Complete History, Theory and Criticism Book Reviews
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The Splintered Glass: Facets of Trauma in the Post-Colony and Beyond edited by Dolores Herrero and Sonia Baelo Allué (Rodopi, 2011)

Trauma studies have been highly productive for thinking about social flows since the work of Cathy Caruth in the 1990s appeared to join up the dots between narrative theory, memory studies and revisionary historicising. Given the reading of colonial histories and their repercussions as centrally traumatic for individuals and indeed for whole cultures, it is not surprising that trauma studies should seem useful to scholars working in the general area of postcolonial studies as well. Yet while the area arose from its Freudian beginnings as a way to deal with the damage sustained by individuals, it has expanded into a discourse area that might now explain and reframe groups, even the large groups that comprise nations or cultures. In the process of this expansion, the area has undergone stresses and strains, given that a clinical tool thought out for individuals may not necessarily be seamlessly applied to the more heterogeneous groupings that we imagine into being, groupings such as communities, cultures, or even whole peoples. One way to deal with the mismatch has been through the textualisation of trauma theory in the symbolic arena of fiction, whether more or less consciously applied by writers, or, more frequently, perceived as operating within fictional texts by scholars conversant with the theory.

The reading of fiction through the terms of trauma theories has the advantage that all fiction brings to the analysis of large polities: that the individuation of cultures via the characters who populate novels, short stories, and even non-fictional autobiographies allows these individuals to serve a partly representative function. That is, instead of presuming to analyse a whole culture or social grouping, the text can depict the general issues through their being lived out by specific individuals, whom we may then extrapolate to the larger groups they belong to. This book accordingly presents a series of studies in which ex-colonies are read in terms of the traumas experienced and processed by characters in fictional texts by several major writers from a mixture of postcolonial discourse environments.

As can be expected, the variety of approaches of such a volume ensures that a programmatic conformity is avoided, allowing for the usefulness of trauma theories to be tested from a variety of angles. It even licenses someone like Marc Delrez to question sharply some of the ‘ambivalence’ that emerges in the application of trauma studies in Australia to the experience of the settler-invader population in an unconscious rearrangement through which both sides of colonial history contend for the victim position. Delrez’s thoughtful article could well have opened the volume, given its extension of its focus to some of the pressure points in contemporary trauma theory in general, particularly as Aitor Ibarrola Armendáriz’s otherwise stimulating lead-off article on Edwidge Danticat, while dealing with the less ambiguously traumatic victim position of Haiti, contains certain linguistic errors that detract from its authority.

One of the most absorbing promises in the area of trauma studies is its undertaking to furnish a suturing methodology to reorganise the past, even, paradoxically, as it speaks of incommensurable rupture and breakdown. Given the pivotal interest of postcolonial fiction in recalibrating the past, the intersections between the two discursive areas are easy to imagine. Accordingly, several articles deal with historical fiction, albeit generally twentieth-century history: the article by Aitor Ibarrola Armendáriz already mentioned, but also articles by Donna Coates on Patricia Grace, Maite Escudero on Sani Mootoo, Marc Delrez on Andrew
McGahan, and Heinz Antor on Richard Flanagan. Other articles handle more contemporary material, such as Isabel Fraile in her spirited unpacking of time and space in Janette Turner Hospital’s *Oyster*, Bárbara Arizti’s measured reading of the land in Tim Winton’s *Dirt Music*, or Susana Onega’s wide-ranging reading of narrative ethics not just in *In the Heart of the Country* but Coetzee’s work in general. Three of the contributions depart from these close readings with more general deliberations such as Chantal Zabus’s ‘Genital Alterations, Autobiography, and Trauma’, Meena Alexander’s reflection on her own poetic practice, and Merlinda Bobis’s interweaving of speculation, analysis and engagé intervention with respect to her work in progress.

As a part of the archive of specific readings of texts from around the world that employ postcolonial hermeneutic practices and which can be read through trauma theory, *The Splintered Glass* offers in one volume a useful place to consider a range of ways in which the theory may be applied in focused fashion. General works on trauma theory tend to be either broad and theoretical, or deal with events such as the Holocaust, or intra-family abuse, which may provide exemplifications of interest for postcolonial studies but which do not illuminate postcolonial texts directly. The grouping of direct readings supplied by this book is thus a good place to observe different strategies or explanatory manoeuvres for the examination of postcolonial novels via notions of trauma and its processing.

In her recent book, *Cruel Optimism*, Lauren Berlant posits that ‘crisis is not exceptional to history or consciousness but a process embedded in the ordinary’,¹ challenging trauma theory’s logic of the atypical. Arguably, traumatically disordering events punctuate all lives, as they certainly punctuate the lives of all nations or cultural groupings. Human beings are more used to negotiating such events than might be thought, leading Berlant to name a ‘crisis ordinariness’ as the actual or potential state we all live in. The response to this returns us to the contentious hierarchising of trauma in which Holocaust studies have been so implicated: that is, when does an event stop being an example of shattering misfortune or natural variation in the proclivity of human beings to hurt each other, and become an example of really radical rupture or an event of such magnitude that it cancels any suggestion of its simply being one more naturally occurring illustration of human nastiness? One of the latter events is commonly held to have been colonisation, so that literary trauma studies appear well-placed to participate in this debate, given literature’s restless enquiry into the bewildering multifariousness of the injuries of colonial and post-colonial disruptions. It is to this debate that *The Splintered Glass* speaks.

David Callahan


This very handsomely-produced book, replete with colour plates, sets out to offer a unique itinerary for first-time readers of Dante, even though the volume’s self-professed ‘travel guide’ (2) and author, A.N. Wilson, admits in Chapter One to be embarking on a journey ‘in unfamiliar terrain’ (2). Thus at this early juncture in the initial chapter, one is tempted to point the author and his reading public in the direction of recent critical volumes for English-speaking readers of Dante, whether they be experienced scholars or novices. One such masterly work is John A. Scott’s *Understanding Dante*. Scott is very aware of T.S. Eliot’s claim: ‘Dante and Shakespeare divide the modern world between them; there is no third’ (*Selected Essays*, San Diego: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1950, p. 225). It is surprising then that while Wilson makes a claim for Dante to be considered a ‘modern poet’ (342), and his volume is flush with excerpts from modern translators such as Mandelbaum, Kirkpatrick and Musa, the twentieth century’s abundant and incisive scholarly production of Dante critical commentary in English is sparingly attested to by the author (for example, the brief mention made of scholars such as Reynolds, Gilson, and Robert Pogue Harrison, who is erroneously referred to as Richard on page 11).

From the outset, the author informs us that his book is also intended for those who have attempted to read the *Comedy* previously but have abandoned the arduous undertaking in the face of Dante’s assumptions regarding his readers’ familiarity with a wealth of historical, literary, theological, political, mythological and philosophical references. Wilson has no doubt that the Dantean literary experience conveyed, above all, by the *Comedy* is a worthwhile one. In fact he terms it ‘one of the supreme aesthetic, imaginative, emotional and intellectual experiences on offer’ (2) and ‘the boldest work of Western literature’ (302). Nevertheless, the expectations made upon the reader by Dante remain a challenge. How then to convey the richness and inventiveness of the *Comedy*; this daunting poetic giant that has come down to us from the fourteenth century via numerous manuscripts in the vernacular, not to mention annotated editions and translations (although the whereabouts of Dante’s original manuscript remain a mystery)?

In *Dante in Love*, Wilson approaches his task as travel guide by immersing his reader in the life and times of the Florentine poet. He skilfully recreates the vicissitudes of a young man of prodigious talent living in an era of profound economic and intellectual transformation. The latter was made possible by the emergence of a banking system and by the availability of influential Greek and Arabic texts in translation during an era noticeably influenced by the spiritual revival of leading figures such as Saint Francis of Assisi. Unfortunately for the real-life Dante, it was also a period of dangerous political unrest, both at the local level with the manoeuvrings of the *Neri* and the *Bianchi* (Black and White Guelfs) and at the level of Empire versus Church. The Papacy wielded enormous power and Dante’s *bête noire*, Pope Boniface VIII, had no hesitation in crushing all opposition and obliterating his enemies when it suited him. He succeeded in sending Dante into political and financial oblivion, at least as far as his life in Florence was concerned.

Dante remained in exile from Florence for the rest of his life. However, even the wily and ruthless Pope Boniface could never have predicted Dante’s emergence from the ruins and the glorious place that he would occupy as a supreme poet of love. And ultimately, as Wilson demonstrates in his genuinely empassioned encounter with Dante’s major literary work, the *Comedy*, it is a poem about love, in its divine and human expression, communicated with an
urgency of purpose by means of a taut rhyme-scheme whose ‘Trinitarian significance’ asserts Wilson, ‘suited his purpose, but so too did its forward movement’ (245).

In guiding us through his idiosyncratic engagement with the poema sacro, Wilson peppers his account with autobiographical snippets, anecdotes and synthetic accounts of historical and literary events of moment and import. His own cammin through Dante’s literary output, inspired as a young man by The Figure of Beatrice by Charles Williams, offers an absorbing read as we are immersed in the highs and lows of Dante’s biographical journey in tandem with the fictional journey occurring in the Papal Jubilee year of 1300: ‘The Comedy is the story of one man’s inner journey, against the turbulent backdrop of his times. It is also the story of Everyman’ (19).

Along the way, Wilson grants us many valuable insights. Chapter XXI provides a focus on the awakening of the English-speaking world to Dante’s masterwork through the efforts of Reverend Henry Francis Cary and his celebrated translation. However, having commenced the chapter with the reception of Dante’s work in Italy and Jacopo della Lana’s commentary, it would have been fitting for the author to mention the revival of interest in Dante in the post-Baroque period when the Florentine poet’s critical fortunes in Italy were on the rise thanks to the perceptive reading of scholars such as Giambattista Vico and Gian Vincenzo Gravina.

The volume makes some odd claims about a number of factors, including Dante’s mental state (for example, the reference to a ‘Tourette’s Syndrome Dante’, 280); St Bernard of Clairvaux (the breed of dog that carries out rescue missions is actually connected to St Bernard of Montjoux, patron saint of alpinists, 308); and Dante’s relationship with his real-life spouse, Gemma Donati, who was related to his political enemies, the Neri. Since Dante has not published any material about Gemma, one can only speculate about the true nature of their marital relationship. In addition, Wilson expresses a preference for the originality of the third canticle of the Commedia but I would contend that all three canticles are works of ‘prodigious originality’ (301), not just the Paradiso. Where the narrative shines is in Wilson’s elucidation of his life-long passion for the Comedy and his ability to navigate the reader through the complexities of Dante’s era of internecine political conflict: ‘Dante, poet of dislocation and exile, poet of a new language, has immediate things to say to us’ (342). Notwithstanding some of the critical omissions mentioned earlier, Dante in Love offers a vibrant and engaging encounter with Dante’s obsessions, his polemics and his deep understanding of the transformative power of love.

Diana Glenn

The book, a collection of essays edited by Rick Hosking and Amit Sarwal, takes its title from the ‘peripatetic bachelor-barrister and writer’ (x) John Lang’s *Wanderings in India* (1859). Lang was the first Australian born author, who spent his life between Australia, Great Britain and India’ (ix) and is buried in Mussoorie. The book informs us that Anglo-Indian writer Ruskin Bond located Lang’s grave in 1964.

The book is divided into two sections with the longer first section incorporating a number of interesting essays based on myriad ‘encounters and interactions’ between Australia and India. These essays provide perspectives ranging from the historical, literary, political and sporting. The shorter second section contains more reflective and personal pieces including memoirs, reminiscences and travel writing.

The book taps into the occasionally touchy issue of Indo-Australian relations and reflects on issues from an Australian perspective. It is written in response to what Hosking and Sarwal term ‘opportunistic racial attacks on Indian students in Australia’ (xx). The editors emphasise historian Robin Jeffrey’s idea of the present state of Indo-Australian relations being ‘on the cusp of something good, deep, long-standing and mutually beneficial – genuine substance’ (xx).

It is delightful to come across articles such as Christopher Vernon’s essay on shared cityscapes between Australia and India, describing the work of architect Walter Burley Griffin and his equally talented wife Marion Mahony. Some essays provide glimpses into the ever-absorbing topic of cricket; Kama Maclean touches upon it as does Bernard Whimpress. Susan Cowan brings a literary lens to focus on cricket especially citing Dal Stivens’ little known short story ‘The Strange Business at Bombay and Madras’ (1979). Sport, especially cricket, provides a ground for thrashing out conflicted inter-cultural relations and also helps bring out differing attitudes; for instance the good that has come out of cricketer Steve Waugh’s strong and ongoing involvement with certain charities in India (70). His endeavours have earned him the sobriquet ‘Bhaiya’ (brother) which augurs well for such Indo-Australian interactions, showing the capacity of each to give and receive in a spirit of generosity.

Perhaps the most important aspect of this book is that it touches upon the basic lack of awareness of Australia-India connections on part of the general populace of both nations. Therefore, this text addresses the need for both cultures to look at one another as step-sisters with a shared but distinctly different colonial past. In addressing such encounters through a variety of writing styles ranging from creative, reflective to academic, the book does not espouse any particular school of thought; rather it explores Australian-Indian connections from several different angles. David Walker’s essay on ongoing encounters during colonial times stresses the fact that since 1960s Australian knowledge of India is on the decline. Walker’s analysis ties in with Kama Maclean’s essay on the Australian media preoccupation with the voyeuristic picturesque at the *Kumbh Mela* festival. Maclean also discusses an Australia ill-prepared for a powerful

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1 Kumbh Mela: A major yearly Hindu pilgrimage in India where millions of Hindus come together to bathe at the confluence of the three holy rivers, Ganga, Jamuna and Saraswati.

India and regrets the decline of Indian studies within the Australian universities in light of the work done by pioneers such as A.L. Basham in that field.

The essays serve as a cautionary reminder to contemporary Australia against viewing India through an Anglo-centric, colonial lens. Such a note of warning had historically been subtly conveyed by Lang as well as in Mollie Skinner’s tale of the non-stereotypical imperial hero Tucker. The issues of the Australian identity posited against India are examined within the essays, highlighting how colonial Australians viewed themselves as imperial representatives and the fact that even today race issues seem to ‘colour’ the Australian-Indian relationship. Margaret Allen tellingly points out that the Australian Baptist women missionaries used their work in India not only to affirm ‘the gender and race hierarchies of the British Empire’ (48-9) but also as an escape route, a way out of doing missionary work helping the indigenous people at home.

Literature finds strong representation within the text; especially in the portrayal of India in works by Australian women writers who have challenged the norms set up by an exclusively male literary discourse. Alison Bartlett deals with postcolonial literature by Australian writers focusing on India, especially Inez Baranay’s Neem Dreams. Susan Cowan looks at earlier women writers such as Mollie Skinner and Ethel Anderson; focusing on characters such as Skinner’s Tucker who views colonial India through very Australian eyes ‘filled with curiosity and challenging authority’ (140). Cowan highlights the irony inherent in the writings of mid-twentieth century Australian writers such as Christopher Koch who depict the Australian still viewing India dichotomously; partly experiencing a wistful regret at the passing of the Empire (146). Lisa French discussing Jane Campion’s Holy Smoke in which India is a place for Australians to be different, exploratory, daring and yet escape themselves, echoes Allen’s analysis of nineteenth-century Australian missionaries seeking to ‘Christianise’ Indian women as they seemed to occupy a higher rung in the colonial hierarchy in comparison to indigenous Australian women.

The essays on colonial and contemporary travel shed light on both the Australian traveller and their reception in India. Hosking, Walker, Campbell, Cunningham, Neil and Barz delve into this aspect as participants, observers and analysts. Lang and Hingston as pioneers in this field find frequent mention within the book, including essays devoted exclusively to them. Hingston’s defining the opium trade as ‘this disgraceful traffic’ (110) raises a colonial Australian voice against imperial iniquities. Lang, Hingston, Ethel Anderson and Mollie Skinner’s fictional Tucker all lend a distinctly Antipodean overtone to the voice of the colonial traveller.

The aspect of spirituality as a ‘given’ within India culture is seen in Lisa French’s essay as in the abstract Baranay provides of her new novel. Running as a parallel theme to spirituality is that of escape as seen in Allen, French, Neil and Baranay. Jayne Fenton Keane also writing of India as a space to escape a post PhD vacuum relevantly states ‘the tourist creates the experience that creates the tourist’ (199). Maybe in these encounters, both Australians and India create their own version of each other. But pondering more deeply on Christopher Koch’s idea of ‘family closeness’ between Australia and India, based on ‘common roots’ (77), might benefit all in the future.

The book is highly relevant for students working across a variety of disciplines in humanities as well as policy makers of both nations. It also reveals the scope for

another collection of such essays, focusing on Indian wanderings in Australia within a similar time frame, which will provide yet more insight into shared links between the two nations. The most pleasing aspect of the book is the wide range of topics covered. It could have emerged as a heavily academically accented text but instead has been skilfully compiled, making it accessible and appealing to most people with an interest in Australian Indian relations.

Reshmi Lahiri-Roy

In their most recent book, *Race in Translation: Culture Wars around the Postcolonial Atlantic*, Ella Shohat and Robert Stam invite their readers to a compelling analysis which involves the political and cultural histories of United States, France and Brazil. This triangular relationship bridges, both on a material and a symbolic level, three apparently different traditions, pointing at the possibility of an inclusive transnational and transcultural framework which could encompass all of them.

This critical perspective is mainly meant to deconstruct the common understanding of the ‘culture wars’ quoted in the title of the essay. Shohat and Stam, indeed, shift away from the politicised use of the term, which, for instance, was enhanced by public debates in the United States during the Nineties, and criticise its very bases. Among them, the authors are particularly effective in the criticism of the ‘Anglosaxonist/Latinist’ dichotomy: according to the authors, this is an underlying dialectics which, by nationalising and essentialising conceptual representations, has produced ideological divisions between those ‘Anglo-Saxon’ and ‘Latin’ intellectual traditions which share, on the contrary, many interesting and fertile foundations.

Drawing on the metaphor first coined by Paul Gilroy in his fundamental oeuvre, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (1993), Shohat and Stam define this triangular nexus among United States, Brazil and France as ‘Red Atlantic’. This is a formulaic expression which recalls a longstanding, transnational history, including the violent conquest of America, the Atlantic slave trade, the different forms of European colonialism and the following processes of decolonisation, and, finally, the present-day dynamics of globalisation.

Moreover, the label is meant to emphasise the sharing, in the three locations, of an ambivalent situation of conflict and cultural encounter between colonial settlers (or postcolonial elites) and indigenous peoples. As Shohat and Stam brilliantly recount, indigenous thinking and politics – in opposition to the common understanding of them – have contributed to the shaping and re-shaping of many ‘Euro-American’ traditions, being, thus, essential to their appreciation.

However, more consistently than the hypothesis of a ‘Red Atlantic’, which is sketched in the initial pages and then loosely retaken, the transnational reading enabled by such a broadly comparative approach constitutes a ‘Tale of Three Republics’ (following the title of the second chapter). From this perspective, the critiques of the Jeffersonian ideology of US republicanism, as well as of the centralising policies of the République and of the Brazilian myth of a ‘racial democracy’ are interrelated and appear to be strongly persuasive.

A similar take on wide intellectual debates, concerning also the political level of critical theory, is evident in the confrontation of the two authors with three important essays: Walter Benn Michaels’s 2006 book *The Trouble with Diversity*, Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc

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1 As Shohat and Stam write in the Preface of the book, ‘[w]hile the term “culture wars” is usually taken to designate the heated polemics in the English-speaking world whirling around identity politics, Affirmative Action, the canon, feminism, multiculturalism, gay rights, anti-imperialism, and antiglobalization, the verbal skirmishes triggered by these wars form but the surface ripples of a deeper oceanic struggle to decolonize power structures and epistemologies’ (xiii).
Wacquant’s 1999 essay ‘On the Cunning of Imperialist Reason’ and Slavoj Žižek’s 1997 article ‘Multiculturalism, or The Cultural Logic of Multinational Capitalism’. These essays share the same general position, as they are left-wing critiques of the discourses involving ‘multiculturalism’, as well as other concepts which now form the core of disciplines such as Critical Theory or Postcolonial Studies: they are all dismissed, for being intrinsically ‘eurocentric’ and ‘neo-imperialist’. In view of the harshness of these left-wing statements, Shohat and Stam pair them with right-wing critiques of multicultural discourses, like Pascal Bruckner’s or Alain Finkielkraut’s.

While the pars costruens of this argument seems to be quite over-stretched, linking positions which are partly similar and partly utterly different from each other, the pars destruens remains very attractive. The latter, indeed, eventually succeeds in showing the vitality and denseness of a variety of multicultural and/or postcolonial discourses, which cannot be easily dismissed, nor attacked by using the same objections that at least some multicultural and/or postcolonial theories have made available for the first time.

Another strong point of Shohat and Stam’s rich essay is the interest for cultural movements, like French Hip-Hop or Brazilian Tropicália, which are commonly excluded from essays in critical theory. The analysis of Caetano Veloso’s or Gilberto Gil’s work might be even considered as ‘paradigmatic’, and Patricia Schor and Emanuella Santos have correctly emphasised this part of the book in their interview with the authors.2

The analysis of Caetano Veloso’s ‘Haiti’, for instance, is an example of how the critical appraisal of such a complex ‘text’ as Caetano Veloso’s song, could support the main argument of the two authors, about the necessity of a transnational framework for critical theory. In addition to this, the reading of ‘Haiti’, like many other comparisons suggested in the book, shows the relevance of a ‘fourth’ point – Haiti itself, as a nation – in the triangular relationship between American, French and Brazilian cultural histories. Once again, this reflection highlights the transnational openness of the comparison enacted, and, by resorting to the Haitian Revolution and its subsequent postcolonial history, strengthens the authors’ critical take on different models of republicanism.

Other brilliant pieces of criticism make Shohat and Stam’s essay really precious: among them, one interesting achievement is the retracing of a unitary history which ranges from the political movements for, or against, Affirmative Action, as located in the three nations under analysis, to the recent academic developments in the field of Whiteness Studies. As Shohat and Stam convincingly argue, wherever and whenever the concept of ‘affirmative action’ has been emphasized on a political level, this has significantly contributed to the progress of the studies on the prerogatives of ‘whiteness’, alongside the already established researches in the field of ‘blackness’.

Slightly less persuasive are the passages in which Shohat and Stam reconstruct the ‘seismic shift’ which has set the academic processes of the ‘decolonization of knowledge’ forth, resulting in an inevitably sketchy history of the otherwise astonishingly complex history of contemporary academic thought. Equally debatable is the mostly negative appraisal of the impact of Postcolonial Studies in France, where recent developments in the wake of postcolonial theory have partially filled the theoretical gap produced by the rhetorical emphasis on la Francophonie.


In conclusion, Shohat and Stam’s essay provides readers with a fresh and compelling approach to transnational criticism, by legitimately insisting on the necessity of a triangular, as well as transnationally open, confrontation among the political and cultural histories of United States, France and Brazil. Despite some controversial passages, which seem to be inevitable in such a richly detailed enterprise, *Race in Translation: Culture Wars around the Postcolonial Atlantic* surely constitutes a critical landmark for further literary, cultural and political analyses.

Lorenzo Mari
Adnan Mahmutović’s study *Ways of Being Free: Authenticity and Community in Selected Works of Rushdie, Ondaatje, and Okri* (Rodopi, 2012) comes as book number 194 in Costerus New Series published by Amsterdam’s Rodopi. Mahmutović singles out Salman Rushdie, Michael Ondaatje, and Ben Okri as belonging to the generation of postcolonial writers ‘writing back to the imperial centre’, to quote Rushdie himself, who have a ‘strong connection to the former British empire’ (1). As the author explains in ‘Ways of Being Free: Introduction’, their writing back is doublefold: directed at both the political colonising centre and the margin they left behind, yet to whose ex-centric history they are still inextricably linked. In his detailed and comprehensive study Mahmutović chose to focus on three novels: Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* (1981), Okri’s *The Famished Road* (1991) and Ondaatje’s *The English Patient* (1993) – that is, the novels which, as products of this peculiar position of double writing back, brought the authors the prestigious Man Booker Prize in the 1980s and 1990s and thus served to underline a perhaps even more peculiar position of being well received in the Anglo-American centre, in the canon of the coloniser, while at the same time striving to ascertain their postcolonial identity.

Mahmutović’s study is divided in two parts, each again preceded by an introduction. The first part, titled ‘War Is Everything’s Father: History and Death as Causes of Existential Angst’, analyses the chosen novels in two rounds of three essays each. In *Midnight’s Children*, the author examines the concepts of change and changelessness as well as death as a drive to meaningful experience; in *The Famished Road*, the road of existential struggle and ideological reappropriation through death; and in *The English Patient*, history and the ‘nervous condition’ in the first essay, and the concept of becoming ‘dead-to-the-world’ in the second. Approaching these topics, Mahmutović engages existentialist thought – taken in all its heterogeneity – and its influences on the postcolonial discourse, especially discourse on political violence, national formation and culture, uprooting from the past and the issue of community. Evoking Sartre, Heidegger, Camus, and Fanon, the author maintains that existential crises and the issues of estrangement and strangeness in these novels lead to the exploration of freedom, of the conceptions of what freedom means and the articulation of authenticity as a way of being free.

What brings about these identity crises and existential angst are ‘both violent history and death’ (23), claims the author and thus contextualises his writing. For the characters in the novels, ‘thrown or fallen into inhospitable world(s) in whose making they have not participated’, ‘the disbanding of traditional communities, nation building, international war, religious and ethnic conflicts’ (23) are just some of the factors that pushed their world out of joint. Communities as social spaces, troubled when the characters are born into them and left behind when they leave to be alienated, prove to be shaped by authoritative and hostile powers that ‘seek to make each person submissive, obedient, exploitable, disposable, and finally, in fact, dead’ (25).

A hope of antidote to this particular angst comes in the form of a struggle to re-establish one’s world, ‘to convert the given situations into new possibilities of personal development’ (99), to find a way of being free and authentic. The second part of this insightful study, briefly titled ‘Authenticity’, discusses this idea as understood in the form of
two strong desires: communalism and individualism. The identity of individuals as indivisible social atoms the author sees as defined in opposition to social commitment *per se*, while communalism finds its foundation in ‘a need to preserve essential relations, meanings and habits’ (101). Three more essays that follow reveal the forces behind the construction of individual versus communal identity, both stemming from the perception that ‘authenticity is something that was lost or stolen or hidden and that needs to be won back’ (101) through various forms of social action. In this respect, *The English Patient* is read as an existential experiment of finding singular ways of being free and forming a community that articulates and embraces difference. Such singular freedom has to be confirmed and asserted in community, without turning that community into mutual exploitation. In *Midnight’s Children* the protagonist’s authenticity is explored in the context of politically charged times and seen as a struggle ‘against a plethora of conflicting forms of power in the postcolonial subcontinent’ (105) leading from communalism to the comic absurd. Mahmutović sees Okri’s strategy in *The Famished Road* as focused on dramatising, through the protagonist, Azaro, ‘a revolutionary spirit’, the implications of choices and actions within oppressive historical circumstances. In all of these novels, he maintains, the possibility of communal bonding has to be found that is not binding or oppressive, that does not lead to any form of exploitation and that sustains personal growth without hindering personal responsibility.

Mahmutović posits that, as ‘challenging and innovative contributions to critical negotiations of their postcolonial histories’ (2), the three novels by immigrant writers Rushdie, Okri and Ondaatje undoubtedly reinstate the authors’ double position. As insiders, they posses the profound knowledge of their native histories which entails the birth-acquired right to speak and write about the mechanisms of oppression and subversion at the hands of the centre. Being outsiders, their uprootedness provides them with a different perspective on the complex burden of the excessive meaning of history, the freedom from which is not so easily attainable by their characters. Although Rushdie’s, Okri’s and Ondaatje’s oeuvre has been thoroughly and extensively written about in the context of postcolonial discontents and specifically in relation to the issue of (crisis of) identity, Adnan Mahmutović opts for a perceptive, clearly contextualised and well researched approach. Analysing these canonical postcolonial literary texts in all their postcolonial hybridity but from a fresh angle, Adnan Mahmutović offers an astute reading of existential angst as a postcolonial condition transformed into a process of rethinking freedom, authenticity and community which would ultimately – one can and should hope – ‘open the universe a little more’.

Nina Muždeka

Bruce Bennett may have become a spy – in another life, on the road not taken. Early in his career he was interviewed for a position in the Australian Foreign Service, at the same time that he was offered a lectureship at the University of Western Australia. Bennett chose an academic career and enjoyed several decades of success as a teacher and scholar of Australian literature. ‘But I sometimes wish, and imagine, that foreign affairs had turned my head just that bit more and given me a chance to immerse myself in the world of international diplomacy and secret intelligence’ (1).

*The Spying Game* comes partly from this wish, and partly from Bennett’s extensive knowledge of Australian literature and culture. This is his last book (sadly, he died in 2012), leaving a body of distinguished scholarship as the author and editor of many books and over one hundred articles, essays and reports.¹ He is probably best known for his co-editorship of *The Oxford Literary History of Australia* (1998) and for his critical biography of Peter Porter, *Spirit in Exile* (1991); he also wrote accomplished essays, published in *An Australian Compass* (1991) and *Homing In* (2006). This last volume is composed mainly of collected journal articles and conference papers on the theme of the spy in Australian history, literature and culture.

Political journalist Phillip Knightley is quoted on the book’s cover, with the comment that ‘Bruce Bennett’s book reminds us of the spy within us all.’ This observation goes a long way towards explaining the fascination of *The Spying Game*: it taps into our curiosity about the secret world of spies and spooks, and their mysterious, inscrutable trade. Bennett acknowledges this in his first chapter:

The spying game begins at an early age ... Books for children reflect these interests and preoccupations. Enid Blyton’s famous five are often waiting behind rocks to spot smugglers and uncover their secrets ... [For adults] films, novels and memoirs continue to provide insights into the involvement of individuals in the clandestine struggles [of espionage]. (8)

An avid reader, I grew up with Blyton’s Famous Five and Secret Seven, graduated to James Bond and John le Carré, and continue to read Graham Greene. Anyone interested in this genre will find much to intrigue them in *The Spying Game*, whether it’s Bennett’s analysis of films such as *The Lives of Others* (set in East Germany, at the time of the Stasi regime) or his discussion of issues like ‘Spies and terrorists: Australian fiction after 9/11’.

It is the Australian angle, highlighted in the sub-title of the book, which is the focus of Bennett’s literary criticism. A scan of the contents pages and index uncovers the names of Patrick White, Christopher Koch, Frank Moorhouse, Michael Wilding and Janette Turner Hospital. Several chapters offer detailed analysis of specific texts, including White’s *The Twyborn Affair* and Koch’s *The Memory Game*. These give the

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reader an opportunity to consider the broader fictional themes of the spying game, beyond the technicalities of hidden cameras and ‘dead drops’: questions of identity, loyalty and belonging, the dilemmas of patriotism and betrayal.

There is Australian history as well as literary criticism in The Spying Game. Our espionage dates from the early days of maritime exploration and penal colonies, when rival nations set spies to steal maps and informers reported on fellow prisoners. The chapter on ‘Exploration or espionage? Flinders and the French’ examines the alleged spying activities of both Matthew Flinders and François Péron, each caught up in the political and military hostility of the times. A new English translation of Péron’s reports to his government recently highlighted the possibility of a planned French invasion of Sydney, referring to his examination of ‘all the points on the coast in the neighbourhood of Port Jackson ... favourable for the debarkation of troops’ (64).²

Many names feature in the analysis of more recent Australian espionage: Nancy Wake, Ian Milner, Ric Throssell, Kim Philby, and so on. There are American and British spies as well as Australian; as Bennett explains, ‘Official intelligence agencies in Australia and New Zealand cannot be considered in isolation from the empires that have largely dictated their fortunes’ in the twentieth century (108). Nancy Wake was brought up in Australia and fought and spied for the British and the French Resistance during World War II; Kim Philby’s notorious activities were exposed by Australian expatriate journalists based in London. Bennett weaves the strands of these disparate stories together in the well written middle chapters of his book.

I enjoyed reading The Spying Game: its loose structure of collected essays and other pieces made it a pleasure to dip into, to discover various facts and insights about Australian espionage. (The excellent index made this especially easy to do). As it is a slender book, just over 200 pages, and mainly composed of previously published material from various sources, it does not provide a deep or thorough analysis of the subject – but it does give us many issues to consider in the cultural, biographical and literary realms of the Australian ‘spying game’.

Jennifer Osborn


I usually feel a twinge of embarrassment when academics refer to their work as ‘interventions,’ mainly because the stakes seem so small compared to other situations where the term is evoked. However, Mari Ruti’s *The Singularity of Being: Lacan and the Immortal Within* is indeed worthy of the term ‘intervention,’ not only because of the strength of her argument, but because her accessible language and pragmatic approach suggest a new kind of psychoanalytic cultural studies.

My understanding of Ruti’s project is that she intends to show how the difficult discourse of Jacques Lacan can be made useful to an audience beyond Lacanian scholars, and she also wants to rescue certain concepts from the nihilistic connotations attributed to them by prominent ‘post-Lacanians’ such as Slavoj Žižek, Alain Badiou, and Lee Edelman. In her endeavor, Ruti employs Lacanian theory to describe the many ways that people use the singularity of their being to shape the discourse of the Other into more inspiring and satisfying forms. The result is a quite ambitious pairing of singularity with personal and social transformation, and this pairing opens interesting avenues of study for both particular works of art and the social function of art itself.

Ruti splits the book into two sections that function as steps in her argument. In the first half, she analyses the ethics of the act in relation to the concept of singularity and proposes a rejuvenating act that contrasts with the destructive act in Žižek and the restrictive fidelity to the truth-event in Badiou. Ruti’s understanding of singularity comes from the Lacanian real, particularly as theorised by the late Lacan of the *santhome*. Using Lacan’s three orders as a guide, Ruti explains that ‘one might say that subjectivity, for Lacan, is aligned with the symbolic, personality with the imaginary, and singularity with the real’ (1). To embrace singularity is thus to work productively with the diverse ways in which the real impinges on the ordinary structures of the symbolic and the incapacitating cultural fantasies of the imaginary. Thus, Ruti draws on aspects of the real such as *jouissance*, the drive, and the ‘Thing to flesh out how singularity weakens the hold of the discourse of the Other so that we are able to experience new intensities of being. While not minimising the frightening aspects of *jouissance*, Ruti shows how *jouissance* frees us from the numbing regularity of the symbolic, and instead of lamenting our dependence on language and our alienation within the Other’s discourse, Ruti suggests that we consider ways in which the failures of the symbolic, often caused by the ‘too muchness’ of the drive, enable ‘an exhilarated sense of liberation and self-expansion.’

Ruti presents a brilliant reading of the Lacanian dictum from Seminar VII to ‘not cede’ on one’s desire, where Lacan stated that ‘the only thing of which one can be guilty of is having given ground relative to one’s desire’ (50). Ruti differentiates between the commitment to sustain desire and the commitment to follow desire to its destructive end, and her reading helps to counter the emphasis placed on ‘subjective destitution’ by scholars such as Žižek and Edelman. For Edelman the ‘santhomosexual’ gains ethical legitimacy by accepting ‘its figural status as resistance to the viability of the social’ (63) while Žižek repeatedly argues that the ethical act in its purest form is the achievement of ‘suicidal ecstasy’. In contrast, Ruti conceptualises not giving ground on one’s desire as negotiating between the symbolic and the real in order to nurture desire. She explains that

Not ceding on one’s desire could be interpreted to mean that one should resist the temptation to completely close the space between the void and the ‘name’ that aims to encapsulate this void; it could be said to imply that desire should remain partially unfulfilled, that some share of desire should always persist as desire rather than become completely overtaken by the jouissance of the act. (101)

Thus not ceding on one’s desire entails accepting a certain indeterminateness and vulnerability; it means avoiding both the rigidity of social norms and the abandonment of the social in favor of the void. Ruti’s emphasis on maintaining the ambivalence of desire presents a very persuasive reading of this problematic aspect of Lacanian ethics.

In the second half of the book Ruti focuses on Lacan’s theory of sublimation and uses it to present singularity as an alternative process of social change to the destructive or suicidal act. At the heart of Ruti’s linking of the singular and the social is an emphasis on the ways in which we incorporate the real into our everyday lives. Because the Other is full of gaps and inconsistencies, we do not need to repudiate it. We need only make use of those gaps in order to refashion meaning according to our own desires:

Although being compelled to participate in a common symbolic system on the one level deprives us of autonomy, on another level it offers us the opportunity of carving out a singular place within that system, of claiming language for our own purposes. (123)

Thus singularity is the source of imaginative possibility that engages us in the life despite its inherent disappointments.

Ruti presents singularity, which she also describes as embracing the ‘dignity of the Thing’, as an alternative to the imaginary lures of capitalist culture. The imaginary fantasy substitutes a socially approved desire for the singular desire of the Thing. The refreshing aspect of Ruti’s argument is her acknowledgement that the Thing can only be grasped through culture; therefore, enjoyment of the material world is still possible. Ruti explains that Lacan does not ask us to shun material things in favor of some sublime ideal that will never crystallize (or even in favor of a radical act that will detach us from the world). Quite the opposite, he intimates that the various things (objects and representations) of the world are how ‘real’ satisfaction makes its way into our lives. (146)

The key is to differentiate desire motivated by the Thing from desire dictated by the big Other. This raises an inherent problem within Lacanian ethics, which is the extreme difficulty of distinguishing the false lures of the imaginary from the echo of the Thing. Ruti is aware of this problem and addresses it directly, particularly in her discussion of the work of Badiou. Unfortunately, a simulacrum, false event, or social fantasy may provide the same rejuvenating energy as proximity to the Thing. It seems that Lacanian ethics leaves us still in need of a supplementary ethics, even if it is the injunction not to harm others. I see no persuasive evidence that an ethics of the Thing will never harm the social good.

Ruti’s exploration of singularity has many implications for the study of art and creativity. The benefit of the (destabilising) proximity to the real that she describes is that it allows us to transform the Other’s signifiers into something more ‘inspired’, and this

creativity appears in language, art, politics, and social and intellectual endeavours. Ruti’s work promotes a Lacanian aesthetics that reveals the particular blendings of the symbolic and the real, or the ways in which cultural context provides quilting points that allow us to communicate our singular passion to others. Singularity is, perhaps, what makes cross-cultural communication possible in that it evokes the ‘inscrutable intensity of being’ (8) that transcends cultural norms. Ruti’s primary intervention is to imply that we can indeed invite the real into our lives and improve our ability to harness its energy. The writing and careful reading of literature is, to my mind, a paradigmatic exercise in the use of the symbolic to gain proximity to the real, a real that connects human beings in a more visceral way.

Tom Ratekin

Context: CanLit
Unruly Penelopes and the Ghosts: Narratives of English Canada is the outcome of a three-year international research project on contemporary Canadian fiction and criticism. Scholars hail from Spain, Canada and the UK. Eva Darius-Beautell, the editor, is an associate professor of American and Canadian literatures at the University of Laguna (Spain). Her previous book Graphies and Grafts: (Con)Texts and (Inter)Texts in the Fictions of Four Canadian Women Writers was chosen by the International Council of Canadian Studies as seminal text, acknowledging the importance of the palimpsestic layers and interconnected threads imbricated in Canadian culture and literary production.1 However, Darius-Beautell argues that Canadians are always in the process of ‘becoming’; uncertain about the nature of reality, predisposed to question their own authenticity and ‘belated’ in recognising their embedded national origins. She also notes that parody, self-mockery and scepticism have become the privileged mode of addressing the home culture from within, and speculates on the tendency towards ‘the ongoing postmodernization of Canadian writing in English.’ 2

The work in hand is critical, an attempt to re-organise and re-orientate scholarship in the field, for strategic reasons.

Concept
Darius-Beautell writes in the Introduction to Unruly Penelopes and the Ghosts that the book has a double objective. On the one hand the creative team examines the hypothesis that English-Canadian literature written and published in the last few decades coalesces around the necessity to debunk the ‘Frygian’ national myths produced in the 1960s, myths which ‘have somehow haunted literary and cultural production in Canada since’ (4). On the other hand the intention is to lead by example; to support a parallel movement to recognise and practice a more inclusive and plural literary tradition as integral to ‘national culture’. The book is a neat production, easy to peruse, with bold chapter headings and indexed for quick reference, while presenting a kaleidoscope of fascinating scenarios by eight university teachers and academics in the field (only one male). Unity and cohesion come from its clear conception but its beauty is the freedom of individual interpretation afforded each author within the fold. The intention is to unravel the complex issues that arise within and between perceptions of national culture, neo-liberalisation and the influences of other universalising ideologies and the machinations of global productions.

Autoethnography
Unruly Penelopes and the Ghosts is emphatically ethnography, in literary terms knowledge constituted through fictional narratives and dialogical strategies. Darius-Beautell cleaves to autobiography (telling stories of self) and/or historiography (the struggle to find human truth in the flow of time and the tide of Canadian events), coupled with a focus on the collisions

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1 Eva Darius-Beautell, Graphies and Grafts: (Con)Texts and (Inter)Texts in the Fictions of Four Contemporary Canadian Women (Bruxelles: PIE Lang, 2001).
2 ‘Displacements, self-mockery, and carnival in the Canadian postmodern’, World Literature Today 70.2 (Spring 1996) 316.
between the narratives produced by ‘little people’ and the great national myths which were advantageously constructed to authenticate the national canon. She suggests that ‘outsider’ texts do not affirm patterns of order and submission but trouble the establishment, paving the way for cultural and literary mutation – subversive offerings. Darius-Beautell sees the potential for limitless possibilities to be articulated out of the difference and diversity which presently constitutes Canadian multiculturalism. She suggests that everyone in Canada is displaced one way or another: each individual has a unique story to tell; self is privileged; Canadians writers are predisposed to defy the stereotypes; they naturally create ex-centric characters; they are driven to intervene in the meta-narratives of history, culture, politics, subjectivity, language and generic conventions that shape public perceptions of Canadian identities. The cohort of writers in this volume set out to challenge the canon from minority perspectives. They aim to redress the silence imposed on indigenous literature, ethnic minority literature, black Canadian and women’s writing by talking back to the authorities. Each of the eight essayists proceeds out of common concern but broaches the problem from an idiosyncratic perspective; all contribute inclusively to the plural construction of the text.

Why Penelopes?
Darius-Beautell suggests that the reference to Greek mythology is not frivolous; it fits the case (4). A Penelopian poetics usually refers to the trope of weaving by day and (un)weaving by night. She points out that some critics do not see this trope in literature as dialectical strategy at work but more like a stalling manoeuvre – not in the interests of real progression, neither in the narrative nor in the discourse. She also concedes that the validity of the trope may be contested from the feminist perspective, being everything women should fight against: passivity, stasis, the object of male desire (5). However, in defence of the conceit Darius-Beautell argues (after Barbara Clayton) that Penelope (or Arachne in another guise) stands for an ongoing, open-ended and mutable project. The Penelope figure patiently weaves away at the web of life, back and forth, representing in coded language the major dialectical themes of the Odyssey: memory and forgetting, marriage and death, reality and illusion, trickery and scepticism. Darius-Beautell postulates that the artistic and cultural flowering in Canada at the beginning of the twenty-first century is based upon the ‘Penelopean process of simultaneous dismantling and reconstruction of the Canadian tradition’ (3). And this process takes place by a constant interrogation of and resistance to official modes of institutionalisation and national belonging embodied in ‘the canon’.

Why unruly?
The mindset here is passionately recalcitrant – unruly. Darius-Beautell explains that the point of inception is The Penelopiad (2005) in which Margaret Atwood retells Homer’s myth ‘from a multiplicity of viewpoints’, introducing idiosyncratic voices, new perspectives and a polyphonic structure which challenges the dominance of grand-narratives about the original. Darius-Beautell says that Atwood’s legacy characterises CanLit research today. She also cites and approves of Aritha van Herk’s surrogate protagonist in the novel No Fixed Address. She is named Arachne and challenges prescriptive codes of writing ‘for the proper behaviour of

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4 Darius-Beautell (2001), 12.
5 The thought may be attributed to Homi Bhabha (1984b), as quoted by Darius-Beautell (2001).

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good little girls’. In writing this female adventurer to an inverted pattern of Odysseus’ wandering, Van Herk not only explodes thematic conventions of female subjectivity but in epic style rewrites generic conventions on Canadian landscape and tropography (6).

**Why ghosts?**

In the 1960s and 70s academics sought to individuate Canada from the aegis of British and American discourses by constructing a distinctly Canadian perspective. At the time literary criticism centred on white settler culture; it was Eurocentric, territorial and masculinist. The social imaginary was trapped in metaphors of lack and haunted by tropes of landscape, wilderness, terror in regard to Nature and ubiquitously the ‘garrison mentality’. Darius-Beautell believes that this collection of essays will help to liberate CanLit from ‘Frygian articulations of national culture’ which have haunted perceptions of Canadian artistic and literary production ever since (6). She suggests that rhetoric of multiculturalism, environmentalism, cultural studies, queer theory, feminism, postcolonialism and particularly the rise of transnational capitalism altogether prompt the realisation of new possibilities for global self-positioning. *Unruly Penelopes and the Ghosts* aims to re focus the discourse on inclusivity and the articulation of ‘authentic’ ideas of communal identity not found in any canon literature. Darius-Beautell goes on to explain however that the deconstructive approach to tradition which underlies the book’s methodology is in a way still predicated on notions of loss and deferral. The process is one of Derridean hauntology, which plays with the way cultural memories are inscribed in the present. The appearance of spectres signals the resurgence of unfinished business, something yet unsettling and provocative about truth-saying, for which the text is metonym and synecdoche and which calls for the redress of social injustice.

**Constant transitioning**

Darius-Beautell cites Gayatri Spivak who insists that a planetary vision requires an interdisciplinary shift in literary studies – regeneration proceeds via oscillation. Darius-Beautell is reluctant to leave behind the concept of ‘nation’ – an old haunt or a weeping sore – but CanLit is forced to move on ‘from the cozy utopian nationscape of cultural nationalism to a restless, borderless globalscape (see Appadurai)’ (8). The spectrality lies in the continuous need to rethink Canadian literature. The ideal is a ‘multiscaled’ reflection of place but Darius-Beautell is well-aware of a paradox in coming into knowledge: Canada is always conditional – in a state of transitioning.

**Eight essays**

Darius-Beautell says that each essay in this collection is haunted by a particular ghost and addresses a different set of questions along the ‘spectrum of methodological, historical, cultural and literary paradigms’ (9). She writes that they emphasise close readings and critical insights, intersecting with one another at key discursive nodes of literary history, institutionalisation, race, gender, sexuality, cultural memory, locality and the body. Darius-Beautell’s introduction is a comprehensive and insightful overview of the project.

In the first chapter, Coral Ann Howell examines the institutionalising drive at work in English Canadian literature and history in the past forty years. She focuses on the critical

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reflection – aesthetic, political, material and social – which facilitates re-visioning narrative and rewriting tradition: ‘demonstrating the capacity of master narratives to provide elements of their own dismantling’ (10). Howell self-consciously restricts her analysis to the preoccupations of ‘White Civility’ – Eurocentric, territorial and masculinist – as the key patterns in the establishment of Canadian literature as a discipline. She sets up the dominant narrative as ‘implicitly white, British and liberal’ (22), in a nation where culture is conceived as either Anglo or French. Her stand opens the field for the attack from marginalised sectors of the community in need of assertive advocacy and recognition – ethnic minority and indigenous literature, black Canadian’s and women’s voices. This first essay represents the wall and fires off the first round from behind the ramparts.

Smaro Kambourelli next analyses the power of institutions ‘to enforce particular processes of canon formation’ (10). She examines the racialisation and minoritisation of certain sectors of the community. She compares the ‘sign Asian Canadian’ and its position in the formation of a literary canon with similar developments in the US. Kambourelli emphasises a close reading of meta-critical texts to discern the difference between the specifics of Area Studies – for instance, Japanese or Chinese literature – and incorporation into canonised studies as iconic examples of Asian-American or Asian-Canadian literature. She is concerned about the ethics of appropriation and commodification which reflect the canalisation of differences. She worries that the particularities of events will be subsumed in clumping or a flattening process. Kambourelli suggests that American discourse is orientated towards pan-ethnicity – eliding the origins of trauma – while Canadian discourse aims to make multiculturality visible and subject to scrutiny in the interests of social justice.

Both Ana María Fraile and Belén Martín-Lucas, the next two essayists, resist the commodification of multiculturalism as celebratory identity politics. Fraile examines two texts from the perspective of mixed race aesthetics. She talks about the pitfalls of institutionalised multiculturalism and denounces the fantasy of a post-racial Canada. She sees African Canadian literature as a culture in its own right, standing apart from the universalising context of CanLit and ‘inextricably enmeshed in the globalized context of diasporic hybridity, and thus essentially transnational’ (11). The issue is whether race and cultural essentialisms matter in terms of conservation or whether these elements are allowed to be subsumed in a new incorporated nationalism.

Martín-Lucas is interested in transnational poetics and the common strategies of cultural and political dissent displayed in transnational feminist fiction. Her focus is the ‘scandalous body’ and the hybrid manifestations of excess – aliens, monsters, vampires, cyborgs, mutants, post-humans – which defy politically correct inscriptions and double for the racialised and sexualised bodies of those who dare to be different. She examines the metaphorical strategies of personification which challenge the disciplinary measures and containment policies of imposed bourgeois codes.

In the next essay, Darius-Beautell investigates the function of both literature and art in the manufacture of a sense of urban belonging. Her aim is to deconstruct land-based claims to national identity. She critiques the commodified images of the City of Glass and implies that in becoming a ‘world city’ and a global icon Vancouver loses its social cohesiveness at a local level. She is particularly interested in the ideological implications for the community –

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the gains and the losses of modernity – and the capacity of works ‘to block or cancel a certain spatial perspective’. She identifies her field of interest as ‘termination views’ (12).8

Richard Cavell is interested in the use of memory for liberation. He answers back to Robert Lecker’s expression of concern that ‘CanLit as a discipline at the threshold of the new millennium ... lack[s] the historical perspective in Canadian criticism’. He writes that ‘contemporary literary nationalism needs memory to survive.’9 This work excavates the great grief of silencing in the official annals. Cavell’s essay ‘Jane Rule and the Memory of Canada’ is about remembering the cut of the whip across divisions of gender and sexuality but principally focuses on the collision between queer sexuality and the state, postulating ‘a theory of queer cultural memory based on the individual and collective performance of embodied identity’ (13). Cavell argues that queer is not simply about deviant sexuality but about an ethics of alterity that ‘denies the completion of identity, national or otherwise’. He theorises about the possible formation of ‘communities outside the nation-state ideology of the family’ and offers Jane Rule’s success story as an antidote to official history. Cavell sees the recovery work in memory studies as a continuous project aimed at inclusion rather than exclusion – alternative models of citizenship are recognised and affirmed within the expanding fold of the nation-state.

María Jesús Hernáez Lerena provides a reading of Michael Crummey’s historical fiction, River Thieves. This work is a best-seller and award-winning novel about the ‘collective sense of loss and guilt’ that haunts the narratives of Newfoundland in regard to the extinction of the local aboriginal people. She too is fixated in the same spectrality as the other essayists: ‘the tensions between remembering and forgetting, speaking and silence, history and experience’ (13). However, Hernáez Lerena does not revisit the colonial past in order to re-examine the symptomatic unease which results from traumatic events but to investigate rhetorical strategies used by the author to evoke the psychic and social malaise.

Michèle Lacombe brings the compilation to a close with a discussion of indigenous issues. Her essay talks back to Howell’s opening gambit by presenting ‘a panoramic discussion of indigenous literary histories, criticism, and fiction’ (13). She points out that it is inappropriate for a body of national identification such as CanLit to configure aboriginality ‘within colonial frameworks of otherness’. She challenges universities (and the societies which they represent) to do away with ‘cognitive imperialism’. The imperative is to transform ‘colonial, patriarchal, and supremacist mindsets, paradigms, and values’ by engaging in a web of relationships which entail responsibilities and assumptions of reciprocity. The issue then becomes one of trust. Lacombe borrows from Rauna Kuokkanen.10 Together they suggest that the academy adopts a concept of ‘hospitality’ grounded in Indigenous epistemology: one should welcome the other without conditions, translation into the language of the host, or other mediation, but in the spirit of a gift economy. Lacomb concludes that ‘the university has a crucial role to play in that complex process of epistemological transformation’ (221).

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8 ... a notion put forward by Cliff Eyland in relation to Bernie Miller’s and Alan Tregebov’s deconstructive techniques.
Conclusion

Unruly Penelopes and the Ghosts demonstrates that in one sense over the last forty years nothing has changed and everything has changed in the critical analyses and processes of production in the field of Canadian literature. National culture is still the referent but land-based connections and outmoded systems no longer serve as the sole marker of national identity. A plural society struggles to define the ideological, material, political and cultural necessities of citizenship in the contemporary era. This project pleads the case for a certain attitude and rigour as integral to the discipline; critical assessment demands close reading, renewed cultural sensitivity and nuanced understanding, as marginalised sub groups and individuals seek acceptance within the mainstream.

Darius-Beautell also raises the issue of ‘belatedness’ which seems to cling to Canadian culture. If I may paraphrase, this means the notion of having finally arrived at the dock with one’s portmanteau only to have missed the boat. The team is acutely aware of the dilemma. Darius-Beautell offers up Imre Szeman’s suggestion that the new transnational scenario privileges an isochronic version of the world in which the narrative will again be linear, with only one global time-zone and perforce no one will be out of sync with the main currents of modernity. But this utopian dystopia is immediately undone in the circularity of the Penelopean world-view. Darius-Beautell articulates mock-horror at the impossibility of ideological dissent and then again at an institutionalised inability to conceive of a national literature founded in a multiplicity of cultural, social and political specificities. Nonetheless, she concludes the meta-text with a sure sense of satisfaction that the essays in Unruly Penelopes and the Ghosts are a testament to the unruly imaginings at the heart of Canadian’s yearning to belong … to the Promised Land.

Christine Runnel

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11 A quotation from Barbara Godard in ‘Notes from the Cultural Field: Canadian Literature from Identity to Commodity’ (2000, 248), Canadian Literature at the Crossroads of Language and Culture edited by Smaro Kamboureli (Edmonton: NeWest Press, 2008) 235-72.
12 The reference originally comes from Renée Hulan (2000) and Imre Szeman (2000).

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When Russell Braddon, still haunted by his Burma Railway privations, found post-war existence unbearable, he tried to kill himself with a spectacular dosage of phenobarbitone. Discovered in a comatose state at his university college, he was taken to hospital, pumped clean, transferred to a ward with bars on the windows, and subjected to five months of disagreeable therapy. It involved the incessant weaving of scarves, shambling through the corridors in pyjamas with the cord removed, and repeated warnings that electro-convulsive therapy would be the automatic punishment for disobeying orders.

So Braddon, scion of an establishment family (two Tasmanian electorates and a Canberra suburb carry the name), devised his own cure. He would go Home – with a capital ‘H’ as Australians styled it in 1949 – to England, and become a writer. On his signed promise that he would not attempt suicide again, Concord Repatriation Hospital released him. He drew his accumulated army pay out of the bank, bought a first-class starboard berth on the *Orontes*, and sailed away to a remarkable metamorphosis: despairing ex-POW into author of international acclaim. His second book, a war memoir written early in a spell at ‘Home’ that would last more than forty years, sold two million copies.

Russell Braddon’s relocation, and his subsequent success, becomes one of the final acts of the literary diaspora covered by Peter Morton in *Lusting for London: Australian Expatriate Writers at the Hub of Empire, 1870-1950*. The book’s ambitious scope echoes the shared determination of its 150 subjects; it is a work of exhaustive scholarship and considerable dimension. Nevertheless, a certain fissure intrudes upon the nexus between Morton’s objective and the lives he describes. For while many of those existences ended in poverty and desolation (even, in one instance, as a workhouse inmate), Morton himself remains uncompromisingly triumphant.

This is a book of prodigious achievement; there is an entire conference in its revelations. The reader encounters a cast of extraordinary expatriates. Among their number are Reginald Carrington (‘no talent’ and ‘a hopeless dilettante’ [109], according to Morton), who fails utterly at journalism and invents a ghastly board game called ‘Blackfellow’, where policemen-tokens pursue an Aborigine; Chester Cobb, who blows his inheritance by going ‘Home’ to write ‘experimental fiction’ and turns instead to chicken farming (113); and William Nicholas Willis, co-founder of the newspaper *Truth*, who makes his London living by spicing up the short stories of Guy de Maupassant. The most extraordinary of the lot was the medical journalist and ‘popular sexologist’ Dr Norman Haire (66), who notoriously once asked a socialite of his acquaintance if she had tried sex with animals. When she reacted with displeasure, he had replied: ‘Why not? They say you can train a peke to do anything’ (66). These characters come back to life on the pages of *Lusting for London* through the author’s incisive research, pursued – surely – through some expatriation of his own to the stacks and the desks of the British Library at St Pancras. His aim, he declares at the outset, is to investigate ‘a phenomenon that has been one of the most identifiable and enduring themes in the socio-economics of Australian letters’ (2).

In satisfying that quest, Morton relates biographies in miniature. Prominent within this feature of the narrative is the story of Philip Lindsay: his London sojourn begins in the doss-house under St Martin’s-in-the-Fields, then offers a flicker of promise with film scripts
and a fee for technical advice on Korda’s *The Private Life of Henry VIII*. But self-destructive behaviour ‘on an heroic scale’ sees him evicted from his rented cottage, where he had failed to pay the rent, urinated from a window, and outraged the landlord by associating with ‘a set of undesirable and drunken companions’ (93). He wrote on (and drank on), nevertheless, dying in 1958 aged fifty-two. He had remained capable, says Morton, of ‘writing 10,000 words in a day’ despite ‘the squalor, the illnesses, the benders, and the bailiffs’ (95).

The life of Louise Mack, for whom Morton’s warm portrait suggests a little delayed lusting of his own, is rich in the courage and self-belief required of the intending *arriviste*. This ‘pretty, vivacious’ writer found the ‘Street of Adventure’ hostile at first, in the winter of 1901-02 after her erstwhile popularity as a ‘cosseted contributor’ at *The Bulletin* in Sydney (124). The plaintive tone of her memoir *An Australian Girl in London* tells its reader: ‘Office upon office looks down on you. … They steal from you all your need for battle. They dissipate your will. They weaken your intention. They convince you of your own unimportance’ (124).

Mack grew profoundly depressed in her Bloomsbury attic, but continued to knock on editors’ doors, finding work with Harmsworth Press and for W.T. Stead (the pioneer of investigative journalism), displaying courage too as a war correspondent in the siege of Antwerp. That brush with combat was sufficient to justify a lecture tour of Australia in 1915 – which, in turn, led to her celebrity endorsement of Rexona soap for its supposed role in preserving her peach-bloom complexion ‘during those difficult days in the trenches’ (127). In addition to the colour and the anecdotes, Morton embellishes his text with extended reflections on the nature of expatriation as expressed in novel form by Martin Boyd, Henry Handel Richardson, and Christina Stead. Life and art, in a variant on Oscar Wilde’s *bon mot*, are shown to imitate each other in those chapters accordingly.

The one disappointment within the covers of *Lusting for London* is that there are no illustrations. One does so want to see Louise Mack and Philip Lindsay and even Dr Norman Haire (although posing perhaps without a pet Pekingese).

Nigel Starck