

Letter from the Issue Editors

Violence is a pervasive phenomenon touching individual and community lives in ways that are oftentimes difficult to foresee or detect. From the violence of war to the subtle annihilation of personal and communal freedom in oppressive regimes, from physical to spiritual mutilation, or the struggle to cope with past traumas, violence inscribes itself in the memory and physical being of victims and witnesses, finding expression in (hi)stories of survival or defeat that stand proof to the human ability to cope with aggression.

The present collection of studies, entitled *Inscriptions on the Body: Violence and Its Encodings in Literature and Film*, captures some of the contexts and ideological implications of aggression in its various guises as reflected in the literature, films and theatrical tradition of the Western World and of Eastern Europe, covering a wide range of topics and offering a starting point for further exploration. That was the aim of the conference organised at Alexandru Ioan Cuza University in November 2010, where these studies were presented in an intimate yet very engaging academic setting. Some of the discussions inspired by the presentations have made their way in the final versions of these studies, which are in many ways representative of the range of topics and approaches from that conference.

The two papers opening this special issue present conflict and scarring as performative acts in a colonial and postcolonial setting at the end of the eighteenth century. **David Worrall**'s claim is that a clash of two armies formerly sharing a common theatre culture goes beyond the limits of combat zone, taking the nevertheless violent form of a battle of theatricalities. In "Theatre in the Combat Zone: The Military Theatricals at Philadelphia, 1778" the author looks at a series of theatre performances taking place on both sides of the military combat zone outside Philadelphia, right before an inspired American attack that was to drive the British away. The author argues that apart from counteracting the similar theatrical activity of the British as a statement of political and cultural power, the American performances represent an assessment of a new American Republic culture, soon followed by a military victory.

Eighteenth-century imperial theatre is also the topic of the following study. **Georgina Lock** steers the discussion towards inscriptions of war onto the bodies of women soldiers turned into stage performers, who exploited their scars for dramatic purposes. Hannah Snell, Deborah Sampson Gannett and Pauline Cushman, former British soldiers serving their country abroad, enjoyed great

popularity in their native England with performances of their military exploits, turning their wounds into testimonies of valiance and commitment to their nation – indirectly paying service to their sex by gaining them honour and cultural value in unprecedented ways.

Lucia Opreanu's interest is in postcolonial times. She uses Graham Swift's novels *Out of This World* and *Waterland*, both set in Britain during and soon after World War II, as examples of oblique representations of the destructions of war, where the sites of violence are shifted from the outside to the human souls of those experiencing war first hand or mediated by testimonials, in verbal or visual form. Both novels, the author contends, use the war as a mere backdrop for the psychological drama at the heart of families left confused and spiritually maimed by the violence in their world, recording history through all means (writing, transcribing and putting together victims' testimonials, or photographing the realities of war) as a form of coping with trauma and of healing, in an attempt to escape a cycle of violence embedded in their family history.

The four papers following dwell on a series of American narratives, two of which belong to African American author Alice Walker. **Oana Cogeanu**'s paper "Inscriptions on the African Body: Alice Walker's *Possessing The Secret Of Joy*" reminds us that the female body may be the site of patriarchal authority in action through a violent mutilation of the female genitalia, endowed with symbolic value. Attempting to reconnect with a culture she only knows from mythologising narratives, the protagonist of the novel undergoes a female circumcision only to discover, the author contends, that she has fallen into the same trap as other fellow African women, allowing her disempowerment as woman and free individual by yielding her body to unnecessary violence, and losing a significant part of her soul in the process.

The traumatic aspects of a rite of passage affect the victims of violent grasping of reality in different ways. The painful, self-inflicted and assumed scarrification in Walker's novel is part of a larger plan of coping with racial discrimination and the numerous other effects of displacement and enslavement—essential aspects of African American identity. For Myop, the little girl in "The Flowers", violence is something experienced only obliquely, without understanding the full implications of a reality that terrifies even without revealing its true significance. **Anca Viusenco**'s "Violence through the Lens of Innocence: Reflections on Alice Walker's 'The Flowers'" focuses on the writer's ability to capture the perversity of violence as seen through the innocent eyes of a child, foreign to such notions as hate crime or racial conflict, the author being particularly interested in the ways in which the text denies clarification and opts for a more subtle and poetic prose instead.

The American tradition of the western as a genuinely American genre deriving its material from the narrative treatment of violence – onto fellow

travellers, indigenous populations, rivals, outlaws, and, though long ignored, on nature itself – is the topic of “Conquered Landscape in the American West”. An exercise in ecocriticism, **Irina Chirica**’s paper makes a compelling argument for a more nuanced discussion of the effects of westward expansion on the nature of the North American continent, foregrounding the remarkable differences in world view and behavioural patterns between the Native Americans and the Anglo-American settlers, and the latter’s violent inscribings of new borders and territories onto the body of the land. Though the West was “won”, the energies of violence at work in the early days of westward expansion never disappeared, even if the great heroes of the literary and film genre did. **Gianina Roman**’s “The Urban Shift of the Western: Inscriptions of Violence in Cormac McCarthy’s *No Country For Old Men*” looks at the refashioning of the genre in literature and film long after its glory days, commenting on how the novel’s complex narrative and unconventional treatment of the theme of violence are incorporated in the film adaptation of the novel under the direction of the Coen brothers.

Mihaela Mudure and **Ilinca-Miruna Diaconu** look into an aspect of twentieth-century European history that continues to be relevant to the peoples of former communist countries of the Eastern Bloc: political oppression as a form of physical and psychological aggression. **Mihaela Mudure**’s study “Romania as a Trauma: Considerations Upon Romanian-American Literature” focuses on three contemporary Romanian-American authors, Domnica Radulescu, Alta Ifland, and Petru Popescu, whose works do more than expose the harsh and grim realities of communist Romania. The novels function as a means to understand the profound implications a life in terror and uncertainty – be it connected with procuring food or other basic supplies, or with the constant fear of being reported to the secret police – could have on the victims of the Ceaușescu oppressive regime. Apart from highlighting the differences in style and approach between these three writers, **Mihaela Mudure** makes a strong argument for the autobiographical character of the texts analysed, claiming that they reflect the writers’ traumatic experience of displacement and integration, after an equally traumatic coping with the dehumanising forces of communism.

Totalitarianism and its traumatising mechanisms is also the topic of **Ilinca-Miruna Diaconu**’s “Symbolic Violence in Tengiz Abuladze’s *Repentance*”, a study of the filmic reworking of the realities of 1980s Georgia in an allegorical mode, with touches of surrealism. Abuladze’s award-winning film is here analysed from a strictly ideological perspective, the author channeling her discussion on three main issues that she considers essential to the film’s representation of the horrors of communist dystopias: the loss of individualism, the undermining of communitarian harmony, and the wiping out of the boundary between oppressor and oppressed.

The study that completes this series is a felicitous addition to the exploration of the cultural effects of ideological oppression, pointing to a linguistic counteraction to excessive censorship: slang. In “Descriptions of the Body: Violence in the Subcultures of Contemporary Romanian Youth”, **Daniela Dobos** connects the outburst of violence and licentiousness in the various forms of public expression available since the 1990s to an increased visibility of slang, a subtle form of resistance to the purging forces at work in the Romanian language, fully supported by an all-controlling totalitarian regime. Some of the writers of our time, the author explains, were quick to respond to the needs of younger audiences to read the language of their own generation in the pages of contemporary prose or poetry books – a form of cultural liberation that was not welcomed by all critics or readers. The author herself is one of them, her perception of the violence *in* the language of youth taking the more serious form of violence *to* the language, considering that verbal aggressiveness is only a mirroring of inner aggressive impulses and a preoccupation with the baser aspects of life which the author fears have become too much part of Romanian mentality and behaviour.

Far from exhausting the topic announced by the title, the studies included in this special issue of LINGUACULTURE aim to offer different views on the question of violence as a universal human experience, and its immediate and long-lasting effects on individuals and societies. In the following pages we invite you to experience an interesting mix of vantage points and styles of analysis – of young and experienced researchers from Romania and Great Britain – reflecting the current trends in trauma and violence transdisciplinary studies. We hope this scholarly venture will prove an interesting and useful reading experience.