

Cfa: Special journal issue on Trauma and Multilingualism in Literature

Starting with two pioneering studies in the 1990s – Cathy Caruth’s *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* and Kali Tal’s *Worlds of Hurt: Reading the Literatures of Trauma* – Trauma Studies have demonstrated that language lies at the core of the experience of trauma, although in an unusual way. Indeed, it is nowadays widely recognised that trauma corresponds to an extreme event which challenges the limits of language. It is, in other words, an ‘unspeakable event’ (Caruth 1996 and LaCapra 2001) or an event ‘defined by the subject’s incapacity to respond adequately’ (Laplanche and Pontalis 1973), an experience belonging to ‘discourses of the unsayable’ (Coupland and Coupland 1997). This is due to the fact that trauma is a particular form of memory that struggles to be fully processed. However, despite being an unutterable event (and, therefore, an event beyond language), trauma needs to be transformed into a narrative in order to be located and put in the past (Bessel van der Kolk and Onno van der Hart 1995).

Despite the fact that many contributions have to a significant extent explored how trauma texts work, there are very few studies focusing on the way language works to represent trauma (Busch and McNamara 2020). There are even fewer works about the way in which multiple languages (multilingualism) are used to discuss trauma. This gap is particularly glaring given that experiences of trauma are often set in multilingual backgrounds where languages carry a symbolic power; as such, it represents a productive area in which trauma studies could further advance.

In this Special Issue of an international peer-reviewed journal, we aim to explore the interface between trauma and multilingualism in literary texts. Multilingual writing offers a possible vehicle to narrate trauma; furthermore, it can be used to process traumata inscribed in language such as the Shoah, wartime atrocities, slavery, colonialism, genocide, exile and migration. Through particular multilingual poetics, multilingual texts offer an alternative perspective of these events, often that of underprivileged subjects such as immigrants, guest workers and former colonial subjects. Thus, officially accepted versions of traumata may be challenged and retold in a new way, or individual trauma narrated for the first time.

We welcome articles that focus on theoretical approaches to the interface of trauma and literary multilingualism, as well as analyses of specific case studies, both with a historical perspective and of contemporary literature. We invite submissions on texts by authors who chose different languages than their first one to write about traumatic events such as Jorge Semprún, Ágota Kristóf, Katja Petrowskaja or Giorgio Pressburger; analyses of works written by borderland writers, writers belonging to minorities and politically controversial areas such as Boris Pahor, Fulvio Tomizza, or Juan Marsé, who employ multiple languages (usually code-switching among them) to deal with traumatic events. Furthermore, we are interested in studies of literary texts that apply multilingual aesthetics/poetics to narrate traumata. Topics may include but are not limited to the following aspects:

- How can the relationship between trauma and language/multilingualism in literature be described, and which theories can be applied to analyse it?
- How and why do authors choose their literary languages to narrate trauma?
- Which particular multilingual poetics do authors apply to narrate traumata? Which specific literary strategies do they apply?
- What is the innovative aspect of a multilingual poetical approach to trauma?
- How can trauma be (re)conceived through the multilingual lens?
- What effect does the interface of trauma and literary multilingualism have on readers?

Please send a 300-word abstract in English and a brief bio to sandra.vlasta@gmail.com and mariannadeganutti5@gmail.com by the 15th of October 2022. We will inform accepted authors by the end of October 2022. Submission of completed articles is planned for the end of January 2023.

References

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