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***The Future of Trauma Theory***, Edited by Gert Buelens, Sam Durrant and Robert Eaglestone, Routledge, 2013.

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The assumptions underlying the research in *The Future of Trauma Theory* (2014), a collection of articles edited by Gert Buelens, Sam Durrant and Robert Eaglestone, is that trauma, as 'wound', denotes the suffering of a subject. Contingent on seeing trauma as the suffering subject is the tendency to think of the condition as a pathology that needs healing. While the discipline of psychoanalysis is in the health field wherein 'healing' is a principle that has various definitions in psychoanalytic practices, depending on your practice, and trauma has been associated with conditions that have inspired methods for addressing the symptoms (current ways to address PTSD is an example), the application of trauma theory for humanities research, specifically literature and history, though also philosophy, religion and politics, raises questions about trauma as a procedure in scholarship, the primary question being the pathology of trauma as a wound requiring healing. In short, adapting the concept of trauma to carry out a certain hermeneutic strategy in the humanities raises questions about method and the assumptions underlying that method. In interpretation, do we want to 'heal' the subject or to watch healing taking place? This new collection is an example of how the two objectives can get mixed up in ways that may or may not be useful.

Twenty years ago, humanities scholar, Cathy Caruth (1996) published *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* which outlined terms for applying Freud's concept of trauma to humanities hermeneutics. She introduced the notion of 'wound' by interpreting Tancred's killing of his fiancé, Clorinda, as the trauma that returns when he goes out into the woods and slashes at a tree that cries, "why are you killing me again?": this crying is the wound of his trauma. Caruth did not invent this use of Tasso's medieval tale to talk about how trauma 'returns' disguised, the inventor being Freud, but her analysis does draw out the linguistic turn in psychoanalytic method as developed through Lacan, in which the subject's 'discourse' is the symptom, and the crying of the tree, wounded by Tancred's sword, gives her a reason to focus on the suffering of trauma as 'wound'. Ruth Leys (2000), a medical historian, critiqued Caruth's application of the psychoanalytic method to non-medical practices, targeting this 'wound' language in Caruth's work for raising alarming ethical concerns about the use of this theory. For Leys, it is totally inappropriate to see Tancred as a victim suffering trauma when in fact the real victim was his fiancé who he murdered. Notable is the fact that none of these ethical issues surrounding Tancred's murder is considered by Freud in his use of Tancred's story as an example of traumatic return.

Leys' critique (2000) became a part of the ongoing criticism of this method. Historian, Dominick LaCapra (2001) observes in *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, that scholars should be sensitive to not perpetuating 'wound culture' in using trauma theory to make truth claims about history. LaCapra was working in Holocaust Studies, a field of scholarship fuelled by the work of Shoshanna Felman and Dori Laub at Yale University to document Holocaust survivors' testimonies, which also happened to have been the scholarship that influenced Caruth's (1996) creative move to use trauma as a hermeneutic practice. In short, the

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particular clinical origin of this theory probably brought ethical concerns to the fore, but as LaCapra's (2001) concerns highlight, the fact that Trauma Theory accounted for a suffering subject meant that, as a theory, the ethical issues were bound to the issues raised by the pathology.

The extent to which the articles in *The Future of Trauma Studies* (2014) reflect the gains made by Trauma Theory in the humanities, if we are going to see gains as addressing concerns raised and improving on Caruth's (1996) initial efforts, is uneven. There are some strong insights and observations in most articles, there are a few articles I found enlightening, but there was no single article that stood out as highlighting a breakthrough in addressing the issues raised by its critics. If addressing this criticism was not the intention of the collection, then the scholars perhaps have missed a chance to move the theory into more useful practice. In any case, what can be said of the state of the nation of this theory as represented by the articles in this collection is that it has spread across the humanities in multiple ways and that multiplicity expresses at the least the potential of this theory.

The collection is divided into two parts, "History and Culture" and "Politics and Subjectivity", and generally contains contributions by scholars who have previous significant publications in their field. The scholarship shares the tendency to rely on trauma theory for identifying a 'suffering' that needs 'healing' (correcting/fixing, etc.) and from this perspective, tries to identify historical trauma as associated with newer scholarship: for example, the effect of the colonizer on the colonized (Craps and Durrant) is identified as a trauma, the impact of the colonized body (Kabir) or the colonizers war (Gana) is also trauma; subjects of trauma range from the European refugees (Stonebridge), to the 'exception' (missing person or the *Muselmann* in Edkins and Vermeulin) to the future shock subject (Lockhurst). LaCapra's (2001) engagement with the perpetrator of trauma stood out as anomalous in this collection though it was, along with Edkins paper, looking at trauma beyond the suffering subject. Only a minority of the scholars showed a strong grasp of the psychoanalytic terms of trauma, though those who had this grasp did not stretch beyond the simple application of this method for interpretation. By "simple" application, I mean that the interpretations were based on a simple consideration of the subject who suffers the traumatic return. What is obscured or not fully tested are several issues: in particular, how literature fits into the dynamic of the traumatic return; what is the relationship between the literary trauma experience by the protagonist and the author's trauma; how the unconscious of an author's reality figures in literature. These are lines of inquiry that are not explored leading to what I would suggest are weak analyses of the literary projects, in particular. The majority of articles relied on the hermeneutic practices outlined by Caruth (1996), Butler, Žižek or Gilroy, but not one article stood out as having resolved issues raised by Caruth's procedures.<sup>2</sup>

As a whole, the project reflected a cross-section of current scholarship as enduring the unrelenting pressure to 'witness' the crimes carried out in history as represented in culture, so as to 'heal' the trauma (wound), but with an uneven sense of how the method might be applied and with a general assumption that healing would be a natural outcome of witnessing. As a project on Trauma Theory "now", it is also an invitation to see this collection as reflecting on a method still coming into being, inviting questions and comments for development. To that end, I will review three articles: LaCapra's (2014) "Fascism and the Sacred: sites of inquiry after (or along with) trauma" (pp. 23-43), Sam Durrant's (2014) "Undoing sovereignty: towards a theory of critical mourning" (pp. 91-105), and Jenny Edkins'(2014) "Time, personhood, politics" (pp. 127-139).

<sup>2</sup> One project did reflect critique: specifically, Creps' "Beyond Eurocentrism" which carried out a postcolonial critique of Caruth's analysis of *Hiroshima, mon amour*. He argues that her analysis of the film was an example of the Eurocentric colonizer's concept of trauma theory. While Creps' critique is an interesting one, his argument that Caruth's analysis of *Hiroshima* proves trauma theory is a colonizer's analysis actually fails to prove trauma theory is postcolonial since the film does not disguise the fact it is a French (colonizer's) film. To be precise, Caruth's blindness to the fact the film is a Eurocentric representation of a Japanese trauma may be considered imperialistic.

In *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, Dominick LaCapra (2001) aims to use the psychoanalytic hermeneutic of trauma to think through the history of the traumatic event known as the Holocaust. LaCapra is a historian who is interested in the intersection of the historian's responsibility to history as a discipline and the contemporary subject's responsibility to current politics. He is particularly sensitive to the dynamic of the historian as witness to historical subjects who suffer trauma and so is understandably sensitive to not wanting to promote what he calls 'wound culture' while also making a contribution to ethically responsible scholarship. He points to scholarship issues raised by victim-generating research in a footnote that includes Leys' critique of Caruth's work. I bring up this footnote because Leys' research definitively raised issues with the 'wound' analysis Caruth brings up in Tancred's killing of Clorinda: Tancred's putative wound returning in Clorinda's voice, observes Leys, gives Tancred the status of victim of trauma and so is ethically circumspect. Sympathizing with a murderer for his trauma is tantamount to sympathizing with the Nazi perpetrators. Interestingly, LaCapra's paper in this collection, "Fascism and the Sacred: Sites of Inquiry after (or along with) trauma", targets the 'perpetrator' issue introduced by Leys not to explore what can be said about the perpetrator as a victim of trauma (unlike Frantz Fanon who was very concerned with this) but as the agent that implies a traumatized subject on the other side: "we may have reached a point where problems can be addressed without always ringing the trauma bell". And that is what he does: his research assumes that we all know that the Holocaust was the trauma and so he lets that stand *a priori* so as to focus on the Nazi fascists who were the perpetrators of the trauma.

He sets up a discussion about how the Nazis came to be perpetrators by reviewing the relationship between western secularism and the sacred, drawing on the concept of the secularization of the religious as a 'desacrilization'. That is, the disenchantment brought about by Protestantism that enabled the move from a religious state to a secular state, or the non-partisan principle of a "radical transcendent" force overruling human social interactions, became associated in pre-WWII Germany with the idea of the 'heilig' (unscathed or pure) in the "Heil" of the Hitler salute. The move from the secular disenchantment to the 'heilig' Nazi is, in LaCapra's terms, the 'postsecular'—a principle he defines as "neither the secular nor the religious or sacred but somehow both—or betwixt or between". The point at which the 'heilig' becomes connected to trauma is the "traumatropisms" which he defines as "different attempts to transfigure trauma into the sublime or sacred, for example, in the sacrilization or sublimation of founding traumas such as the Crucifixion, the French Revolution, the Holocaust, and possibly the First World War for Hitler and others". In effect, LaCapra means that Germany's WWI trauma became sublimated in Hitler's 'heilig': thus, we see the perpetrator as a victim of a trauma. This might imply that the sublimation of the wounded survivor of the Holocaust as sacred is equal to the fascist figure who is hailed as the 'pure' (Helig), though I believe LaCapra is highlighting that "traumatropism" is something to be wary of since it can take narratives to extremes.

Along with implying that there is danger in seeing the Nazi as a figure of "traumatropism", LaCapra resists interpreting the German fascists, but rather spends time understanding fascism as relevant to Nazism and then Nazism in relation to the sacred: he admits to being at a disadvantage in fully grasping fascism in its varities, though in outlining the nine prominent characteristics, he introduces the privileged Nazi individual such as Himmler, and not the community as a whole, as representative of the elite who stood for "Nazism's postsecular dimensions". These figures promoted a "symbolically, even quasi-ritually 'purifying' and not simply hygienic response to Jews and probably other victims who were projective objects of anxiety, allowing Nazis... to deny sources of disquiet in themselves by construing alienated others as causes of pollution or contamination...". This whole exploration leads to LaCapra's qualified conclusion that his interest in Nazi perpetrators is not meant to explain and so normalize the Nazis and their actions: his aim is "to explore what [he] think[s] are aspects of the perpetration of genocide and perhaps extreme collective action in general that have not been adequately researched or conceptualized" all while not falling into the trap of eliding or repeating "the equivocations and confusions of Nazi discourse and practice themselves". In effect, the potential to seriously consider whether or not a Nazi could actually experience trauma is treated here very cautiously by separating out the actual trauma, German's surviving WWI, with the crime, killing Jews carried out by the elite fascists.

While LaCapra shows a sophisticated understanding of psychoanalysis and especially its applicability to humanities hermeneutics, such as a recognition of the way repression works on the individual and on the collective, and a commendable preference for focusing on individuals so as to avoid generalizations which would undermine the historian's commitment to 'truth claims', he avoids ringing the trauma bell. In the end, Leys' (2000) criticism of Caruth's work (1996) remains standing in such a way that we might suppose LaCapra only highlights ways of getting around letting the perpetrators off the hook. In this way, LaCapra's scholarly allegiance to what Trauma Theory identifies as suffering victims is sustained by his role as historian/witness.

LaCapra's article, sensitive and nuanced as it reflects the problem with the state of Trauma Theory, as it has been conceived. Considering that the victim language continues to support the victim status as privileged for healing, making it impossible to see trauma outside of the binary of victim/perpetrator, the perpetrator remains the necessary cause of the victim's trauma. This is perhaps why LaCapra establishes ways of looking at the perpetrator without being, in Leys's terms (2001), unethical. It is a political position that most people are comfortable taking. Frantz Fanon could not figure out how to help a policeman work through the trauma of beating his wife so he focused instead on the subjects who he understood: the Algerians. The aporia that Fanon faced in his psychiatric work is visible in LaCapra's project which clarifies where the hole in Trauma Theory is: this aporia is in the discourse around trauma as a condition of suffering that should not have happened. Believing suffering should not happen also means that people who suffer are doing so because they are victims of a crime. Central to LaCapra's political position to the victim of trauma as an ethical one means that the healing process can only be successful in bringing the perpetrator to justice. In short, legal discourse has become bound to psychoanalytic discourse in humanities research.

In many respects, Sam Durrant's "Towards a Theory of critical mourning" is as sophisticated as LaCapra's work. He also draws on an array of scholarly projects on trauma, including Judith Butler and her debt to the Foucauldian bio-political turn, but also the structural form of trauma as defined by Lacanian psychoanalysis. His interest is in exploring trauma through historical paradigms of postcolonial thought as considered by Frantz Fanon and Homi Bhabha, with the aim to define the utopian promise of trauma theory as one of "common corporeal vulnerability" and he will do this not via the deconstructive ethics of Derrida et al, but through "critical mourning": "A mourning that works to undo not simply 'the idea of the sovereign subject' but sovereignty itself, property relations, and the human assumption of sovereignty over nature". I hear two concepts of trauma here: there is the trauma as suffering which the subject is compelled to bind in the symbolic and there is the trauma as a method (the symbolic) that can 'free ourselves' of the bind. It seems that the freedom is not from suffering but from the symbolic structure that resolves suffering. Whether or not this is contradictory remains to be seen.

Durrant (2014) uses David Lloyd's essay "Colonial Trauma/Postcolonial Recovery" (2000) as a project that performs this undoing: it problematizes postcolonial mourning by seeking "to recover the traces of a moral economy that would contest property relations, per se", the point here being that colonization is based on taking by force real estate and production from those who live and use the land. In order to get at a new way of thinking through the colonized subject's trauma, Durrant takes up Adorno's reading of Homer's *The Odyssey* as a means of thinking about literature as an expression of Freud's "dead(ening) protective shield": this is to say that literature (*The Odyssey*) is this metaphor of a shield which becomes the means for the subject to protect itself from the bombardment of external stimuli that cause trauma and so free itself from trauma.

Adorno's analysis of the last moments of the ancient epic offers an image that signifies for Durrant that moment when the epic "catches itself in the act of providing a protective shield that would neutralize the traumatic impact of the past atrocity that it nevertheless records" (98). At this point, a pattern in Durrant's analysis of seeing the work 'perform' its analysis suggests this is Durrant's hope for his own article: the argument will be that his work is a 'shield' by which to resolve trauma (and so freed the subject from it). The third document he uses to make his point is the cycle of poems by Ingrid de Kok in response to the Truth and

Reconciliation Commission (TRC) report in South Africa. What Durrant listens for are the effects of this report on the subjects and how it translates into the cultural projects. What he hears is how the cultural response may be heard as melancholia, in Freud's sense of depression, but that we should understand how the art itself resists that pathology. The art work, in being political, is critical of the postcolonial mourning that the postcolonial subject 'suffers': art "resists the historical drive that would appropriate mournful testimony as national archive"; "in its corporealization of testimony, [de Kok's poem] disrupts the national imaginary and instantiates an alternative form of community". Durrant concludes by suggesting that Freud's "protective shield", which was meant to describe how the subject creates a psychic environment safe from trauma with the epic narrative, may be seen in the cultural artifact. The value of the artifact is that it is an act of resistance that bonds communities and protects them, or makes them safe from trauma.

Durrant's use of Freud's psychoanalytic concept of the protective shield 'membrane', or 'dead layer', as a metaphorical concept for rethinking trauma theory in literary hermeneutics, as inventive and creative as it is, raises questions for me about the rigour of the method. For example, this Freudian concept of the membrane is actually more speculative than 'real': it was Freud's metaphor for how people's consciousness is essentially selective in order to protect itself. This membrane explained the border between consciousness and the unconscious: the place where things exist without the subject being conscious of it. The unconscious was caused by stimuli breaching the protective layer unbeknownst to the subject (the trauma) and lodging in the unconscious, until it is expelled from the unconscious to inspire repetitive behaviour or thinking, this return being the symptom of trauma. It is a very materialistic vision of psychic life and makes assumptions based on the motor functions of the human body: the logic is that, just as the skin is a layer of protection from outside stimuli, so the mind must have a protective layer.

Lacan's revision of Freud's protective layer loses its materialistic veneer through the linguistic turn. Language, as the symbolic structure that made humanity possible, organizes our world so that we may work with the world to help us. The fact our discourse keeps out things that do not fit into our world is raised by scholars all the time, and Althusser's work on ideology shows us the grander picture of how effectively ideologies occlude unwanted 'matter'. Notice the difference in position between Freud and Lacan: Freud believed the mind had a 'shield' a membrane for protection; Lacan saw the screen as a socializing function of the symbolic. In fact, if we apply Lacan's principle of this 'screen' as a symbolic principle of Durrant's analysis, his analysis does not show us something new, but simply affirms the function of ideology to 'bind us'. What is perhaps more important in this circumstance is to ask whether the act of resistance is actually freeing the colonized subject or not and, does literature function for ideology or for freedom?

There are some very interesting propositions in Edkin's "Time, Personhood, Politics" which I happen to have a personal scholarly interest in: the relation between messianic time and trauma, as interpreted through reading "messianic time" in Benjamin's "On the Concept of History" by such scholars as Giorgio Agamben and Eric Santner. World issues are motivating her project which "is an attempt to understand an aspect of contemporary social and political life that I find unacceptable and to explore what is objectionable about it and what other politics might or might not be possible". That is a tall order for any project and this single article does not pretend to address the extent of this objective. Yet what her objective reflects is an essential agreement with the ethical impulse motivating all the projects in this collection and in that sense, two questions are raised for me: what political issue is she getting at and why does trauma theory seem to promise to address it? The fact that Edkin does not centre her analysis on a specific world issue since, even when she focuses on 'missing persons' she is not speaking about a specific kind of missing person or a specific political location of missing persons, the potential of her work for useful 'ontic' political situations remains vague. This project is theoretical, and trauma becomes the code word for binding the theory of trauma to the human condition. What is refreshing about her approach is that she does not assume trauma is about suffering but then again, she does not use trauma theory as a method for interpretation. By way of exploring what her method is, I will back into the very interesting premise in her work which is that trauma does not have to be associated with suffering.

She begins by setting up the terms of her discussion as centered around time and missing persons: "What this essay attempts... is to think of the question of trauma time and that of the missing person alongside each other". The expression "alongside each other" is the code for deconstructionism and that is the method that governs each step in her analysis. Trauma time is a concept she has explored elsewhere in her research: it is meant to be the opposite of chronological or linear time which is the kind of time determined by the symbolic order and more especially exploited by the state. Trauma time is, for Edkins, associated with Agamben's "messianic time" (*The Time That Remains* (p. 68). Before exploring time, she first defines "the person missing". There are four kinds: the "ontically missing" person who is the one who has been abducted or has been 'disappeared' as is common in South and Central America; there is the ontological missing quality of the person, namely the Lacanian subject whose subjectivity is based on something missing (lack); there is the missing person in the political realm, one determined by the state; and the bio-political missing, the body in the state. This leads to her question about time: when is the subject missing? For Edkins, the concept of 'missing' is a condition of trauma or the 'real'. For example, ontologically, the subject's 'lack' is associated with the 'encounter with the real'. Regarding war, as the event of trauma, she sees a splitting between the state and its fantasy of war, and the individual who has a counter-fantasy. I quibble with this polarizing of the state and the individual, because not all individuals resist the state fantasy in wars and in fact, the majority of individuals take on the state fantasy for their own. Edkin's particular binary between state and individual may be complicated around principles of ideology and resistance.

Still working through trauma time, Edkins draws a connection between Caruth's (1996) adaptation of Freud's principle of trauma as "forgotten" ("it is only in and through its inherent forgetting that it is first experienced at all" (p.11) and Agamben's engagement with the "unforgettable" (*Time that Remains* 41) which expresses the principle that forgetting, in the deconstructive procedure, represses as it stands for the unforgettable. So, trauma time basically embodies the 'forgotten' as the unforgettable. This inversion, made possible because of the dialectic integral to deconstructionist methods, means that the missing person in the state, located in state time, chronology, is actually not missing but in biopolitical terms, accounted for: the Homo sacer or the *Muselmann* exists in the state and so would not be considered missing, Edkins argues. She goes on to propose that the actual missing person can only be found in trauma time, or Agamben's messianic time. By locating that figure in trauma time, Edkins does not make so much an argument but a kind of ingenious move in redefining the exception to the state as the one that exists in trauma time but not the state. That figure, Edkins claims, is Santner's neighbour "a form of life closely linked to messianic time" who is the signal of the 'miracle' of love. The neighbour is the missing person in trauma time exemplified by such people as the refusniks in Israel-Palestine, central to Žižek's (2010) "ethical moment at its purest". In short "the neighbour is *the personhood that is missing in sovereign politics*—and yet available in everyday life". Thus, Edkins has moved through various associations of political responsibility to shed light on where the missing persons may be associated with a trauma that involves suffering, but the significance here is not the suffering but the act of love used to assuage, heal or otherwise reframe the suffering. You could say that she has essentially transposed Agamben's messianic remnant, the dynamic between the witness and the *Muselmann*, as the dynamic between the neighbour and the victim of state persecution.

I enjoy many of the moves Edkins makes. The fact that trauma is not about a person suffering because of a perpetrator's actions, but puts into place the figure acting ethically, and engages with what Badiou (2008) defines in *The Century* as the "passion for the real" thereby implying that trauma is a valuable factor in ethical action. Yet, while I agree with all these issues and observations that Edkins' makes, I am concerned with the implication of her research in this paper. What happens from her perspective is that the actual missing persons out there in the world, in our recent histories, those who have been made to disappear in political terms, have disappeared from her research. Furthermore, how this analysis takes the concept of trauma beyond the places that Žižek (2010), Agamben (2002), Santner and Badiou (2008) have taken it, is not clear. Yet one thing I think that is worth saying is this: though Edkins' does not use trauma as a method,

she does put it into play in the ethical imperative running through current social and political inequalities and in that sense, gives it value.

In this review of three articles, I think a reader sees how vague trauma theory is as a method in humanities scholarship. Whether the method is there to ‘uncover’ a traumatic event as an explanation for the present circumstances, or the method is used to rethink our engagement with prejudice, oppression and other factors of postcolonial politics, the inconsistencies of how the method is applied stand out. The articles I reviewed implied that it was a theory that allowed for witnessing of healing from trauma and, indirectly, promoted a healing through using the method. Maybe these are not exclusive objectives but, when all is said and done, the collection reflects how the potential of this theory is still only being tested. In the meantime, I think it benefits all users of the method to leave the notion of perpetrator for the courts and, as is implied by LaCapra’s foray into fascism, seriously acknowledge the trauma factor as a human condition; and as a human condition, I propose that victimhood as a privilege be waived. We can go so much further if we resist seeing trauma as a pathology, as the condition of a suffering we should protect people from enduring, and doing as Edkins’ work does by following Lacanian thinkers in seeing trauma as an ethical move of “encountering the real”, miracles and devastations, alike.

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