

Working with survivor testimony and against official historical documents, Malacrida's text speaks back to the dehumanizing function of the institution. In short, *A Special Hell* participates in the important political process of rehumanizing ex-residents, whose humanity was stripped away through normal institutional practices and extraordinary acts of violence. As an emancipatory history, interviewees "name hurts, describe exploitation, acknowledge power relations, and remember history as it occurred for those most oppressed by it, rather than reproducing memories that serve dominant interests" (243). I understand Malacrida's participation in this process, and the text that results from her impressive level of multi-modal research, as an act of allyship. *A Special Hell* names perpetrators of extraordinary violence when possible, but it also reminds us that perpetration is complicated and that the complicity of the general public of Red Deer (and Alberta) helped Michener thrive for decades. As Malacrida puts it, ordinary and extraordinary violences were "permitted to unfold precisely because these children did not have allies outside to expose the institution and make it accountable for its actions" (58). *A Special Hell* is, broadly speaking, a contemporary expression of solidarity with former residents of the Michener Centre.

A Special Hell does not relegate the history of institutionalization to the past. Contemporary discrimination against disabled Albertans and "the threat of continued or renewed institutionalization" (233) are central concerns for Malacrida and her work. Michener may not admit new patients at this point in its history, but "leaving the bricks and mortar of the place standing means that there remains a too-easy alternative in the form of reinstitutionalization when the will and resources to support community living fall short" (231). In the final pages, then, Malacrida returns to the importance of the structure of the institution. Because economic arguments so often motivate eugenic projects, from segregation to sterilization, and because discrimination of disabled people remains today, Malacrida makes clear that to leave the architecture of Michener intact means to make reinstitutionalization too easy and too likely to recur in the future. *A Special Hell*, which begins with the story of this specific institution, concludes with a call (indeed, an insistence) to bring about the destruction of all institutions like Michener.

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Gillian Whitlock, *Postcolonial Life Narratives: Testimonial Transactions*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2015. Oxford Studies in Postcolonial Literatures Series. 242 pp.

The introduction of Gillian Whitlock's *Postcolonial Life Narratives: Testimonial Transactions* immediately alerts readers to its impressive scope. The book successfully draws connections between life writing produced and read in disparate places at disparate times by disparate audiences in order to demonstrate the ways in which life writing can articulate the impact of conflicted human subjecthood on bodies, lives, and peoples. The book is divided into two parts along a temporal logic, but variations on the term "divided" are inappropriate descriptors for Whitlock's text, given its constant attention to unexpected connections between groups of texts.

Part 1 focuses on what we might broadly call "pre-contemporary" case studies. Chapter 1 traces and compares the textual histories of two life narratives published in 1789: Olaudah Equiano's *Interesting Narrative* and Watkin Tench's *Narrative of the Expedition to Botany Bay*. While the two texts are written from starkly different perspectives, those of an emancipated slave (Equiano) and a British Marine Officer (Tench), both "offered an autobiographical account that gave witness to the previously unseen, and in turn called upon the reader to bear witness to unknown and scarcely imaginable scenes from the 'New World'" (16). In chapter 2, Whitlock compares the two texts from chapter 1 to a 1796 letter from an Australian indigenous man, Woollawarre Bennelong, and argues that, similar to the first two narratives, the letter testifies to the individuality of Australian indigenous people and the dynamics of first contact. Chapter 3 analyzes Saartjie Bartman's (famed as the "Hottentot Venus") 1810 argument that the "freak shows" in which she was featured were not exploitative but, rather, reflected her free will. This decision, in Whitlock's estimation, gives us "insight into humanizing discourses in colonial modernity" (36) because she refuses to be subject to discourses that frame humanitarian actions as necessarily compassionate (40).

In chapter 4, Whitlock contrasts Mary Prince's 1837 *History with Equiano* and Bennelong's texts, arguing that the Prince's text "reveals how gender and sexuality constrain the voice, embodiment, and agency that become available for women in the slave narrative" (46). She further argues that Baartman and Prince's texts indicate that cultural discourses limit the extent to which women's bodies are legible in testimonial narrative. Chapter 5 turns to Susanna Moodie's *Roughing it in the Bush*, written between 1832 and 1852. Moodie's humanitarian sensibility and white civil-

ity reflect on her portraits of indigenous women, “resulting in a portrait of the noble savage, which is implicated in discourses of indigenous peoples as a dying race” (56). Chapter 6 reads what is usually identified as the first autobiography by a Canadian indigenous man, *The Life, History, and Travels of Kah-ge-ga-gah-Bowh* (1847). Kah-ge-ga-gah-Bowh (known in English as George Copway) testifies to traditional practices and mobilizes the Christian language of suffering to demonstrate the negative impact of the eradication of these practices by settler colonialism. Chapter 7 takes stock of the whole of Part 1 and Rousseau’s *Confessions* into conversation with these case studies. Here, Whitlock accurately summarizes Part 1’s accomplishments in mapping the opportunities provided by life writing and suggesting the various texts’ ideological (humanitarian, democratic, and recognition-based) proximities to one another.

Part 2 consists of four chapters that tackle contemporary case studies. Chapter 8 considers texts produced in the aftermath of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), anchoring its argument in Antjie Krog’s trilogy of memoirs collectively known as *Country of My Skull*. Using Sara Ahmed’s theory of economy of affect, Whitlock demonstrates that a memoir can become an authoritative account of bearing witness at the TRC but can be co-opted and appropriated by well-meaning “ethical engagement” when it is circulated. As always, Whitlock draws connections here to earlier chapters, indicating that Krog’s testimony, like Prince’s and Baartman’s, uses the “resources that were available to resist the gift of benevolent recognition” (93). Chapter 9 reads representations of Dian Fossey as “gorilla girl” against testimonies of rape warfare in Central Africa. Fossey’s work, particularly *Gorillas in the Mist* (1983), contests speciesism and brings gorillas into “civilization” (120), suggesting that their lives are grievable. But accounts of Fossey’s life also tend to obfuscate issues of rape and gendered violence. In total, then, Fossey’s corpus refigures the limits of recognition and speakability to include non-human lives but re-inscribes the unspeakability of gendered violence.

Chapter 10 is centred around Sally Morgan’s 1987 “autobiographical account of indigeneity and belonging, *My Place*” (136). Whitlock places this text, which speaks to the trauma of the Australian indigenous Stolen Generations, in conversation with residential school testimony from Canada, Dalit testimony, and the South African testimonies cited in chapter 8, in order to question why some texts inspire conversation in disparate places and analyze the ways in which indigenous life narratives reckon with truth and reconciliation discourses. Whitlock ultimately argues that indigenous testimonial discourses tend to be appropriated for processes of

national renewal, resulting in particular kinds of settler shame and affect, but also testify to the enduring fact that “Indigenous peoples are [...] victims of benevolence” (162). Chapter 11 discusses the ends of testimony via a reading of refugee and asylum seeker testimony. She ultimately argues, using Edwidge Danticat’s *Brother, I’m Dying* (2007) as a case study, that refugee and asylum seeker testimonies remain unspeakable and unintelligible. Danticat’s accomplishment, Whitlock argues, is not in recording her uncle’s death but in reimagining it using literature.

Whitlock’s epilogue usefully frames this book’s accomplishment in two ways. First, she notes that, in the most recent edition of Mary Prince’s *History*, Sara Salih refers to Prince as an asylum seeker, which suggests the proximity of this “early” life narrative with refugee and asylum seeker narratives written in the twenty-first century. Second, she succinctly sums up her broad argument: “Testimonial life narrative is embedded in the history of anti-colonial resistance” (203). Indeed, *Postcolonial Life Narratives*’ chief accomplishment is that it manages to bring together more than two hundred years of life writing to make what appears on the surface to be a relatively simple argument. In doing so, Whitlock successfully draws connections between texts and suggests their relationalities without writing over their historical and cultural specificity. This achievement is perhaps best summarized by Whitlock herself in chapter 10, discussing the various indigenous testimonies of removal: “These testimonies are specific in place and time, indicating how the policies of assimilation were effective because they were precisely keyed to local jurisdictions and institutions. Yet collectively this testimonial literature maps out a shared imaginative geography of a ‘total institution’” (148). Each of the texts that Whitlock reads in this book contributes to a shared history, but each also reflects its unique history.

Whitlock’s greatest strength, her scope, also opens up questions that will hopefully be taken up in future research. Because her readings of each text, concept, and theoretical discourse are necessarily relatively brief, this work will be instrumental to scholars working in a variety of fields insofar as it opens up avenues for deeper reconsideration of the implications of said discourses on specific texts. One example stems from Whitlock’s focus on recognition as a result of indigenous testimony. While Whitlock usefully frames a consideration of the ways in which said recognition produces particular kinds of settler affect, and how this affect might ultimately re-inscribe indigenous peoples as victims of benevolence, a reading of recent indigenous scholarship on recognition would certainly extend Whitlock’s discussion here. Such a consideration could usefully further

frame the relationship between such recognition and the re-imposition of settler colonial structures and policies ostensibly designed to “help” indigenous peoples. While one might be tempted to read *Postcolonial Life Narratives*’ length as limiting the claims it can make, then, it convincingly and comprehensively argues for these texts’ shared history and should also be tremendously productive of new scholarship.

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