emotion. Moving beyond a critique of emotion, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* helps us think through emotions that can be expanded to include different affects as an active means of making the world.


Reviewed by Kimberly W. Segall, Seattle Pacific University

How do literary critics assess postcolonial literature, which often moves among narration of historical details, traumatic events, and postmodern techniques of stream of consciousness or dream-like segments? What theoretical schools have emerged to describe literature after colonization, after war, after the Holocaust, and are there connections among them? How do critics make sense of the obvious gap between violence and writing?

*Postcolonial Narrative and the Work of Mourning* is part of a recent trend to redefine the postcolonial in relation to trauma studies, which emphasizes how atrocity cannot be represented. This theoretical emphasis aligns well with Gayatri Spivak’s polemical question, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” What makes these theoretical trends a bit discordant, as Durrant himself argues, is that the “postcolonial” literary project is often defined as claiming identities and defining historical losses from the perspective of the colonized, a kind of redemptive project. Whereas trauma studies, emerging out of Holocaust studies, challenges any redeeming metanarratives (even to the extent that Adorno’s famous adage that there should be no lyrical poetry after the Holocaust is taken as a warning against the way language has a mimetic or beautify-
ing impact, thereby making historical representations of atrocity potentially suspicious or inadequate). Where does Sam Durrant position himself in this struggle between postcolonial authors' focus on the redemptive task of healing the past, or claiming new identifications, and trauma studies' focus on interpreting breaks within the text as signs of irremediable loss? In *Postcolonial Narrative and the Work of Mourning*, Durrant falls into the theoretical camp of Holocaust studies, wherein the critic analyzes the difficulties of representing violence, pointing out the way texts refuse readers' attempts to find closure or a single prominent meaning. While arguably one could cite Frantz Fanon and Homi Bhabha as the true founders of the combined approach of positioning psychology next to racial representations, Durrant adopts Freudian and other trauma studies theories as a way to locate "an aesthetics—or ethics—of incompleteness" (114). My critique not only assesses Durrant's interpretive lens as applied to works by Toni Morrison, Wilson Harris, and J.M. Coetzee, but also more broadly analyzes how this critical work attempts to combine Holocaust studies and postcolonial theory. Specifically, while Durrant provides an astute reading of melancholy in these texts, his reading strategy focuses on the figure of the obscure, the inconsolable, and racial melancholy, a tactic with great potential and some possible pitfalls.

By sorting through a vast amount of criticism on Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, and by delineating a reading strategy with clear memory terms, Durrant's book serves as a helpful analytical tool. Overall, Durrant's insightful idea on Morrison's work is that "coming to terms with one's personal history involves reconciling oneself to the fact that one can never come to terms with one's collective history," if you are from a community that has been "racially marked" by the dominant culture in a negative way (84). Durrant's clear exposition of Morrison's work delineates cultural memory, recollections of a specific era or cultural traditions, in opposition to racialized memory, which refers to external and internalized negative associations with the body of the black subaltern. While there are many insights in this reading, I have two central theoretical contentions: at times,
this idea of racialized memory seems abstract and fatalistically negative, and the "mythic" status of the violence of the past seems a bit of an over-reading of Morrison.

For instance, Durrant accurately exposes a historical trajectory of racist violation leading to family violence, as in The Bluest Eye, where the sexual abuse by white men precedes a father's rape of his daughter. Yet, Durrant argues for an "excess" of "racial memory," not just prior historical violations (82). The idea of "inherited memory of collective negation" remains in the realm of the abstract, and despite multiple disclaimers of biological "determinism," this idea of "racial memory" as a "bodily memory" is hard to grasp (80). Later, a more overt link to psychoanalysis is helpful: racial memory is "a melancholic identification with the dead" (80). The dead that Durrant refers to are the millions who died in slavery and on the Middle Passage. What I take this to mean (since I reject some of the mystical embodiments Durrant sometimes leaps toward) is that the melancholy and violence of many of Morrison's characters reflect not only the present moment and past experienced violations, but also a deeper sense that one's cultural group has been persecuted on the basis of skin color. While sorting through Durrant's theoretical approach, I find myself seeking more concrete details about how these theories work in a text; for instance, how is this "collective racial memory" formed (89)? This interesting concept could be elaborated on and related to evidence from Morrison's texts; otherwise, it is in danger of reifying the horror of the past as a mystical site and creating a fatalistic contagion of violence for lower-class blacks. Despite the otherwise astute reading of Morrison, the focus on the "mytical" comes too close to the idea of an innate violent nature that is passed on through embodied collective memory—the realm of stereotypes. In contrast, historicism places experienced violence, including the knowledge of a history of racism, as the source of these internalizations and acts of familial violence.

Durrant's approach rejects the idea that postcolonial literature is a "recuperative, historicizing project" (7). So, on the one hand, Durrant claims to avoid historicizing approaches; at the same time,
he believes that to avoid repeating the patterns of the past, literature must perform a “never-ending labor of remembrance” (8). Referencing Leela Gandhi’s work, Durrant rejects the notion that postcolonial literature works as a “therapeutic retrieval of the past” (qtd. in Durrant 8). Literature becomes postcolonial when it mourns the erasure of minorities, presenting an ethical strategy for reminders of loss: refusing closure, rejecting the therapeutic. However, despite these disclaimers about closure and the psychoanalytical model that quests for a sense of narrative and ending, Durrant does study the degree to which the postcolonial authors in his case studies “attempt to assign a limit to the work of mourning” (10). Is this not a strategy to find if the authors attempt to bring a measure of closure (and thus healing) to the characters in their novels?

My second minor contention concerns Durrant’s claim that “Morrison’s novels constitute a mode of working through” (83). The idea of working through could use a bit more defining, since Durrant uses it in Freudian terms, not as a therapeutic telling of a story that allows for understanding, but rather in the sense of the uncanny, where violence is repeated as a type of death drive—hence, his example that Cholly’s rape of his daughter, after the father’s experience of sexual abuse, is a form of “working through” (83). Durrant’s interpretation thereby exemplifies an ethics of failure, following Cathy Caruth: because the victim’s memory is not fully recoverable, a text should show the failure to work out injury.

Through careful explication of critical work on memory tropes in Morrison’s oeuvre, Durrant contrasts his ideas with other critics. For instance, he quotes Barbara Freeman’s argument that Beloved performs the sublime, so that characters can momentarily encounter a history that is so horrific it becomes an absent presence in their lives. Durrant’s basic premise reiterates Freeman, except for when Freeman sees the sublime as a form that allows moments for mourning this historical violence. Instead, Durrant argues that this horrific glimpse, or the “racial sublime,” is part of the problem. The sublimation of negative racialization,
entrenched because of a prehistory of slavery, extends, in some ways, Paul Gilroy’s argument of “racial terror” in *Beloved*, which Durrant cross-references (126). More specifically, Durrant’s idea is that the collective presence of racism embeds itself within collective memories and the body, leading to patterns of violation. Again, this mystical inheritance (as opposed to textual evidence of a history of racism) seems, at points, problematic and fatalistic.

Just as Durrant contrasts his theorizing of Toni Morrison’s work with critical work on the sublime, so too does my work on Coetzee contrast with Durrant’s, for I carefully outline Coetzee’s literary strategy of a sublimation of historical experience. I analyze how the traumatic sublime leads (via the process of writing and dreaming and speaking) to a particular illumination of one’s self and others. Durrant’s foci on the abject and rituals of melancholia are quite different, for they embrace Freud’s uncanny, where the ego’s death drive to obliterate itself does not shift the gaze to another. Durrant then follows Kristeva’s theories of abject space, where characters deny and deconstruct themselves. Thus, abjection describes a defamiliarizing of the self; the abject body “no longer operat[es] as a sign of the human”; this dehumanization becomes the point of identification with the subaltern (36). While the radical alienation proposed by Durrant is intriguing, it seems like an escape out of linguistic and cultural boundaries—at times, a bit of a utopian, ahistorical critique of Coetzee. The language of metamorphosis, rife in *Age of Iron* and *Disgrace*, suggests a transformative, although incomplete, movement in Coetzee’s novels, which is different from Durrant’s notion of the “abject body.” Durrant admits that this “‘contamination’ of self and other is precisely the opposite of the transcendent movement of an empathic identification” (36).

I hesitate to uphold Durrant’s disease metaphor here; his language of contamination implies a mysterious spread of trauma throughout society, as if traumatic literature constructs a “community” of infectious abjection (113). Similarly, I find Durrant’s claim that dream identifications are a place where the self and the other are “inseparable” a bit grandiose. The sublimation of experiences
creates identifications, but not an inseparability of identities in the dream realm.

Durrant focuses on the "aesthetics—or ethics—of incompleteness" (114), which is a slightly different dynamic than the "double thoughts" that Coetzee analyzes in his essay on "Confession and Double Thoughts" [Doubling the Point (Harvard UP 1992)]. Examining what is obscured or incomplete in the text is distinct from the idea of an unwilling confession, an illumination of the innermost self, a sublime recognition. Coetzee’s terms, a “crisis of illumination” (262), and the development of his protagonists suggest a relational model and sublime epiphanies. There is a slight contrast here with Durrant’s “aesthetics—or ethics—of incompleteness”: a “model of subjectivity in which the self, far from accruing a history and an identity like so much cultural capital, instead comes to an awareness of its infinite obligation toward others” (114). Does a deconstructed self always look towards another? How does this process occur in Durrant’s model? These postmodern ethics feel a bit vague. In contrast with Stuart Hall’s location of a transcultural subjectivity as an ethical foundation, Durrant characterizes a lost self, adrift in melancholy, which thus desires other oppressed figures (112).

Durrant’s approach does not focus on illumination; instead, the mystical focus on the obscure keeps the violations of others sacred. Likewise, the theory of the abject as a method for the dominant culture to relate to the subaltern moves into the realm of the mystical: when the Magistrate has a mildly sensuous, disturbing infatuation with a tortured girl and kneels at her feet, Durrant interprets this as a sign of inconsolable mourning with a posture that implies the “sacred nature of our responsibility to the other,” drawing on Levinas’ theory of the “other as the incarnation of God” (44). While I am drawn to the ethic of responsibility in Durrant’s perspective, I want an explanation of the obscurity and sexual politics in this scene, which perform an erasure of the woman in the Magistrate’s bed. Her obliteration hardly feels ethical; criticism of the abject and the sacred does not fully take the woman into account.
While "unceasing mourning" as a theory of the postmodern promotes an ethical commitment to remember and mourn the violence of history, more detail on the incomplete nature of recollection as a type of dangerous obliteration and sexual embodiment within Coetzee's work would round this reading off a bit more. Anyone who has taught Coetzee's novels in the classroom will find students demanding an explanation of Coetzee's sexual politics. I am uncertain if Durrant's theory of unceasing mourning can deal with the sexual power plays in Coetzee's texts.

While I like the way Durrant shows the tension between "memorialization and antimemorialization, mourning and melancholia," I am uncertain about his encampment not only in antimemorialization, but also in the valorization of the obscure (87). Returning to his reading of Morrison, his idea that "racial identity is partly grounded on what we are unable to remember" (87) contains a mystical leap to the unknowable, which extends past the very explicit references to past violations in Morrison's texts, many of which Durrant lists, but then places in a mythical space. For instance, what few critics, Durrant included, spell out is how there is a brief mention in Beloved of a teenage girl who has been locked away for her entire life in a shed and repeatedly sexually abused. This historical origin of Beloved is different from Durrant's reading that "the baby returns" (90). Postcolonial literature, as a way of representing the oppressed, marks out the violated space of the subaltern with an image, claims Durrant (following Spivak's model), that is the space of the disappeared, and thus, an image of death (16).

In celebrating Spivak's focus on a silenced subaltern and applauding the author's retrieval of aphasic, disembodied symbols of the past, Durrant gives the reader a sense of the impossible task of representing the horror of the past. However, Durrant elides the way that Spivak not only suggests a tactic, but also draws attention to a problem: the problematic deletion of the Other. Durrant argues that "all three writers bear witness to the denial of subjectivity at the heart of racial oppression by denying their specters the status of fully realized characters. These specters remain unhomely or
uncanny subjects precisely because the narratives are unable to render them familiar by retrieving their respective histories" (18). Applying this to Morrison, we see Beloved as an unhomely ghost. However, one might argue that Beloved is not the dead baby killed by her mother; rather, following Morrison’s reference, she is an actual, disturbed teenager whose presence recalls the traumatic experiences of Sethe and others in the community. My more concrete reading here suggests that this adolescent takes on the status of the gothic sublime because of the community’s repressed terror. Thus, she exemplifies a collective sublimation; however, she also has a very historical origin. This tension over the redemptive or anti-redemptive, memorial or counter-memorial, is also seen as Durrant defends Coetzee’s works where protagonists, like Magda, cannot find meaningful dialogue with black South Africans.

In contrast, Wilson Harris’ “vision of redemption renders his novels ahistorical fantasy” (59). Durrant later places a more positive spin on Harris through a deconstructive interpretation of the Caribbean writer’s work, yet he remains critical of what he terms “redemptive nostalgia” (62). However, is this dislike of redemptive trends and partial closure a white luxury, with which Coetzee and Beckett can challenge the readers, while many postcolonial authors want a voice and identification separate from the colonizer’s inscriptions?

Is it a cultural lens for a critic to self-select and judge which novel is the more ethical or correct remembrance of the past? If Coetzee and Harris each gave an elegy at a funeral in very different styles, would one be ethical while the other “nostalgic” of a pre-Holocaust and Enlightenment ideology? Or does Harris as a Caribbean writer reside outside the Enlightenment verses post-Enlightenment boxes? The central problem of applying Nietzsche to Wilson Harris’ work is the cultural dislocation. While Holocaust studies honors the horrific experiences of the past, and even as cynicism about healing the past is in vogue, must all authors, from all cultures, take up this literary mode? The insistent placement of Harris next to Nietzsche can be seen in critiques such as the following by Durrant: “The radical import of Harris’s witnessing of
history only becomes clear if one sees his art as a postsecular, postnihilist mode of remembrance" (62). While Durrant's approach works better with the other two authors, his insistence on a Nietzschean reading of Wilson Harris feels a bit forced.

The tension between recollection and forgetting is an important dialectic; however, what I find a bit constrained is the embedding of these works in one of two camps: memorializing or counter-memorializing. For instance, almost all of the novels have a degree of closure at the end, except for Coetzee's *Foe* with its final dream scene. And yet, even *Foe*, because of its intertextuality, plays this open confrontation against the closed circuit of both Roxanne and Crusoe. A measure of closure is desired for reader satisfaction at the end of a novel, and in psychoanalysis, partial closure is sought for a full narration of traumatic experience. The experiences of these authors' characters are not simply repetitions of horrific events (such as rape or a hanging). As my reading here shows, critics of Coetzee, Morrison, and Harris actively battle over interpretations of memory tropes, and in this respect Durrant makes a valuable, distinct contribution.

For myself, I respond to these literary works and react to Holocaust studies by using a dialectical frame of recollection and forgetting that values the novel's partial closure, its sublime transfigurations. I find myself questioning Durrant's book, asking: what are the limitations of Holocaust studies? Does Durrant's celebration of Eurocentric theories and post-Holocaust studies jargon place all racist movements of annihilation next to the genocide of Hitler's Germany? And, as we look at the Jewish state of Israel, especially its uncanny repetition of destroying Palestinians with occupied settlements and ghetto walls, are there ways in which applauding the anti-memorial and the unspeakable have not worked through, or brought enough reconciled healing, to avoid repeating the past? Coming from a Jewish extended family, I must ask if aesthetics are political, because Durrant's skepticism of the therapeutic, while honoring the horror of violence, does not, at least for me, quite match my ideal interpretive ethics. Overall, while I appreciated Durrant's skillful assessment of these postcolonial
authors and enjoyed the challenge of applying another interpretive frame to their works, I found myself in the margins of Durrant's text, scribbling another response.


Reviewed by Jenny Edbauer, Pennsylvania State University

In his article "Agonizing Affection: Affect and Nation in Early America," Peter Coviello argues that in the earliest years of the republic, geographical or social unity alone could not force a sense of citizenship to emerge. However, certain founders such as Thomas Jefferson were able to imagine an "affective unity" for the young nation, a unity that "pre-dates and so authorizes its political unity" (443) [Early American Literature 37 (2002): 439-68]. More specifically, the sympathetic experience of pain sponsored (the capacity for) national citizenship, creating an emotional state of "the people" that Jefferson and other founders needed as a reference point. The loss of brotherhood with Britain, which led to the loss of a once firm national identity, became the sponsor of a new form of affective citizenship. Yet Coviello points out that Jefferson also used affect as a measurement of differences between whites and blacks. In his *Notes on the State of Virginia*, Jefferson remarks that blacks do experience pain, yet those experiences "are less felt, and sooner forgotten with them" (qtd. in Coviello 447). An "improper quality" of feeling thus operates as a rationale for withholding citizenship from blacks. Coviello suggests that Jefferson did not believe that blacks could not feel, but rather that they were not capable of feeling with the proper "proportion, regulation, or intensity" that citizenship demanded. Since feeling