
H-France Review Vol. 23 (September 2023), No. 161

Alexandra Onuf and Nicholas Ealy, eds., *Violence, Trauma, and Memory: Responses to War in the Late Medieval and Early Modern World*. Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2022. 270 pp. Figures, notes, bibliography, and index. \$105.00 U.S. (hb). ISBN 9781666914566; \$45.00 U.S. (eb). ISBN 9781666914573.

Review by Brian Sandberg, Northern Illinois University.

Dynastic wars, rebellions, peasant revolts, and religious wars proliferated in late medieval and early modern Europe. Many of these conflicts were long wars that devastated entire regions over protracted periods. The work under review presents a new collection of essays exploring contemporary literary and artistic sources responding to these wars. The editors of this collective volume point out that Europeans experienced “almost constant wars” from the fifteenth through seventeenth centuries (p. 1). The volume is organized into three geographically based sections considering war narratives in France, Spain and its empire, and the Netherlands in the late medieval and early modern periods.

Violence, Trauma, and Memory lies at the intersection of trauma studies and memory studies. Although the field of trauma studies has been concentrated on psychological trauma in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, Alexandra Onuf and Nicholas Ealy argue that “trauma is not a phenomenon limited to the modern period, as psychological wounding—and the witnessing that comes from it in literature, visual culture, and historical records—transcends time and place” (p. 3). The editors point out that Sigmund Freud’s *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) is seen as the “foundational text” in trauma studies, yet Freud himself interpreted a key early modern text, Torquato Tasso’s *Jerusalem Delivered* (1591), in order to expose the repetitive nature of traumatic experiences (pp. 4-5).^[1] Medieval and early modern sources, the editors suggest, can indeed be read using recent approaches to trauma studies that build on Freud’s insight, especially when brought into dialogue with studies of historical memory.^[2] The editors draw on historical studies examining constructions of collective memory and processes of public commemoration, which have been heavily influenced by Pierre Nora’s methodologies and particularly his concept of *lieux de mémoire*.^[3] However, the editors follow Anne Rigney’s critical responses to Nora, asserting that “*lieux de mémoire* might themselves be less stable entities than Nora assumed” (p. 7).^[4] The volume might have considered even broader extensions and criticisms of Pierre Nora’s extremely influential approaches to historical memory.^[5]

In chapter one, Kimberly Lifton offers a close reading of Colins de Beaumont’s poem “On the Crécy Dead,” which contemplates the bodies of thousands of French noblemen killed at the battle of Crécy (August 1346). Colins de Beaumont served as a herald in the aftermath of the battle and

seems to have used his poetry to consider the meaning of death in battle. Lifton finds that “in drawing on the honor system as a framework for understanding the trauma of war, Colins de Beaumont participates in a wider movement within the French nobility to reform chivalry during the Hundred Years’ War” (p. 37). Lifton concludes that the poem became part of the mourning process and a provided a means of “communal processing” (pp. 38-39).

Charles-Louis Morand-Métivier analyzes poems written by Charles, duc d’Orléans (1394-1465), a French nobleman and member of the royal family who was captured at the battle of Agincourt in 1415 and then imprisoned for twenty-five years in England. Chapter two considers how “the traumatic experiences of his forced captivity” shaped Charles d’Orléans’s poetry and related to broader collective trauma of the entire French population after the military disaster at Agincourt (pp. 50-51). Morand-Métivier attempts to read Charles’s position in captivity through the lens of “prison writing.” This seems problematic, however, given Charles d’Orléans’s privileged position as a great nobleman and a political prisoner. The chapter’s exploration of Charles d’Orléans’s poetic exchanges with Philippe III, duc de Bourgogne, is intriguing (pp. 56-60). While the chapter presents this poetic correspondence as a way for Charles d’Orléans to work through his personal trauma, it could instead be understood as a form of diplomatic engagement.

Kathleen Long examines the dead and the grotesque in early seventeenth-century French literature in chapter three. She considers the problem of representing the religious wars and confronting the royal policy of *oubliance* (forgetting the past) in religious peaces, which provided amnesty for combatants except for those accused of atrocities. Drawing on the work of Mack P. Holt and other historians of the religious wars, Long argues that “the threat of this violence proliferating precisely because of such silencing was an accurate assessment of the effect of these edicts, which seemed to lead perpetually to yet more wars” (p. 68). She emphasizes that “hyperviolent genres of writing” including *histoires tragiques*, classical tragedies, epics, and lyrical poems all “evoked the horror of the wars, directly or indirectly” (p. 69). The chapter focuses on the relationships between the monstrous in French literature and the grotesque ornamental style in art. In a key passage, Théodore Agrippa d’Aubigné’s *Les Tragiques* (1616) depicts Catherine de’ Medici as possessed by Satan and consumed with her project of building the Tuileries Palace, while obscuring the reality of mass murder during the Saint Bartholomew’s Day Massacre. Meanwhile, *L’Isle des hermaphrodites* (1605) presents a satirical image of a magnificent palace that has a “mysterious interior” that is seemingly devoid of living people. Both texts present disturbing imagery of royal palaces that effectively unsettles sovereignty. Long concludes that “both the epic poem *Les Tragiques* and the novel *L’Isle des hermaphrodites* evoke the grotesque aesthetics of designs such as those of Vredeman de Vries to convey the horror not only of the French Wars of Religion but also of the projects designed to both cover over them and justify them” (p. 87).

Nicholas Ealy provides an interpretation of desire and conflict in Fernando de Rojas’s *Celestina* (1502) in chapter four. Ealy’s analysis focuses on the star-crossed lovers Calisto and Melibea, who both die tragically in this work, and on Melibea’s father Pleberio, who suffers from his daughter’s suicidal death. Ealy also explores the figure of Cupid, god of desire, as attacking human lovers with his bow and arrows, and leaving deep wounds. “Such a confluence of wounding and war in *Celestina* finds a theoretical parallel in contemporary approaches to the study of trauma, first arising in the twentieth century as a means of explaining the ‘nervous disorders’, similar to the anxiety and terror of the *Picatrix*, experienced by soldiers after the horrors of battle” (p. 99).

In chapter five, Ivan Gracia-Arnau considers royalist and rebel printed propaganda during the Catalan Revolt, also known as the War of the Reapers (1640–1652). He juxtaposes conflicting accounts of the initial popular insurrection in Barcelona on 7 June 1640, during which the viceroy of Spain either died or was murdered. Gracia-Arnau’s methodology stresses the importance of “paying attention to the representations of the violence carried out by the armed crowd. The main aim is to identify what was hidden, what was exaggerated, and what was manipulated in the narratives written during the Catalan revolt” (p. 118).

Covadonga Lamar Prieto’s essay (chapter six) assesses trauma and postmemory of Martín Cortés’s uprising in New Spain in 1565.[6] This is the only essay in the volume to consider European empires and geographic regions beyond Europe. Prieto focuses on an eyewitness account by Juan Suárez de Peralta of the trial and execution of nobles who participated in the revolt, as well as a later account by Luis de Sandoval Zapata that depicts the events very differently. The essay considers how *criollo* identity played an important role in the revolt. Martín Cortés and his followers were *criollos* (Spanish colonial elites who had been born in New Spain) who aimed to promote a patriotic attachment to New Spain, which Suárez de Peralta’s text helped articulate. By the time Sandoval Zapata wrote his account in the seventeenth century, “there was already a sense of a colonial past, both for Europeans and *criollos*” (p. 151).

Art historian Rachel Wise examines Hendrick Goltzius’s *Lucretia* series of four engravings in chapter seven, offering a political reading of the prints. The *Lucretia* engravings were composed and executed in 1578–1580, as the Union of Utrecht (1579) was being negotiated and implemented. Wise argues that “Portraying Lucretia’s account as a series...allowed Goltzius to explicate and draw parallels between Lucretia’s narrative and the Dutch Revolt” (p. 169). The engravings depict a banquet scene, Lucretia and her handmaidens spinning, the rape of Lucretia, and finally her suicide. The chapter contextualizes the Lucretia engravings through a discussion of sexual violence and political abuse in the Dutch Revolt, drawing on Amanda Pipikin’s impressive recent study of rape in the Dutch Republic.[7] Rape metaphors and accusations of rape and pillage by Spanish troops abound in contemporary Dutch pamphlets, prints, and medals, such as through the figure of the Maid of Holland. Wise concludes that “out of the ravishing and suicide of Lucretia, a new republic was born, thus offering an overriding message of optimism to the war-torn city of Haarlem and, more broadly, to the rebels” (p. 187).

In the final essay (chapter eight), Alexandra Onuf offers an art historical analysis of Claes Visscher’s landscape print series, *Regiunculae et Villae et Villae Aliquot Ducatus Brabantiae* (1612). Onuf argues that Visscher’s prints were far more than simple landscape scenes of Brabant, since the prints were produced during the Twelve Years’ Truce (1609–1621), a precarious peace between the nascent Dutch Republic and the Spanish monarchy. The chapter emphasizes that “initially, many celebrated the Twelve Years’ Truce not just because of the cessation of hostilities, but also because it offered the prospect of a newly peaceful and united Netherlands” (p. 204). Allegorical figures and maps of Belgica (often depicted as a lion) continued to be popular, often depicting a unified Netherlands. Onuf links Visscher’s bucolic landscapes of Brabant to this broader nostalgia for a lost peaceful countryside as it had presumably existed prior to the Dutch Revolt. Of course, Protestant exiles in the Dutch Republic could not return to Brabant in the southern Netherlands, which were under Spanish rule. As a result, Onuf concludes, “these images of Brabant could serve as the visual loci of memory upon which to imagine new identities and places of community in the Dutch Republic” (p. 220).

Violence, Trauma, and Memory succeeds in bringing together disparate lines of research on trauma and memory in medieval and early modern French, Spanish, and Dutch literary and artistic sources. Many of the essays utilize common approaches to trauma, drawing on recent psychological studies of trauma and wounds. Employing more anthropological, historical, and sociological approaches to war, violence, and trauma might have offered a broader array of methodological tools for reading medieval and early modern sources.[8] Histories of war and modern memory could have offered different perspectives on the experiences of war, the construction of wartime memories, and the commemorations of wars.[9] Nonetheless, this collective volume signals that medieval and early modern literary scholars and art historians are actively considering violence, war, and trauma in new ways.

NOTES

[1] Sigmund Freud, "Beyond the Pleasure Principle," in James Strachey, ed. and trans., *The Standard Edition of the Complete Works of Sigmund Freud* (London: Hogarth, 1955), vol. 18, pp. 7-64.

[2] The editors draw especially on: Erika Kuijpers, Judith Pollmann, Johannes Müller, and Jasper van der Steen, eds., *Memory before Modernity: Practices of Memory in Early Modern Europe* (Leiden: Brill, 2013); Judith Pollman, *Memory in Early Modern Europe, 1500-1800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017); Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996); Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985).

[3] Pierre Nora, ed., *Les Lieux de mémoire*, 3 vols. (Paris: Gallimard, 1984-1992); Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*," *Representations* 26 (1989): 7-24.

[4] Ann Ringley, "The Dynamics of Remembrance: Text between Monumentality and Morphing," in Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning, eds., *A Companion to Culture Memory Studies* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2010), pp. 345-353.

[5] On history and memory studies: Michael Rothberg, "Introduction: Between Memory and Memory: From *Lieux de Mémoire* to *Noeuds de Mémoire*," *Yale French Studies* 118/119 (2010): 3-12; Hue-Tam Ho Tai, "Remembered Realms: Pierre Nora and French National Memory," *American Historical Review* 106, no. 3 (2001): 906-922.

[6] On postmemory, see: Emmanuel Alloa, Pierre Bayard, and Soko Phay, "Figurations of Postmemory: An Introduction," *Journal of Literature and Trauma Studies* 4, 1 (Spring/Fall 2015): 1-12; Russell J.A. Kilbourn and Eleanor Ty, *The Memory Effect: The Remediation of Memory in Literature and Film* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2013); Marianne Hirsch, "Surviving Images: Holocaust Photographs and the Work of Postmemory." *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 14, 1 (Spring 2001): 5-37.

[7] Amanda Pipkin, *Rape in the Republic: Formulating Dutch Identity* (Leiden: Brill, 2013).

[8] On anthropological, historical, and sociological approaches to war, violence, and trauma: Philip Dwyer, "Violence and its Histories: Meanings, Methods, Problems," *History and Theory* 56 (2017): 7-22; Dominick LaCapra, "Trauma, History, Memory, Identity: What Remains?" *History and Theory* 55, no. 3 (2016): 375-400; Susan Broomhall and Veena Das, *Life and Words: Violence and Descent into the Ordinary* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007); Oren Baruch Stier and J. Shawn Landres, eds., *Religion, Violence, Memory, and Place* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 2006); Veena Das, Arthur Kleinman, Mamphela Ramphele, and Pamela Reynolds, eds., *Violence and Subjectivity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); Primo Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, trans. Raymond Rosenthal (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1988).

[9] On war, memory, and commemoration: Patrick H. Hutton, "Philosophical Reflections on the Ways of Memory and History," *History and Theory* 57 (2018): 292-305; Duncan Bell, ed., *Memory, Trauma and World Politics* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006); Jay Winter, *Remembering War: The Great War between Memory and History in the Twentieth Century* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2006); Jay Winter, *Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Gary B. Nash, Charlotte Crabtree, and Ross E. Dunn, eds., *History on Trial: Culture Wars and the Teaching of the Past* (New York: Vintage Books, 1997).

Brian Sandberg
Northern Illinois University
bsandberg@niu.edu

Copyright © 2023 by the Society for French Historical Studies, all rights reserved. The Society for French Historical Studies permits the electronic distribution of individual reviews for nonprofit educational purposes, provided that full and accurate credit is given to the author, the date of publication, and the location of the review on the H-France website. The Society for French Historical Studies reserves the right to withdraw the license for redistribution/republication of individual reviews at any time and for any specific case. Neither bulk redistribution/republication in electronic form of more than five percent of the contents of *H-France Review* nor republication of any amount in print form will be permitted without permission. For any other proposed uses, contact the Editor-in-Chief of H-France. The views posted on *H-France Review* are not necessarily the views of the Society for French Historical Studies.

ISSN 1553-9172