

Title: Approaching Non-Event Violence in Fiction: A Study of Babel's Kaleidoscope
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Abstract:

Against political theory's scramble to tackle the saturation of contemporary and 20th century violence, this paper is an extract from a larger project that reconsiders the limits of fictional representations of lived historical violence. I challenge sentiments that literature is unable to capture extreme instances of violence – sentiments like Adorno's "No poetry after Auschwitz", Agamben's "language, in order to bear witness, must give way to non-language in order to show the impossibility of bearing witness", or Balibar's more recent statement that, "it is no longer possible to write tragedies". The paper expands on narratological and anthropological concepts of the event and the everyday in order to suggest that innate to fiction's form is not the impossibility of capturing extreme violence – the real horror that Sontag maintains is elusive to, but deeply desired by, literature – but rather what belies its form is the kaleidoscope of chronological registers necessary to describing everyday violence. I suggest that fiction's event-plot structure means that it is forced to translate everyday violence into an event, into the extreme. In order to make this argument, the paper uses Lotman's distinction of the eventful and the eventless book to carefully compare the way that violence functions along the plot structure of Babel's short stories in the collection "Конармия", juxtaposing stories in which violence functions as introduction, climax or conclusion on the level of plot structure, with stories when the plot is suspended between two points of violence. The latter, which is more commonly employed by Babel in this collection, frames the plot, cradles it between constant violence that is occurring at the boundaries of the narrative. This textual suspension traps the reader with one eye always to the frame, thereby coming as close as is potentially possible to a literary experience of everyday violence.