

Poetry, Translation and Trauma: Teaching Anglophone postcolonial poetry through critical care

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Abstract

The article examines the teaching of Anglophone postcolonial poetry as a space of critical care, focusing on the relationship between trauma, poetic form and translation. The theoretical underpinnings of this study are drawn from a range of perspectives on trauma, testimony, and opacity, as explored by Caruth, Felman and Laub, Spivak, and Glissant. The central argument posits that the manifestation of trauma in poetic discourse defies conventional narrative devices, instead inscribing itself within the domains of linguistic fracture, silence, and formal disruption. Translation is therefore rethought not as a process of equivalence or recovery, but as a situated, irreversible and ethically charged act that makes the limits of sense operative.

The article employs a range of carefully selected classroom case studies, including Zong! by M. NourbeSe Philip, The Hill We Climb by Amanda Gorman, and the poetry of Derek Walcott, to analyse divergent poetic articulations of trauma and their implications for reading and translation practices in higher education. The argument is put forward that the objective of teaching poetry in translation is not to overcome trauma, but rather to cultivate a critical coexistence with its persistence. This transformation of interpretive incompleteness into a central pedagogical and ethical resource is proposed as a key tenet of the teaching process.

Keywords: Anglophone postcolonial poetry; trauma and poetics; translation ethics; opacity; critical pedagogy.