**Contemporary asylum narratives: representing refugees in the twenty-first century**, by Agnes Woolley, Basingstoke, Palgrave, 2014, 252 pp., £58.00 (hbk), ISBN 978 1 1372 9905 5

In times of ethical and political disquiet during what is now called “the refugee crisis” – when the consolidation of national borders ominously erodes rights to refuge – this timely study engages with issues of representation around refugees. Departing from traditional discourses of diaspora and migration, Agnes Woolley explores cultural representations of asylum and addresses issues of statelessness and its contradictions. The focus is on narratives by British authors and filmmakers (or those set in Britain) that challenge the paradoxes of contemporary migratory politics – which guarantee free flow of goods and money but are hostile and unaccommodating for those in search of safety – and “call for sustained politicized responses to the condition of the statelessness” (211).

This study offers an effective example of the ways in which literary representations extend into activism and have the potential to influence and transform current debates over asylum, which are often dominated by the social and political sciences. *Contemporary Asylum Narratives* is an important and enriching addition to the emerging scholarly works on migration in the humanities; this work foregrounds the chosen texts as alternative spaces to understand the social and cultural resonance of forced migration today. Engaging with existing scholarship on contemporary migration (Farrier, Rosello, Gilroy, Kaplan) and with critical theory (Hall, Bhabha, Derrida, Clifford, Appiah, Arendt, Negri, Hardt), this book illustrates how narratives can “re-energi[ze] the position of the refugee and [envision] new ways of belonging” (9) beyond what Farrier calls the “infrahuman”. Woolley’s rigorous and lucid work is concerned with the ethics, aesthetics and politics of representation: its choice to discuss texts and films by authors and filmmakers who are not refugees deliberately refutes dominant representations which valorize authenticity of testimony and condemn migrants “only to answer for their experiences as refugees” (19). This choice also subtly, yet powerfully, alludes to the asylum process which concerns itself with “authentic” narratives to found its decisions on asylum claims.

Part I, “Hospitable Representation”, focuses on Graham Swift’s *The Light of Day* and Caryl Phillips’s *A Distant Shore* as examples of imaginative narratives of (conditional and unconditional) hospitality which ultimately “testify to the inhospitality of contemporary Britain” (68). Woolley’s engaging monograph also explores filmic representations (Part II) and focuses on the ways in which the cinematic gaze frames spaces of detention and bordering; the issues explored in this section, and addressed by Alfonso Cuarón’s and Pawel Pawlikowsky’s films, question Britain’s role in protecting the stateless and critique repressive practices to curb and regulate migration. The political engagement of narratives is taken even further in part III, in which documentary theatre is examined as a transformative tool to intervene in current political debates. Woolley offers readings of the plays *Credible Witness* by Timberlake Wertenbaker and *The Bogus Woman* by Kay Adshead as both aesthetic dramatizations and provocative critiques of the asylum process. The last section highlights the significance to asylum of globalization and cosmopolitanism. Examining texts which represent the encounter and relationship between the “host” and “guest”, part IV explores issues of cultural conflict and solidarity, the material realities of forced migration, and reminds us of the responsibilities and obligations (to the other) inherent in the global present.

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