

HEIKE SCHWARZ, *Beware of the Other Side(s): Multiple Personality Disorder and Dissociative Identity Disorder in American Fiction* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2013), 456 pp.

Memoirs, novels, films, and academic studies in the humanities frequently establish a counter discourse to medical science, highlighting the narrative forces at work in illness and often promoting an understanding of illness as culturally determined, constructed, and flexible. Perceptions of mental illness can be shaped by “objective” medical knowledge (as found, for example, in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*), the subjective experience of suffering, and fictional as well as non-fictional representations thereof. Multiple personality disorder (MPD), or dissociative identity disorder (DID), the subject of Heike Schwarz’s *Beware of the Other Side(s): Multiple Personality Disorder and Dissociative Identity Disorder in American Fiction*, lends itself as a perfect case study of the definitional complications brought about by the absence of scientific evidence. Because of this epistemological gap, as Schwarz translates from the *German Brockhaus Psychologie*, MPD has frequently been designated to be “an artificial product of therapeutics” (133). This embeds the disorder in a long tradition of doubt and anxiety over illnesses of uncertain etiology, from hysteria to chronic pain syndrome. Schwarz’s comprehensive analysis of the reconfigurations of MPD/DID over time through both medical and fictional texts is a timely and fascinating illumination of these discourses’ impacts on, or even productions of, mental illness.

By revealing the fundamental influence of fictional discourse on definitions of mental illness, Schwarz’s pioneering interdisciplinary study of MPD/DID bridges the gap between the sciences and the humanities. Schwarz puts forward the thesis that in fact popular definitions of the disorder mainly originate in the field of fiction rather than psychiatric theory (cf. 15). The concept of multiple personality, as she suggests, “is now a fixed part of popular culture with a genre and subgenres of its own in a self-referential mode presenting the trope of multiple personality as a vivid metaphor of not only individual trauma or (patho)subjectivity but of the contemporary subject within a fragmented society” (13).¹ Her study exhibits the many facets of

¹ While Schwarz takes up the metaphorical dimensions of the disorder in her study, she fortunately also acknowledges, if briefly, the possible danger of such metaphorical understanding of illness in its possible misrepresentation and disregard of patients’ suffering (cf. 17). Controversies over studies like Elaine Showalter’s *Hystories: Hysterical Epidemics and Modern Media* (1997) or Joan Acocella’s *Creating Hysteria: Women and Multiple*

the disorder and its inextricable connection to popular culture through a wealth of psychiatric and literary sources, working towards a more inclusive and interdisciplinary understanding of MPD through an examination of the reciprocal interrelations between the two discursive fields.

The book is structured in three parts: “History and Theory,” “The Culture-Embedded Syndrome – Multiple Personality and Dissociation in American Fiction,” and “Contemporary Variations in Selected Novels.” In part one (“History and Theory”), Schwarz traces psychiatric theories and famous historical cases of MPD/DID and distinguishes it from related mental disorders like hysteria and schizophrenia. Schwarz begins the section with a chapter on various psychiatric definitions of MPD/DID, immediately highlighting the fluidity and undecidability of these terms due to sociohistorical shifts and changes. This is certainly true for many illnesses and disorders—consider, for example, the transformation of hysteria into conversion disorder, its long history between body and mind, and its reorientation from a disease anchored in the female body to a disorder linked to traumatic experience regardless of gender. Schwarz notes a shift in terminology from ‘multiple personality disorder’ to ‘dissociative identity disorder’ and proposes that the move from personality to identity promoted by the new name lessened the disorder’s complexity (cf. 26). She directly compares MPD to DID, arguing that the first promotes “the idea of distinct personalities within one body” while the second simply refers to “different levels of consciousness” or identity states rather than distinct personalities (39). In a meticulously researched and informative review of the historical explanatory models of the “other side(s),” Schwarz traces MPD and DID across a variety of discursive fields, from the belief in demonic possession to hysteria to Pierre Janet’s concept of dissociation and psychological explanations by William James and Morton Prince in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. One specific claim made in this part that seems questionable is Schwarz’s assumption that the decline of the term hysteria brought about the rise of both psychoanalysis and schizophrenia (cf. 58). Two issues arise from such a claim: Comparing a mental illness to a field of psychological science appears ill-advised, and psychoanalysis certainly did not rely on the decline of hysteria (it may in fact have been born through its presence).

Perhaps the most engaging part of the following chapter in part one, “Shock and Trauma: Renaissance of the Dissociation Concept,” is Schwarz’s reading of pop culture, especially her

Personality Disorder (1999) (both cited in Schwarz’s study) illustrate the possible harm done by reading illness merely as constructed or metaphorical.

discussion of the double lives of comic superheroes, which beautifully complements her discussion of MPD in contemporary dictionaries (cf. 76). Following this, in the course of four pages, the author's discussion links thinkers such as Sigmund Freud, Ian Hacking, John Locke, W. E. B. Du Bois, William James, Henri Bergson and Ralph Waldo Emerson (cf. 81). While Schwarz clearly has a wide-ranging grasp of these thinkers, her analysis may have benefitted from a stronger sense of organization. Individually, the examples elucidate the various aspects of Schwarz's thesis, but the section leaves something to be desired with regard to their structural and systematic interrelations, lacking a clear chronological or thematic development. This is somewhat emblematic for the study as a whole: while Schwarz presents meticulously researched material and analyzes her subject in an impressively comprehensive manner, the book might have profited from a more stringent organization of the host of information accumulated in this study, especially to avoid frequent repetitions.

Part two of the study encompasses an analysis of brand identity and the role of the mass media as well as close readings of personal narratives and fictional accounts of multiple personality disorder. Schwarz here further elucidates her concept of "culture-embeddedness," which she has introduced at the beginning of her study (17). The theory calls for a consideration of not only psychiatric cases but also fictional manifestations of the disorder and is therefore essential to the author's approach. It might have been helpful to distinguish this particular concept from the already commonly used culture-bound, or culture-specific, syndrome early on in the study, as there seem to occur certain conceptual overlaps between the two. Schwarz does refer to the term 'culture-bound syndrome' in later parts of the book, but this established concept might have been instrumental in further exploring and defining the scope of "culture-embedded syndrome" when first introduced. In the chapter "Creating a Public Consciousness: The Role of the Mass Media," Schwarz further builds the notion of culture-embeddedness by demonstrating the ways in which mass media inform and construct people's ideas of MPD and DID, for example by "diagnosing" stars like Britney Spears with the disorder (160-161). In the following chapter, Schwarz examines representations of MPD and DID in multiple autopathographies, including works such as Truddi Chase's *When Rabbit Howls* (1987), Joan Frances Casey's *The Flock* (1991), and Robert B. Oxnam's *A Fractured Mind* (2005). In her analysis, Schwarz suggests that these nonfictional examples all promote the idea of alters as separate persons, thus falling in line with earlier definitions of multiple personality disorder rather than the later developed dissociative identity disorder.

Schwarz begins her analysis of fictional treatments of MPD by tracing the origins and implications of the doppelgänger motif, infusing her interpretation with many theoretical perspectives, especially the Freudian notions of the unconscious and the uncanny. She arranges her interpretation of MPD fiction chronologically: first, she investigates American texts—Nathaniel Hawthorne’s “Wakefield” (1835) and Edgar Allan Poe’s “William Wilson” (1840)—as well as the British Robert Louis Stevenson’s *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886). In the next chapter, she focuses on the American novel in the 1950s (e.g., Shirley Jackson’s *The Bird’s Nest* [1954] and Robert Bloch’s *Psycho* [1959]), reading the 50s as “an era of paranoia” that fostered interest in “the mysterious hidden side within” (229). Schwarz’s analysis pays particular attention to the gender dynamics at work in the novels, suggesting that the representation of female characters reflected “the incompatibility of daily life requirements of the 1950s with suppressed desires or craved opportunities within societal structures” (230), which leads to a questioning or even loss of subjectivity. In the following chapter, Schwarz observes a splitting of the MPD novel into several thematic subgenres in the 70s and beyond: first, “the devil inside” (*The Exorcist*); second, “the spy inside” (spy thrillers); third, “the killer inside” (serial killer stories); and fourth, “the protector inside” (dissociation as coping mechanism). Before moving into an interpretation of contemporary novels, Schwarz presents a brief overview of MPD films from the 1950s to the present. With only ten pages, this part feels a little underdeveloped. The author might have worked through the different media in more detail, examining how films represent MPD in ways different from written texts.

In part three, “Contemporary Variations in Selected Novels,” Schwarz explores novels published between 1996 and 2008, for example, Margaret Atwood’s *Alias Grace* and Chuck Palahniuk’s *Fight Club* (both 1996), Matt Ruff’s *Set This House in Order* (2003), and Siri Hustvedt’s *The Sorrows of an American* (2008). Her close readings reveal the multifaceted manifestations of multiple personalities in these texts, which reflect the “multiplicity of the self” and “fragmentary existence of contemporary minds” (408). Ultimately, Schwarz proposes in closing, the connection between fictional characters and the reader “may offer a space beyond psychiatric diagnoses and their validation, beyond a mystification or a fixed understanding of agency, identity and subjectivity” (413). Through her insightful interpretations of these contemporary texts, Schwarz makes an impressive case for the rich potential of fiction in broadening the reader’s understanding of an identity disorder deeply connected to the social contexts from which it emerges.

Overall, *Beware of the Other Side(s)* is an exhaustive testimony to Schwarz's assiduous research practice, and it delivers some intriguing insights into the definitions and redefinitions of mental illness according to its sociohistorical and cultural contexts. Despite, or maybe because of, the study's impressive scope, the polyphony of critics and thinkers that the author brings into conversation at times outweighs her own compelling critical observations. Additionally, in some passages grammatical mistakes distract from the quality of the content, which may have been avoided by more careful copy-editing. With these caveats, Schwarz's highly informative study will certainly be of great value to scholars investigating the topic. Her considerations of the cultural embeddedness and the active configuration of a medical diagnosis like MPD through fictional texts give further valence to the assumption that firm boundaries between fictional and scientific discourses are constructions that cannot be upheld under critical investigation.

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