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Performing the Void: The Violence of the Unassimilated in Some Contemporary British Narratives¹

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One of trauma's defining traits is the subject's incapacity to have access to the cause of his/her affection, as indicated in clinical descriptions, and from the earliest definitions. This is famously the case in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, where Freud elaborates on the repetition compulsion according to which the victim repeats in the present an episode that he cannot remember (Freud 1971, 18), and less famously—but just as convincingly—in Pierre Janet's earlier description of amnesia and memory dissociation through emotion (Janet 1904, 12–13). Ferenczi similarly described emotional amnesia as induced by traumatic cases, in his August 14th, 1932 diary entry (Ferenczi 163), and Cathy Caruth formulated the radical experience at the heart of traumatic cases and symptoms as “crisis in truth” and “collapse of [...] understanding” (Caruth 1995, 6, 7). The inassimilable nature of traumatic experience is what is often selected as the key feature of the suffering that it imposes on the subject, a peculiar form of violence that “*simultaneously defies and demands our witness*” (Caruth 1996, 5; original emphasis). Such a contradiction performs an unbearable violence on the victim, as widely documented in psycho-analytic literature, and fuels many a trauma narrative.

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In the field of fiction, the writing of trauma has been analysed from various perspectives. Anne Whitehead has contributed to the definition of canonical trauma fiction by defining fictional testimony as “speaking beyond understanding,” and she has sketched a poetics of “traumatic realism” as based on the “search for a new mode of realism in order to express or articulate a new form of reality” relying on “the intensification of conventional narrative modes and methods” that resort to intertextuality, repetition, dispersal and fragmentation, among other devices (Whitehead 7, 84). She has also remarked on the affinity between trauma narratives and experimentalism, which “offers a powerful vehicle to communicate the unreality of trauma while still remaining faithful to the fact of history” (Whitehead 87). Her vision is germane to Michael Rothberg’s evocation of traumatic realism as based on the contradictory drives of documentation/realism and self-reflexivity and pointing at the nature of “the real as felt lack [, ...] the startling impact of that which cannot be known immediately” (Rothberg 104). Elsewhere, Rothberg returns to the idea of the radiating gap at the heart of trauma realism and once again addresses the issue of contradiction by insisting that “the abyss at the heart of trauma entails not only the exile of the real but also its insistence” (Rothberg 140). In the above definitions, the images of the gap, the lack or even the abyss all refer to the void that is given pride of place in my title and, beyond, to the etymology of the word “trauma” or wound, hence to an opening, or possibly a subtraction that is also an excess or a supplement. The images used in clinical or critical literature converge to express the violence of a contradiction according to which a felt lack assumes tyrannical, overwhelming proportions. From this point of view, it might be argued that traumatic realism and trauma fiction partake of what Jacques Derrida sees as the disruptive power of writing or *écriture* (Derrida 1967, 30), as the anti-totalising drive of fictional trauma narratives is submitted to the evocation of an experience located beyond understanding and

totalisation. That is why I want to address the issue of the writing of violence inherent in traumatic realism by attending respectively to the issues of metalepsis, lateness and the archive.

Writing violence implies confronting the limits of representation and trading in incapacity. This is what I have argued, in collaboration with Susana Onega, in the introduction to a volume devoted to limit-case trauma narratives (Ganteau and Onega). In the novels evoking the sufferings provoked by severe trauma, when the traumatic breakthrough is essentially inaccessible, because radically unassimilated, the issue of realism is systematically at stake. Admittedly, one option to evoke traumatic cases is to merely thematise them and describe them from outside. Such a narrative choice is present in many novels with a taste for third-person, unfocalised narration. This is the case with the various volumes of Pat Barker's *Regeneration* trilogy, for instance, and particularly with the eponymous one, which provides an external evocation of some of the victims' symptoms and grants the reader access to the consciousness of William Rivers, the military psychiatrist working with shell-shocked patients at Craiglockhart War Hospital. The reader may share his gropings and doubts, he/she is also privy to his discoveries and moments of realisation that help to fill in part of the holes and abysses affecting some of the wounded psyches that he attends to. In other terms, realism seems to be fairly unproblematical when mediated through outside descriptions. Still, things are more complex when one is confronted with the internal evocation of traumatic states.

This is the case in first-person narratives like Anne Enright's *The Gathering*, for instance, when the narrator and protagonist, Veronica (her emblematic name assigning her with the identity and function of the witness), sets about writing a book-length account of what led her brother to commit suicide. In so doing, she is hampered by her ignorance as to some elements of

her deceased brother's past, as well as by the limitations of her own memories. From this point of view, the novel multiplies failed attempts at getting to the heart of a central event that keeps escaping her and may only be glimpsed at in moments of tentative or negative epiphanies (Ganteau 2015, 79–82). In a novel that is very much concerned with the way in which traumas relate to one another and generate accountability for the other's wound, thereby providing a chain-like, telescopic image of communal and national trauma, what is at stake is the presentation of the narrator's own trauma, which is improbably approached and blurted out in contradictory terms (Enright 224). In Enright's novel, one trauma may be used as a screen for another, and the violence of unknowing is lent a textual illustration (for provisional lack of a better word) by the ceaselessly inchoate, compulsive attempts at hailing back to the dark traumatic hole of a past common both to the narrator and to her lost brother—a past that also concerns her singularly. Following the contradictory phenomenology of trauma drafted above, I would say that *The Gathering* is caught between the imperatives of emptiness and formal excess, the latter being a textual and presentational modality of the former. With such an excess of textual matter meant to evoke a void that is certainly not a nothingness, trauma fiction in general and traumatic realism in particular hit on the way to express or render the violence of traumatic symptoms by signalling beyond traditional realism and privileging a series of mimetic devices.

In *The Gathering* as in sundry other trauma narratives, the internal evocation of trauma goes along with such a preference for hyperbole and the inflation of repetitive devices, making the writing of trauma edge towards the pole of monstrosity (and we may recall here that Derrida specifies that *écriture* implies monstrosity [Derrida 57]). The issue that such novels raise is that of a presentation of trauma that can only be indirect and, more specifically, whose indirectness is indexed on the circuitous accessibility of traumatic content. In *The Gathering*, this is performed

by multiplying instances of the narrator's unsuccessfully grappling with her memories, in inchoate, Sisyphean fashion, asymptotically straining towards the hidden, unidentifiable void of the unassimilated.

In a novel like Neil Bartlett's *Skin Lane*, the violence of the trauma narrative is brought in through the means of seemingly endless inaction. In fact, the first fifty pages of the narrative are devoted to the meticulous evocation of the main protagonist's routines, as he is going to and from work using the London public transport system early in the spring of 1967. The painstaking evocation of the bland routines and the almost compulsive recurrence of everyday moves stretch the reader's expectations and make him/her suspect that there is something strange about the novel's thematic and narrative agenda, diagnosing the presence and, possibly, ascendance of massive trauma as the pages are eked out in patient, minute, hence promising but backfiring observations. This is yet another way to suggest and, one step beyond, present the idea *and* the sensation that there is an other to the system (both psychic and representational), and that no totalisation may be envisaged (Cornell 68). In this case, as in the preceding one, I feel that the violence of the traumatic breakthrough as extended in the omnipresence of the void is rendered through the corresponding violence of a writing that relies on metalepsis. What I mean is that, since the wound is inaccessible, since its contents cannot be grasped, since it is felt as a gap that paradoxically fills the whole of the subject, it cannot be figured out according to the principle of analogy and metaphor, but only through its contours or effects, along the lines of what Gérard Genette calls "consecution" (Genette 10). The dominance of this trope that acts according to the principles of contiguity allows for an indirect approach to or interpretation of the traumatic object by relying on its effects or consequences and not on its contents. This may be compared to what Georges Didi-Huberman has called "dissemblance," i.e. a mode of figuration that consists in

imitating not so much an aspect as a process or an effect (Didi-Huberman 140). To write and figure out the remainder that characterises trauma, the dynamics of effect are tapped the better to avoid describing an aspect that remains unknown. The violence of trauma requires in turn the strength of a poetics based on the metalepsis that entraps both protagonist and reader in a re-enactment of the unassimilated event. In other terms, the loss of the capacity to both think and represent (Press 52, 63) dovetails into an indirect presentation of the unassimilated content, thereby moving beyond mere representation towards some iconic rendering of the object of trauma in its very inaccessibility. In doing so, the reading comes close to being a performance of symptoms addressing not so much the readers' minds as their senses. The textual performance of trauma becomes a way of renewing more conventional forms of mimesis so as to adopt the pathic violence of a logic of sensation (Deleuze) that is also an invitation to an ethical encounter with the other and the radical alterity that trauma both represents and constitutes. Performing means involving and getting involved, and by choosing the way of metalepsis as the performance of symptoms, the violence of writing trauma warrants the opening of the narrative onto the sphere of the reader and, beyond, of the social (Lecerle 43).

In her latest book, *Literature in the Ashes of History*, Cathy Caruth returns to the ground of her earlier *Unclaimed Experience*, where she addressed what she saw as one of the most salient traits of trauma, i.e. “the belated impact of reference” that attends to traumatic states (Caruth 1996, 7). What she addresses here is not really the principle of belatedness often used as a synonym for ‘afterwardsness’—itself generally admitted to be the closest translation of the German *Nachträglichkeit*. She does not concentrate on the temporal loop according to which a violent occurrence reactivates a first breakthrough and allows a two-way movement on the axis

of time, the first occurrence modifying the second one and, reciprocally, the second one allowing for a re-reading or modification of the first. Rather, what she has in mind is the temporal specificity of the first occurrence, and the idea that what allows for the advent of traumatic cases is the lack of preparation through anxiety (*Angstbereitung*) as indicated by Freud and Ferenczi, among others (Freud 12; Ferenczi 32–35). This is tantamount to saying that unpreparedness is all, and that the greater the surprise, the more chances of a massive trauma. Cathy Caruth elaborates on this issue, in her reading of Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, entitled "Parting Words: Trauma, Silence, and Survival." I find her analysis of Freud's observations extremely useful in accounting for the violence of the traumatic breakthrough, as predicated on dazzling speed: "The breach in the mind [...] is not caused by a direct threat or injury, but by fright, the lack of preparedness to take in a stimulus that comes too quickly. It is not the threat of danger, that is, that is, that constitutes the threat for the psyche, but the fact that the danger is recognised as such a moment too late." (Caruth 2014, 6) The prime condition of destabilization, intrinsic to the sensation that the carpet is being snatched away from under the victim's feet, may be the most relevant modality of trauma's temporal violence. Caruth goes on commenting on the forcefulness of the breakthrough by elaborating on the notion of unexpectedness and bringing in an analogy with the dream:

If 'fright' is the term by which Freud defines the traumatic effect of not having been prepared in time, then the trauma of the nightmare does not simply consist in the experience within the dream but in the experience of waking from it. It is the surprise of waking that repeats the unexpectedness of the trauma. (Caruth 2014, 6)

The dream/sleep analogy implies of course that the breakthrough can only be traumatic when it catches the victim not only unprepared, but also in a state of utter helplessness or maximum exposure or vulnerability to the event. And once again, the violence is conditioned by a lack: the

absence of preparation, a gap in time, or more precisely a trouble in the rhythm, as if the victim *missed* a beat.

Such a Rip-van-Winkle type of effect is perhaps one of the most faithful ways for a narrative to present and enact the violence of curtailment as encapsulated in the sense of lateness. Waking up too late, only to realise that something is amiss, does intensify the sensation of exposure: the intimation is that something *worse* could have happened during sleep, as the victim was blissfully ignorant of impending danger, hence unprepared. Rhythm is used to dramatise helplessness and present the violence perpetrated on the character while performing an effect of the same violence on the reader. Of course, in such cases, narrative ellipses may well have a breath-taking impact, as is the case in the canonical passage in *Lord Jim* when Jim realises that he has jumped from the Patna. The episode is narrated in the first person, as Jim is giving an account of the events. This does not correspond, then, to a case of massive trauma, as some partial memory of the scene is accessible. Still, the action of the metalepsis is powerfully at work, as the core of the breakthrough (the decision making that may not have been one, and on which the whole of the ethics of the novel are balanced) is converted into a void:

‘He raised his hands deliberately to his face, and made picking motions with his fingers as though he had been bothered with cobwebs, and afterwards he looked into the open palm for quite half a second before he blurted out –

“I had jumped . . .” He checked himself, averted his gaze. . . . “It seems,” he added.’
(Conrad 124–25)

The multiple aposiopeses and the final qualification—less understatement than hyperbole—inscribe violence at the heart of the writing of trauma in a passage that is not so much concerned with describing an episode as with reproducing the effects of helplessness. In this fragment, acts seem to have given way to events so as to present a loss of agency, so as to typographically and

rhythmically share it with/perform it on the reader. The writing of violence loops on and warrants the violence of writing.

Of course the vertiginous approach to lateness is also present in contemporary trauma narratives. This is the case with Ian McEwan's *Saturday*, for instance, whose *incipit* and first pages are dominated by the sensation of missing something, as signposted by the very first sentence in the novel: "Some hours before dawn Henry Perowne, a neurosurgeon, wakes to find himself already in motion, pushing back the covers from a sitting position, and then rising to his feet." (Mc Ewan 3) Interestingly, the impression of lagging behind, i.e. of being submitted to forces beyond one's ken, is abruptly built into the narrative in the novel's opening sentence, catching the reader unawares, at least as much as the character. This impression will dominate the first pages, as Henry Perowne watches a light in the sky and has to re-adjust his interpretation of this visual stimulus until he reaches a satisfying conclusion, "[h]orrified,» the narrator specifies (Mc Ewan 14), with the possibility of a terrorist attack over the post 9/11 metropolis exposed to global violence. Even though the evocation of Henry Perowne's belated realisation by far not as dramatic as that performed by Conrad's text, I would say that a similar sensation of exposure and unpreparedness obtains in pages that evoke the gap of the unassimilated content directly, this time, through abruption or ellipsis (as opposed to the *extremum* of matter going along with the use of metalepsis, as explained above). And even if the protagonist of *Saturday* may not be considered as literally traumatised, it is true that the evocation of the benighted world that seems to have fallen over the novel addresses the issue of collective trauma, so much so that the initial indications of lateness bear upon all further evocations of traumatic breakthroughs.

A similar inspiration, albeit applied to the case of the fictional evocation of individual trauma, is to be found in Nicholas Royle's *Quilt*, a novel obsessed with the idea of temporal

disjuncting. Here, the bereft protagonist is assailed with dreams of turning up late at his father's funeral (Royle 90), after missing his death and coming up too late to the hospital. In such instances, the lateness intrinsic to traumatic perception is thematised, and not specifically enacted. Still, the last pages of the narrative, which go along with a pronominal shift, are devoted to the oneiric evocation of a huge manta ray floating in a vast aquarium built on the upper floor of the male protagonist's cottage, and invading the whole of the space, both architectonic and textual (Royle 144–49). The intimation—and it comes to the reader as a flash—is that the former narrator, who also used to be the main protagonist, has refined himself out of existence. His elocutionary surrender has gone along with a capitulation of the self that designates his disappearance or demise without stating or describing it. Here again, metalepsis is used to evoke the traumatic void of the character's melancholic loss of self: the ultimate absence of the character is a textual effect of its loss of self provoked by his father's death, itself reactivating a previous traumatic breakthrough (Ganteau 2015, 92–93). The void at the heart of the protagonist's psyche—as the initial breakthrough remains inaccessible to him—is figured out through the consequences that such a gap triggers off in the present. Hence the final vision of an overwhelming, ghostly presence, that of the ray, to indirectly—or rather, paradoxically, *directly*—present an absence, by imitating what is *not* there.

Metalepsis, by focussing on effects, instrumentalises the dazzling powers of ellipsis and resorts to a mimesis of effect through dissemblance. As suggested above, this it does not so much by describing as by performing. What I mean here is that the text's rhythmical resources (repetitive, subtractive) are tapped to get the reader to take part in the (re-)enactment of the traumatic symptoms. In Derek Attridge's terms, then, we are confronted with trauma narratives that are also fictional testimonies in which the process of witnessing goes along with the “staging

[of] the activity of witnessing” itself, this in turn illustrating the capacity of literature to both “present themes as such [and take] the reader through the process of thematising” (Attridge 97). The result is that, in the two present-tense narratives that I have just alluded to, the characters and above all the readers are “caught up in [...] the event of performance,” “partly constituted as [subjects] by it,” and “active in performing it” (Attridge 98). Caught in between activity and passivity, the reader is submitted to the *event* of performance. The writing of violence is also, of necessity, a performance of violence.

Such violence, as seen above, takes much of its inspiration and energy from the powers of contradiction, and I would add that along metalepsis and lateness, the archive is a figure that thrives on contradiction and on the fictional evocation of traumatic states. I take this notion from Derrida and admittedly, once again, from Cathy Caruth’s reading of Derrida in Chapter Five of her recent study, entitled “Psychoanalysis in the Ashes of History.” One may remember that in his *Mal d’Archive* Derrida defines the archive as that which resists memory:

Car l’archive, si ce nom ou cette figure se stabilisent en quelque signification, ce ne sera jamais la mémoire ni l’anamnèse en leur expérience spontanée, vivante et intérieure. Bien au contraire : l’archive a lieu dans la défaillance originaire et structurelle de ladite mémoire. (Derrida 2008, 26).

And he goes on to reveal the main contradiction at the heart of the archive in a pithy statement: “L’archive travaille toujours *a priori* contre elle-même.” (Derrida 2008, 27; original emphasis). Taking her lead from Derrida’s reading of Freud, Cathy Caruth elaborates on the nature of twentieth- and twenty-first-century history that she considers to be very much indebted to the thinking of the archive. This is what she explains at the beginning of Chapter Five: “This history, she tells us, is not, as one might traditionally expect, constituted by events that create their own

remembrance, but by events that destroy their own remembrance.” (Caruth 2014, 76–77) At the heart of this violent contradiction lies the tension between capacity and *incapacity*, or rather incapacity’s special capacity to produce memory (and history) by erasing them (Caruth 2014, 78). And I feel that one of the most efficient ways in which fiction both thematises and performs the violence of trauma is by, precisely, writing the archive.

Many contemporary narratives that put the representation of historical trauma on their aesthetic agenda resort to what Caruth calls “the thinking of the archive,” which might also be called the aesthetics and the ethics of the archive. This is famously the case with Pat Barker’s evocation of the First World War, for instance, more specifically in her novel *Another World*, which is not set in early twentieth-century Britain and Europe, as is the case in the regeneration trilogy, but at the other end of the century. The novel is concerned with violence as ethos, and explores the theme of fratricide, using realistic and spectral ploys to call forth a sense of the fantastic that is very fitting in a text deploying the effects of trans-generational trauma and revenance. Its main protagonist is Nick, a university lecturer, caught up between his dysfunctional reconstituted family, and his dying grandfather, Geordie, aged 101, a First World War veteran. Now, even though the main trauma might concern Nick’s character, a possibility that is never developed but sufficiently hinted at, it so happens that the most obviously thematised trauma is Geordie’s, as he is seen to be in the grip of *Nachträglichkeit*, re-enacting some of the scenes that took place on the battlefield some eighty years before, mistaking his old bayonet wound for the one consecutive to his recent operation, for instance. Interestingly, Geordie’s itinerary from the horrors of the battlefield to the status of acclaimed elderly witness is organised around a silence that is shown to dominate his whole life and his family’s, a hole that the other characters are only allowed a glimpse of as he is on his deathbed, during his nightly re-enactments, and in the oral interview that he produced for the benefit of one of Nick’s fellow lecturers at the local university. When listening to one of the tapes on

which the interview is recorded, Nick comes across a reference to Geordie's brother Harry, who died on the battlefield in mysterious circumstances. This triggers off the following comment in the young man: "A rare reference to Harry's death, not pursued. All Geordie's words, Nick realizes suddenly—and there are thousands of them in this interview alone—orbit round a central silence, a dark star." (Barker 1999, 158) This dark star of a silence here partakes of the same narrative economy as the one to be found in Anne Enright's *The Gathering*, in which the truth about the origin of the narrator's trauma remains forever inaccessible. Here again, the unassimilated memory is only orbited around and negatively apprehended through its contours and effects, according to the logic of metalepsis. But in *Another World*, the historical orientation of the narrative gets the text to move over from the individual to the collective and, possibly, the historical, as underlined by the interview conducted for research purposes. I would say that in those pages we are confronted with the violently contradictory drives of the archive as both erasure of the memory and transmission of it through its own erasure, since Geordie and Nick—and the reader witnessing the failures of confession—are seen to take part in the building up of a historical narrative that is "*constituted by the erasure of its own witness*" (Caruth 2014, 81; original emphasis).

In such writings of trauma, what obtains is an *écriture* of violence and, conversely, a violence of *écriture* that indicates and performs, through the logic of frustration, the impossibility of totalisation and the ceaseless attempts at making as full an account as possible. Once again, performance extends the powers of more conventional mimetic modes by going over the frontiers of the textual and intervening into the social. The same could be said of a series of other narratives, among which, prominently, Jon McGregor's second novel, *So Many Ways to Begin*, which stages the protagonist's quest for his unknown biological mother against the background of national history, from the Second World War to the present. The fact that he over-reacts to the news of his mysterious origins constitutes, for the alert reader, an indication that this piece of news has the specific function of reactivating an earlier breakthrough, of

which he remains unconscious till the end of the novel, while the reader may benefit from a glimmer of dramatic irony to realise that the revelation of the family secret is but the reactivation of an earlier, unknown, hence unassimilated one. This is suggested during an apparently minor episode when young David helps his father harvest the potatoes in the garden of their house in Coventry. At one point, the adolescent makes a grim discovery by unearthing a child's shoe, presumably catapulted into the garden during one of the memorable Coventry bombings. The protagonist, who is a collector of very ordinary items from everyday life and may be considered an "archaeologist of the present" (a phrase that is applied to another character in McGregor's first novel), claims the shoe as one of his exhibits, which leads his father to give him the following piece of advice:

I'd say it's probably been in the ground since '44, he said, so it's older than you at least. [...] I wouldn't tell your mother about this one though, he added. She might be upset. She might not let you hang on to it, he said. (McGregor 38).

The fact that he is mistakenly called 'Daniel' by two other characters transforms him into the double of what the readers cannot but identify as a lost brother. As each chapter of the novel (apart from the prologue and the epilogue) is headed by a brief inscription imitating the informative plates accompanying exhibits in museums, the archaeological drive is made to loom large over the novel. In fact, the exhibits are considered as prompts that lead the narrator to give an account of the interconnected lives of the novel's protagonists, so much so that putting together a personal collection of ordinary objects becomes compatible with the writing of an archaeology of the present that, under its apparently benign hoards, releases violence emerging from the depths of characters' individual and interdependent lives. Here again, the fact that the material of history should partake of the essence of the archive, allowing for a measure of memory even while erasing it, seems to me to be characteristic of trauma narratives. The diegetised violence is necessarily extended into the performance of the violence meted out on the

character as the latter remains ignorant of the cause of his trauma, even while the reader is only given the faintest of inklings into the possibility—uncertain and provisional as it seems—of accessing an event that is written off as unassimilated. Mc Gregor’s text taps the powers of contradiction to show how both the narrative and its protagonist are, once again, “constituted by the erasure of [their] own witness” (Caruth 2014, 81).

The use of the metalepsis, of belatedness and of the figure of the archive in contemporary trauma fiction seems to me to be indexed on the necessity to account for the violence of trauma not only in terms of its representation or thematisation, but also as a means to go beyond traditional mimesis and *perform* the traumatic experience. In other words, the group of narratives that I have solicited here perform a writing of violence that aims at complementing mere description or representation. In so doing, trauma narratives underline the limitations and reduced capacities of the realistic idiom to call forth violence. They go on to remedy such an incapacity by transforming description and representation, singular as they may be, into an experience of violence as event for the reader. The remainder that trauma constitutes on account of its unassimilable character is aptly called forth and at times made present through the use of a writing of violence that prefers the violent monstrosity of *écriture* to the tamer, more totalising regime of representation. In this respect, the writing of violence evinced and performed by such trauma narratives is dependent on the use of the vulnerable form of fictional testimony, which gropes about and reaches on without managing to embrace, encircle or totalise. In so doing, it depends on a reliance on the present and eschews the enclosing mode of the aorist. The *writing* of violence is a violence and a writing in progress, submitted to the tyranny of a present that throws

time out of joint, prevents any narrative closure, and warrants the ascendancy of performance as literary and ethical event.

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Méta-données

Résumé

Cet article s'intéresse à divers aspects du texte vulnérable et de la vulnérabilité textuelle tels qu'ils s'expriment à travers les représentations fictionnelles du trauma. Il se concentre plus particulièrement sur la violence d'une écriture qui s'enfle pour indirectement figurer et présenter l'événement traumatique non assimilé. Pour ce faire, il envisage le paradoxe dans les termes duquel l'*extremum* de matière est sollicité pour mieux privilégier une logique de la métalepse. Les modalités de cette écriture de la violence se fondent sur des effets rythmiques dont la fonction est de présenter ou de *performer* une absence, une inaccessibilité et une compulsion de répétition qu'alimente la tyrannie de l'après coup. Le texte vulnérable l'est, précisément, en ce qu'il ouvre une voie vers ce qui n'est ni dit ni su, et parce qu'il est subordonné à la présentation de ce qui ne peut qu'être tu, dans la mesure où il s'institue en symptôme rhétorique et figural, exprimant et *performant* tout à la fois une forme d'hétéronomie envers la blessure. Au bout du compte, cet article se concentre sur la figure de l'archive qui produit un autre type de violence en dramatisant la possibilité d'évoquer le vide du trauma à travers l'impossibilité même de cette évocation.

Abstract

The article addresses aspects of the vulnerable text and of textual vulnerability as expressed in fictional representations of trauma. More specifically, it focuses on the violence of a writing that swells up to indirectly evoke and perform the unbearable and unassimilated traumatic event. To do so, it concentrates on the paradox according to which the *extremum* of textual matter is solicited the better to privilege the powers of metalepsis. The modalities of such violent writing are indexed on rhythmical effects whose purpose is to perform an absence, an inaccessibility and a compulsion to repeat that find their origin in the category of belatedness. The vulnerable text is vulnerable, precisely, because it opens up to that which is not said or known, because it is dependent on presenting that which it can only keep silent, and in so far as it becomes a rhetorical or figural symptom, expressing and performing some heteronomy to the wound. Ultimately, the article concentrates on the figure of the archive that performs yet another violence by dramatising the possibility of evoking the void at the origin of trauma through its very impossibility.

Mots clés

après-coup, archive, Caruth, Derrida, Freud, métalepse, performance, trauma, vulnérabilité

Keywords

Archive, belatedness, Caruth, Derrida, Freud, metalepsis, performance, trauma, vulnerability

Notice biographique

Jean-Michel Ganteau est professeur de littérature britannique at l'Université Paul-Valéry–Montpellier 3. Il est responsable de la revue *Études britanniques contemporaines* et a publié deux monographies sur David Lodge et Peter Ackroyd ainsi qu'un ouvrage intitulé *The Ethics and Aesthetics of Vulnerability in Contemporary British Fiction* (Routledge 2015). En collaboration

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Biographical note

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