

Stef Craps. *Trauma and Ethics in the Novels of Graham Swift: No Short-Cuts to Salvation*. Brighton and Portland: Sussex Academic Press, 2005.
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This is a good book about a major British novelist. It deserves to be widely known and discussed among those interested in Swift's novels. In eight chapters Craps analyzes the critical and scholarly reception of Swift's fictions, and discusses each of Swift's novels in a thoroughly intelligent manner. The introduction to the book sets out Craps's approach to Swift's work. It derives from what Craps calls "trauma studies." Craps argues that Swift's characters have to deal with historical, personal, and generally human traumas in their pasts. He further argues that what Swift's fictions show is the necessity of confronting trauma and "working through" it (3), but without containing it within "redemptive, totalizing narratives" (3). The best result that Swift suggests in some texts is a movement towards "open-ended inquiry" and learning "to enter into non-totalizing relationships with other people" (3-4).

Chapter 1 develops Craps's theoretical position, arguing that his approach is part of a renewed interest in ethics in literary studies since the late 1980s, after the rhetorical analysis (he means deconstruction) and new historicist/cultural materialist positions of earlier decades, both of which rendered literary studies indifferent to or downright hostile to ethics (5-6). Craps suggests that ethical approaches to literature come in two kinds: "neo-humanist" ethical theory that stresses the importance of literature in imagining and bringing the reader close to the other (7); and "deconstructive" ethical theory that stresses the responsibility of each of us to the irreducible otherness of the other, and advocates "a non-appropriative encounter with the other" (7-8). Craps then connects this with trauma theory, which he sees as also being preoccupied with "the demands of otherness" (9), that is the sheer obscene unspeakable quality of trauma, which is uncontainable within traditional schemes, but which it is imperative to think about and, finally, to act upon (9-13). Craps closes chapter 1 with a discussion of Swift's critical reception (14-24). In this he distinguishes three ways of discussing Swift: a textualist one (represented by Linda Hutcheon, for example) that sees Swift as a metafictional novelist, scrutinizing the power and the problems of narratives; one that focuses on the ethical

dimensions of Swift's novels, especially their engagement with trauma (Craps mentions here Wendy Wheeler, Ernst van Alphen, and Tamás Bényei); and one that suggests Swift is a traditional nineteenth-century novelist with a clear moral agenda (Susanne Mecklenburg is the scholar whom Craps most identifies with this way of reading Swift). Craps makes it clear that he does not have much time for the third approach, but identifies himself with the second, although acknowledging that the first, in its focus on narration and narrative, provides him with textual underpinning for his arguments (24).

The remaining seven chapters discuss each of Swift's novels in chronological order. Chapter 2 deals with *The Sweet-Shop Owner* as an examination of response to trauma and the evasions that its principal characters, Willy and Irene, engage in to neutralize terrible experience, and the deadly consequences of these evasions. Only in the Chapmans' rebellious daughter Dorothy is there a hint at the possibilities of doing something better. Chapter 3 looks closely and subtly at *Shuttlecock*, particularly at its epiphanic and ecstatic conclusion, arguing that scholarship has hitherto misunderstood Prentis's development as a movement towards maturity, rather than (in Craps's view) one bedeviled by obfuscation, self-centredness, and evasion of trauma that will later lead to catastrophe. Chapter 3 takes on *Waterland*, Swift's most celebrated and most intensely (and aridly) analyzed novel. Craps argues that *Waterland* embodies the subject of his study, the broad trauma of human life and the attempts of characters to evade, neutralize, and, in Tom Crick's case, eventually work through it. The subtitle of Craps's book – "no short cuts to Salvation" – comes from chapter 10 of *Waterland*, in which Crick speaks of the value of history as an intellectual pursuit. A central plank of the entire study's argument is that this is precisely what Swift is suggesting throughout his oeuvre: there is no easy way to deal with the vileness of human life. Craps also, in a very interesting fashion, relates Swift to Camus in this chapter.

Chapter 5 examines Swift's scrutiny of the strengths and distortions of visual and textual representation in *Out of This World*. Critics have noted that the narrators' doubts about the possibility of accurate representation in image or word are at odds with the text's "classic narrative formula" (113).

Craps points out that Swift's text undermines realist conventions by its ironic deployment of happy-ending conventions and its clear open ending (116, 118). In the discussion of *Ever After* in chapter 6, Craps argues that Unwin attempts to evade trauma through three totalizing discourses, literature, romantic love, and history, only to move at the novel's end away from the narcissistic melancholia of these lies towards an openness to others. Chapter 7, on *Last Orders*, discusses an established reading of the novel as an attempt to have the reader identify himself or herself sympathetically with its lower-class characters. Craps then suggests a counter reading that sees *Last Orders* as "a record of resistance to the textual execution of this project" (150), a resistance embodied in the novel's emphasis on the utter fictionality of its own proceeding. In his final chapter, on *The Light of Day*, Craps points out the novel's undermining of George Webb's sense of redemption and revelation, through self-parody (it is just *such* a Swiftean novel [175, 178]), and through the figure of Louis Napoleon (via Marx's *Eighteenth Brumaire*, the patron saint of the absurd repetition of what was once vital).

All this is clearly argued and convincing; Swift's novels are analyzed with considerable subtlety. However, despite the strengths of Craps's study, one can have some reservations about it. There are local worries, such as in chapter 5 on *Out of This World*. Craps suggests that the novel seems to be organized according to a "classic narrative formula" (113) and then shows how this is not so. He is quite right, but surely the novel blatantly advertises its distance from the nineteenth-century protocols of realism by using monologues, the material provenance of which is never made clear (how are we overhearing them?), by having a dead character speak, and by the non-chronological arrangement of the story materials. The "classic narrative formula" is a bit of a *canard*. In chapter 6 on *Ever After*, Craps does not sufficiently recognize that the novel (despite its ambiguous concluding sentence) ends with the lovers together in a moment of ecstasy, just as, for all its hesitations, *Shuttlecock* does give

Prentis and family that moment of Wordsworthian respite from trauma on Camber Sands. Endings do have their privileges. In a broader context, one does wonder about Craps's claim that literary studies have ever not had an ethical dimension. Even the most rarefied deconstructionist, the most hard-bitten Marxist or feminist, the most sterile and benighted neo-formalist (among whom I count myself) does not usually (a) ignore the ethical or moral position advanced in a work (and it's hard to think of a text that does not have some kind of such position), or (b) not conceive of what she/he does as having some kind of ethical import. Finally, too, one wonders about the category of trauma. Craps's argument is that Swift is a writer distinctively concerned with trauma. Well, yes, but so, if trauma is broadly conceived, is every novelist in British and Irish literature. Emma is upset by Miss Taylor's marriage and her father's wimpishness, Hetty Sorrel by her ambiguous social status and Adam Bede by his father's drunken demise and Hetty's affair, Stephen Blackpool and Louisa Gradgrind by the awfulness of mid-nineteenth-century industrial capitalism, and Jude Fawley by his association with Arabella and Sue, and by his treatment at the hands of the Christminster academic world. *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* is surely about Ireland as wall-to-wall trauma, and John McGahern's novels focus on the traumas of death, failed love, and exile. And if being made the ring bearer, as Frodo Baggins is, isn't a trauma, I don't know what is.

However, these are quibbles. The virtues of Craps's study are considerable. These include close and subtle argument, a consistent vision of what he wants to say, and a clarity of exposition. In addition, Craps puts Swift's work in an interesting and complex European context. Camus, Sartre, and Mauriac (although Swift's echoing of Mauriac, like his reminiscences of Gide and Proust, is not explored here) have a place in his discussions. In short, *Trauma and Ethics in the Novels of Graham Swift* is an excellent study that will play an important role in Swift studies for a long time.

Walt Whitman's "Song of Myself": A Sourcebook and Critical Edition, Ed. Ezra Greenspan, Routledge Guides to Literature, Routledge: New York and London, 2005, pp. 210, incl. index, ISBN 0-415-27544-X.

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"Song of Myself" (1855), one of the most acclaimed and influential poems ever written by an American, has been extensively studied, debated, imitated, condemned, translated, even echoed in other art forms,

for over 150 years. Writers, artists, composers, filmmakers, and readers across national, linguistic, and cultural borders have been extremely influenced by what has been called by many "an American ur-poem."