he is tortured himself as a result of his ‘ethical awakening’ – some form of penance and reparation – the narrative fails to establish hope for a lasting affective relationship between colonizer and colonized except for ‘the reader’s participation in the minimal existential freedom’ achieved by the protagonist’s assumption of responsibility for other people’s pain.

Bibliography

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