

EARLY MODERN LITERARY STUDIES



Erin Peters and Cynthia Richards, eds., *Early Modern Trauma: Europe and the Atlantic World* (University of Nebraska Press, 2021). 414pp. ISBN 978 1 4962 0891 0.

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While the application of modern theories to early modern texts remains a vexed issue, Peters and Richards' edited collection credibly addresses what they identify as the 'paradox' of 'trauma's supposed modernity' and the ample evidence for trauma and traumatic experiences in the early modern period (pp. 3-4). Their volume has three key objectives. First, to explore the applicability of trauma theory, in its various manifestations, to the early modern period, its art, and its artefacts. Second, to expand on the existing literature and lay foundations for further work in the field. Third, to offer examples of how early modern people understood and described their experiences with cultural and individual traumas. Each aim is solidly achieved.

The introduction reviews the trauma studies literature on the early modern period and outlines the core aims of the text, which is divided into two distinct sections. Part 1, 'Reframing Modern Trauma', contains chronologically organized chapters that employ trauma theory as their interpretive framework, demonstrating both the utility of trauma theory as an interpretive lens and the limitations of treating trauma as a purely modern phenomenon. These chapters offer insights into how early modern audiences viewed traumatic experiences. The chapters of Part 2, 'Recognizing Early Modern Trauma', demonstrate how the application of trauma theory can decrypt or illuminate texts or historical events that have traditionally been misunderstood.

Part 1 opens in the 1500s in France. 'Devastated Nature: The Emotions of Natural World Catastrophe in Sixteenth-Century France' by Sarah Broomhall explores how early modern

people ‘managed perceptions of environmental destruction,’ both from natural disaster and human practices (p. 31). It analyzes a variety of sixteenth-century sources, including journals, essays, and poetry. Particularly stunning is Broomhall’s analysis of language of sexual violence in Baïf’s ‘La Ninfe Bièvre.’ As global climate change increasingly informs our modern experiences, Broomhall’s approach and discussion of early modern environmental damage will only grow in relevance.

Following this discussion of rhetoric of sexual violence, Zackariah Long’s ‘Historicizing Rape Trauma: Identification with the Aggressor in Early Modern Humoralism and *The Rape of Lucrece* (1594)’ examines a literary depiction and discussion of sexual violence, applying Sándor Ferenczi’s theory of identification with the aggressor to Lucrece’s response to Tarquin and decision to kill herself. Identification with the aggressor is a psychological defense mechanism whereby the victim responds by internalizing the attacker’s self-loathing, guilt, and aggression, resulting in the victim blaming herself or even self-harming. Long’s straightforward analysis is hindered only by Ferenczi’s reliance on Freud, which leaves critics skeptical of that kind of psychoanalytic approach with reservations.

Amelia Zurcher’s ‘The Trauma of Self: Hannah Allen and Seventeenth-Century Women’s Spiritual Writing’ examines Hannah Allen’s *A Narrative of God’s Gracious Dealings with that Choice Christian Mrs. Hannah Allen* (1683). Allen’s account shows several signs of living with trauma, including dissociation from her thoughts, starving herself, and harming herself. Negative mental health indicators, according to Zurcher, pervade early modern women’s religious life writing, including dissociation, depression, self-harm, and suicidal ideation. Though rightly wary of pathologizing early modern women’s writing, when women, especially religious women, were already excessively regarded as susceptible to madness, Zurcher holds that ‘to write madness out of these accounts may be to miss significant dimensions of their experience, dimensions they themselves may have owned’ (p. 86).

Moving away from the narrative and fictional realm of the prior chapters, Katherine Ellison’s ‘Early Modern CIPHERING and the Expression of Trauma’ examines ciphering and code-creating or code-breaking as a ‘language of trauma’ (p. 107). She particularly examines the cryptography manuals of the period and their presentation of the craft, concluding that they emphasize the use of ciphering and deciphering as a strategy for ‘processing trauma and circumventing and conventionalizing the communication and

reading of suffering' (p. 107). CIPHERING allows for the mediation of, though not the regulation of nor disconnection from, emotion. Although Ellison provides an intriguing discussion of case studies and the use to which ciphers were historically put in conveying or recording information about traumatic events, her research may be most interesting in its detailed account of the historical applications of early modern ciphering and code making/breaking.

Ismini Pells's 'Soliciting Sympathy: The Search for Psychological Trauma in Petitions from Seventeenth-Century Maimed Soldiers' analyzes veterans' petitions in the wake of the Civil War and the Restoration. Her chapter covers the 1593 Act for Relief of Soldiers and its subsequent amendments, as well as the changes to the pension schemes during the Interregnum and after the Restoration. It focuses on disabling mental injury and its relation to trauma. Early modern English law emphasized that disability pensions were for those 'disabled from work', which naturally would not include all or even most of those who experienced war-related trauma. This novel exploration of historical records is eminently worth reading. This chapter also affords an interesting grounding for Peters's chapter on war trauma later in the volume.

Taking the reader to the other side of the Atlantic, Peter Walmsley's 'Hans Sloane and the Melancholy Slave' details the treatment of an enslaved woman named Rose in Jamaica for melancholy by Hans Sloane. Sloane recounts in his *Voyage to Jamaica* what medicines, sometimes violent and non-consensual, he used to 'treat' her melancholy and return her to forced labor. Walmsley's application of trauma theory to the examination and diagnosis of melancholia is intriguing and well-substantiated. He carefully grounds his analysis in the post-colonial and multicultural issues and dynamics surrounding trauma theory.

Continuing the focus on trauma relating to racism and the colonization of the Atlantic world, Melissa Antonucci's 'Representations of Loss and Recovery in Unca Eliza Winkfield's *The Female American*' applies Bonnie Duran, Eduardo Duran, and Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart's work on 'spiritual injury' and intergenerational trauma to *The Female American* (1767), an anonymously published novel about a biracial woman who, marooned on a 'deserted' island, converts the indigenous population to Christianity. This chapter engages solidly with both post-colonial critiques of traditional trauma theory and research on the traumas of colonialism. Antonucci seeks to inspire further investigation of how this book could speak to the trauma of Indigenous populations in the Americas in the early modern period (p. 181). A central weakness in the approach comes as the chapter

slides between regarding Unca Eliza as the protagonist of a novel and suggesting this book 'represent[s] the experiences of Native women' (p. 180). Can the views of a fictional heroine, likely the creation of a white person, and possibly one who had never lived in America,¹ really be placed alongside the writings of Native men such as Samson Occom (Mohegan), Logan (Cayuga), Tecumseh (Shawnee), and Pontiac (Ottawa) as Antonucci claims? A white writer's fiction cannot stand in for a Native reality.

Part 2, in which the focus shifts from analyzing acknowledged sites of trauma to the application of modern trauma awareness to historical events and texts, opens with Eamon Darcy's 'Stories of Trauma in Early Modern Ireland,' which, like Antonucci's chapter, discusses colonial trauma. The chapter addresses the violent colonization of early modern Ireland and the experience of the resulting diaspora community, and it instigates discussions of the social construction and experience of trauma in early modern Ireland. It explores how early modern Irish stories of trauma were articulated and deployed, especially how they were put to political or polemical uses by English and Irish communities. Darcy notes the limits to historical investigation into these narratives, especially as surviving evidence may be limited. However, Darcy highlights a great variety of sources and influences — ranging from oral testimonies to sermons and poetry — that demonstrate the importance the early modern writers and readers placed on accounting and recounting trauma.

Like Walmsley's chapter, Adam R. Beach's 'Trauma, Psychological Coercion, and Slaves Who Love Their Masters: The Case of William Okeley' explores enslavement-related trauma, offering a thoughtful and well-researched rebuttal to defenses of early modern slavery practices. Beach focuses on the role of psychological coercion and traumatic bonding in William Okeley's autobiographical account of his time as an enslaved Christian man in Algeria. Like Antonucci's application of *Duran, Duran, and Brave Heart*, Beach employs modern research to an early modern text; the chapter provides a brilliant application of modern psychological and social research on the experiences of enslaved people to early modern responses to slavery. At the same time, it clearly outlines the differences between the early modern period and our own that might impact how the enslaved might have viewed or described their experience, such as the use and role of

¹ Unca Eliza Winkfield, *The Female American or, the Adventures of Unca Eliza Winkfield*, (Broadview Press, 2014), pp. 25-27; Jeffrey H. Richards, 'The Adventures of Emmera', the Transatlantic Novel, and the Fiction of America', *Early American Literature*, 42 (2007), 499, 522-23 n.5.

Biblical narratives of enslavement. This chapter stands out from the others with its examination of the Ottoman empire in the period.

The next chapter also touches on issues of slavery and sexual violence. Cynthia Richards's 'Imperfect Enjoyments and Female Disappointments: Understanding Trauma in Aphra Behn's 'The Disappointment' and *Oroonoko*' analyzes Behn's 'The Disappointment,' the only female-authored impotency poem, in connection to imperfect enjoyment poetry and the novel *Oroonoko*. The chapter emphasizes Behn's contributions to the poetic genre, particularly by reshaping the trope of the fleeing female as a signifier of female trauma and engaging with both male and female traumatic experience of erotic disappointment. While an innovative approach, this chapter moves too fluidly between positioning *Oroonoko* as a novella — something definitionally fictional — and an account of a real experience Behn had, without ever reaching the midpoint of suggesting Behn may have *fictionalized* a *real* experience. This murkiness on whether Richards regards *Oroonoko* as a work of fiction, biography, fictionalized biography, or biography-influenced fiction, detracts from the overall argument that explores a relationship between two of Behn's works.

Turning to the matter of the (re)construction of the historical narrative, Erin Peters's 'Cultural Trauma, Exile, and the Birth of Jacobitism' explores the development of Jacobitism out of the Glorious Revolution and the acts of oblivion. She discusses how the events were framed in the period, especially the Stuart overthrows. She argues that, as memories of one atrocity shape how one experiences or recounts another, they will also shape how people experience or describe current events, which impacts the experiences and expressions of cultural trauma. This chapter discusses the impact of memories of the Civil War on the Glorious Revolution and the development of a Jacobite identity. In particular, she highlights how acts of oblivion, intended to heal social ruptures, were traumatogenic. Peters offers an illuminating expansion on the conventional telling of this history and how those living through it experienced it. Compellingly, she includes the experience not only of Jacobite exiles but of Jacobites who remained in England, Scotland, and Ireland and lived amongst non-Jacobites.

The fifth chapter of Part 2 returns to France where Part 1 started. Joseph's Harris's 'Tragic Trauma?: Remorse, Repetition, and the Orestes Myth' examines how late-seventeenth- and early-eighteenth-century French writers adapted the Orestes Myth, especially their tendency to absolve Orestes of responsibility and to amplify his traumatized reactions to the violence. According to Harris, the adapted Oreste's traumatic status rests on three grounds: the

horrific nature of the matricide and regicide; his mental absence from the actual acts of violence; and Oreste's involuntary repetition of these acts through hallucinations and hauntings. However, Harris finds that it is nigh impossible to establish with certainty Oreste as a trauma victim. Harris concludes that this is less important than the fact that some early modern adapters come closer to modern conceptions of trauma than our prevailing notions of early modern's understandings of trauma would expect.

Continuing the turn to eighteenth-century literature, Tamar Leroy's 'Trauma, Ritual, and the Temporality of War in George Farquhar's *The Recruiting Officer*' examines the war-recruitment plot of the breeches comedy that inaugurated theatre seasons in London and in multiple colonized territories for most of the eighteenth century. Leroy particularly emphasises the language of bodily vulnerability and destruction in the play, focusing on the 'psychosocial problem of the soldier's homecoming' as the subject of the play, rather than the comic cross-dressing. He notes that, rather than chiming with literary approaches to trauma that prioritize wholeness and closure, this play was an oft-repeated negotiation of trauma (as opposed to healing). This shifting ground of trauma representation explains the differences in how the play was employed in performance, from patriotic to satirical. He also examines how queer and crip theories, such as crip time, foreground new elements in the text. This chapter is delightful, enlightening, and eminently readable. Leroy effectively balances and blends gender-based and queer readings with trauma- and disability-oriented analyses.

The sixth chapter stands out as an exploration of an eighteenth-century reception and depiction of a seventeenth-century trauma. Andreas K. E. Mueller's 'For Those Who Did Not See It: Transgenerational Trauma and Postmemory in Defoe's *A Journal of The Plague Year*' examines the mind-preparing role Defoe's *Due Preparation* and *The Plague Year* played for the London populous in the 1720s. According to Mueller, *Due Preparation* advises readers that they must prepare mentally for the coming of a plague so they can handle the trauma, and the *Journal* offers that mental training (p. 356). Through fictionalized first-person accounts of the prior plague most Londoners would be too young to remember, the *Journal* 'merges the practical and the imaginative' (p. 350) and offers an important 'mental playing-through of an anticipated traumatic situation' to prepare a reader for the new plague (p. 347). Reading this chapter in the second year of a global pandemic certainly gave it a particular salience. Mueller, for example, outlines the preponderance of plague materials published in the 1720s (much like the increased consumption of plague

histories in 2020). As COVID persists or future plagues come, this chapter will be of interest to future readers.

It all comes together in the afterward. Melinda Rabb's 'Afterward: Early Modern Trauma and the Generation of Satire' highlights the relationship between trauma and satire. Trauma theory provides a framework for how satire and irony could enable writers to distance themselves from or mask emotions and injuries or to cope with pain and assign guilt to those they deem responsible. Satire responds to, depicts, and processes sources of personal and collective trauma, and trauma could trigger an 'innovative outpouring of satire' (p. 362). Many writers with firsthand knowledge of England's troubles turned to satire by the end of the seventeenth century. Rabb's afterward provides an original close to the volume, highlighting a potential literary 'consequence' of the traumas the prior chapters describe, and suggesting a new way forward for literary trauma theory.

This book's greatest achievement is the historical and geographical range of its case studies and the sheer variety of texts it covers. Its application of different trauma theory approaches is instructive. It offers compelling readings of books, plays, poems, and historical documents and will doubtless be of interest to those interested in trauma theory, new ways of examining the early modern period, or historical counterparts to modern-day traumatic struggles.