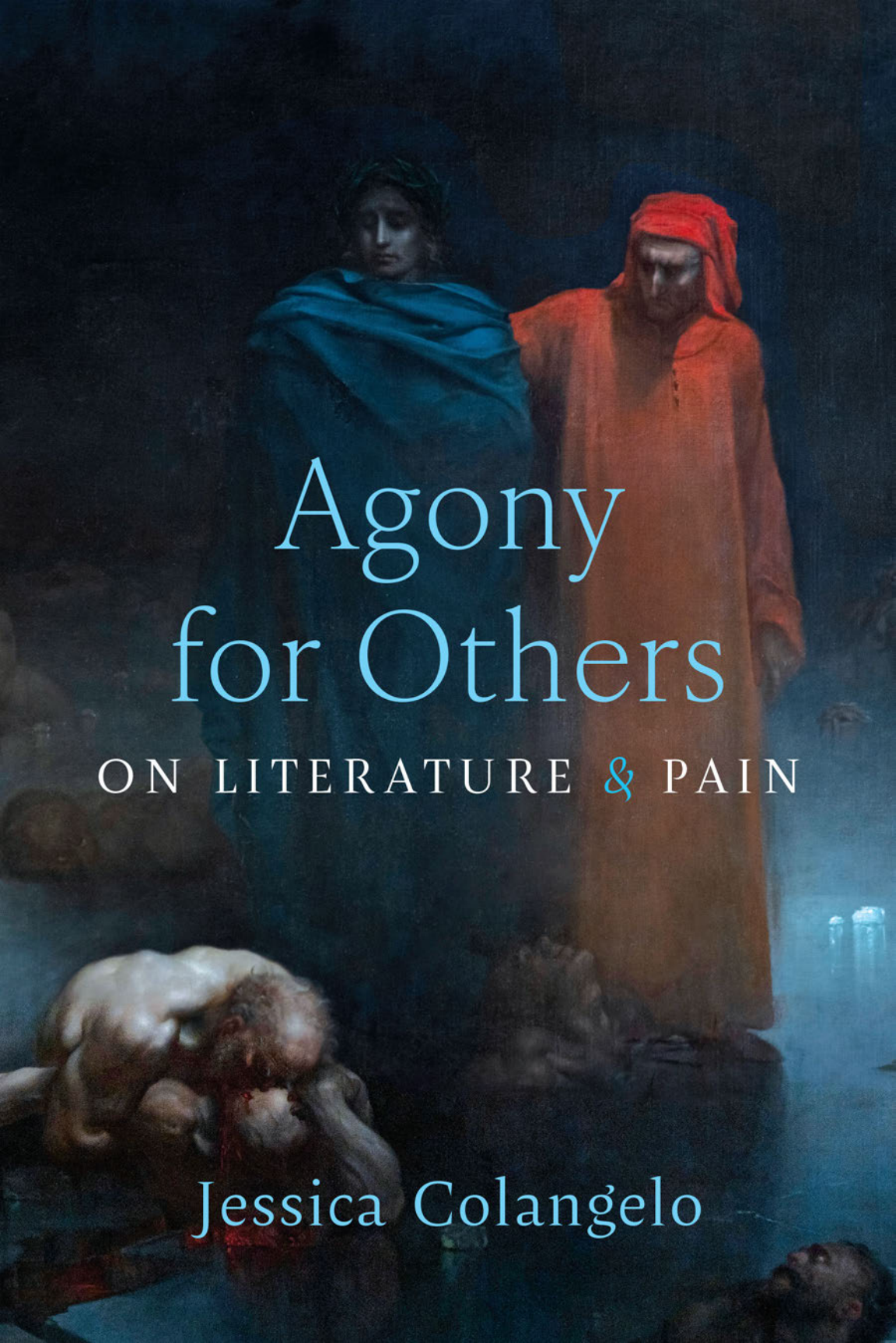


The background of the cover is a dark, atmospheric painting. In the center, two figures stand: one on the left wearing a blue robe and a green head covering, and one on the right wearing a red robe and a red head covering. They appear to be observing a scene of suffering. In the lower-left foreground, a person is hunched over, their back to the viewer, with a visible wound on their back. In the lower-right foreground, another person lies on the ground, looking up. The overall mood is somber and dramatic, with strong contrasts between light and shadow.

Agony for Others

ON LITERATURE & PAIN

Jessica Colangelo

Agony for Others

Corporealities: Discourses of Disability

Series editors: David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder

Recent Titles

Agony for Others: On Literature and Pain

by Jessica Colangelo

Pain in Relation: On Causality, Chronicity, and (Crip) Evidence

by Alyson Patsavas

Crip Authority: Disability and the Art of Consolation in the Renaissance

by Elizabeth B. Bearden

Rehabilitative Postsocialism: Disability, Sex, and Race in Eastern Europe

by Kateřina Kolářová

Light of the Everlasting Life: Disability and Crip Eschatology in Old English Literature

by Leah Pope Parker

By Touch Alone: Blindness and Reading in Nineteenth-Century Culture

by Vanessa Warne

Down Syndrome Culture: Life Writing, Documentary, and Fiction Film in Iberian and Latin American Contexts

by Benjamin Fraser

Crippling Girlhood

by Anastasia Todd

The Disabled Child: Memoirs of a Normal Future

by Amanda Apgar

Blind in Early Modern Japan: Disability, Medicine, and Identity

by Wei Yu Wayne Tan

Cheap Talk: Disability and the Politics of Communication

by Joshua St. Pierre

Diaphanous Bodies: Ability, Disability, and Modernist Irish Literature

by Jeremy Colangelo

Embodied Archive: Disability in Post-Revolutionary Mexican Cultural Production

by Susan Antebi

Beholding Disability in Renaissance England

by Allison P. Hobgood

A History of Disability, New Edition

by Henri-Jacques Stiker

Vitality Politics: Health, Debility, and the Limits of Black Emancipation

by Stephen Knadler

Blindness Through the Looking Glass: The Performance of Blindness, Gender, and the Sensory Body

by Gili Hammer

HandiLand: The Crippest Place on Earth

by Elizabeth A. Wheeler

A complete list of titles in the series can be found at www.press.umich.edu

Agony for Others

ON LITERATURE AND PAIN

Jessica Colangelo

UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN PRESS

ANN ARBOR

Copyright © 2026 by Jessica Colangelo

Some rights reserved

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 (CC BY-NC) license. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0>

For questions or permissions, please contact um.press.perms@umich.edu

Published in the United States of America by the

University of Michigan Press

First published November 2026

A CIP catalog record for this book is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Control Number: 2026023970 (print)

Library of Congress Control Number: 2026023971 (ebook)

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2026023970>

LC ebook record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2026023971>

ISBN 978-0-472-07840-0 (hardcover : alk. paper)

ISBN 978-0-472-05840-2 (paper : alk. paper)

ISBN 978-0-472-90620-8 (open access ebook)

ISBN 978-0-472-00680-9 (audiobook)

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3998/mpub.14614499>

The University of Michigan Press's broader open access publishing program is made possible thanks to additional funding from the University of Michigan Office of the Provost and the generous support of contributing libraries.

Cover illustration: *Dante and Virgil in the Ninth Circle of Hell*, oil on canvas, by Gustave Doré (1861). Courtesy Musée du monastère royal de Brou, Bourg-en-Bresse, France.

Photograph © Denis Vidalie.

The cover shows two figures, Dante Alighieri on the right in a red robe and Virgil on the left in a blue robe, standing on a lake of ice that stretches far into the darkness. There are people in the ice all around them frozen up to their shoulders, necks, or eyes. Everyone in the ice looks at the central figures, while Dante and Virgil stare at two men in the ice before them. One is attacking the other, biting his head, and blood is dripping out. At the center of the image reads the title, *Agony for Others: On Literature and Pain*, and below it the name of the author, Jessica Colangelo.

The authorized representative in the EU for product safety and compliance is Easy Access System Europe, Mustamäe tee 50, 10621 Tallinn, Estonia, gpsr.requests@easproject.com

Contents

<i>Acknowledgments</i>	vii
Introduction: An Element of Blank	1
ONE Pain Between Feeling and Expression; or, What Other Is Agony For?	14
TWO What Is It Like to Be a Body in Pain? Imagining the Other in Virginia Woolf	56
THREE An Episteme of Agony and Faith: Pain and Religious Experience in James Baldwin	83
FOUR The Text Against the Camp: Narrative Biopolitics and Elie Wiesel's <i>Night</i>	108
FIVE A Private Honesty: Torture and Interiority in Sarah Kane	132
SIX <i>Wit</i> , Illness, and Understanding: Toward an Ethics of Clinical Hermeneutics	156
SEVEN Notes on Pain and Dehumanization	187
Conclusion: Disregarding the Pain of Others	216
<i>Bibliography</i>	223
<i>Index</i>	241

Digital materials related to this title can be found on the Fulcrum platform via the following citable URL:
<https://doi.org/10.3998/mpub.14614499>

Acknowledgments

This book was begun in the depths of the COVID-19 pandemic, a time of great pain and isolation. It is for this reason that I want to thank, first and foremost, my friends, whose company made that era bearable and this book project thinkable: David Carlton, Kevin Goodwin, Davis Hoyer, and Phillip Luckhardt.

The research behind this book would not have been possible without the tireless and often unheralded labors of academic librarians. Thank you to the workers at the Weldon and Cardinal Carter libraries at the University of Western Ontario for making this, and innumerable other research projects, possible.

Thank you also to my editor at the University of Michigan Press, Haley Winkle, for seeing the potential in this book and for shepherding it through the complexities of publication. Thank you also to the anonymous peer reviewers, for saving me from myself. Thank you to Natasha Tuskovich for preparing the index.

Two chapters of this book have appeared in an earlier form: Chapter 5's "A Private Honesty: Torture and Interiority in the Theatre of Sarah Kane," appeared in *NTQ: New Theatre Quarterly* 38, no. 4 (2002): 379–93; chapter 2 on Virginia Woolf, "What Is It Like to Be a Body in Pain? Imagining the Other in Virginia Woolf," appeared in *Modernism/Modernity* 32, no. 4 (2026): 771–91.

This book draws on research supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council.

Introduction

An Element of Blank

Pain—has an Element of Blank—
It cannot recollect
Where it begun—or if there were
A time when it was not—

—Emily Dickinson, “[Pain—has an Element of Blank—]”¹

Let us go then, you and I,
When the evening is spread out against the sky
Like a patient etherized upon a table

—T. S. Eliot, “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock”²

Any scholar who seeks to examine the question of pain inevitably emerges from their labor with a text as heterogeneous and sprawling as its subject. For pain is a topic about which everybody knows at least something, and the more people there are who know about a thing the more things there are to know about it. Pain is therefore extremely complicated, touching, and being touched by, every conceivable subject, including literature, philosophy, history, numerous sciences, sociology, linguistics, anthropology. To speak of pain in isolation is foolhardy, and often times one can best learn about pain by reading its siblings, the ache vanishing beneath the details until it leaps back to attention, suddenly, like

1. Emily Dickinson, “[Pain—has an Element of Blank—],” in *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson*, ed. Thomas H. Johnson (New York: Little, Brown, 1976), 323.

2. T. S. Eliot, “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock,” in *The Poems of T.S. Eliot: Volume I*, eds. Christopher Ricks and Jim McCue (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015), lines 1–3.

an old wound on a rainy day. As Saulius Geniusas writes in his important *The Phenomenology of Pain*, “almost as a rule, pain is a mosaic of physiological, psychic, cultural, historical, and social factors, unified in the framework of the personal meaning.”³ It is felt by nearly every person on earth, and those who do not feel it must always attend to its absence. Pain is a problem to be avoided, a way of protecting yourself, a claim to intellectual or moral authority, a sign of intelligence or of its absence, and the somatic foundation of many types of political and individual oppression. It can be discussed as a source of value (“no pain, no gain”), an ersatz currency (“I’ll make you pay for this!”), a metonym for punishment (“on pain of death”), an ethical reminder (the “prick of conscience”), or even an entryway to pleasure (“the same time pain fulfills what is expected, it becomes possible for pleasure to fulfill what is awaited”⁴). It contains, inevitably, an “element of blank,” whether through the experience itself and its ineffability, as Emily Dickinson observes, or through its evasion, as with T. S. Eliot’s vision of the modernist subject as a “patient etherized upon a table.” Pain is easy to detect but difficult to grasp, present mostly insofar as it is either inaccessible or inescapable, experienced on an individual level while opening one up to a community, the experience of one’s own pain intelligible against the backdrop of the world that it destroys.

This book is primarily concerned with the role of pain in literature, and especially with developing new ways of reading and interpreting pain in literary works. Yet in doing so it inevitably becomes, also, a study of the role of interpretation in ethics, the filter of representation through which one person’s experience enters another person’s awareness. In that domain, seemingly innocuous questions of literature and aesthetics prove tremendously relevant to all manner of current and historical injustices. The present book focuses on select texts from twentieth-century American and European literature, articulating the various elements of its argument through a series of case studies where different texts are used to examine different conceptual problems in relation to pain and its expression. Yet pain does not respect academia’s disciplinary boundaries, and often this book, in order to talk about literature, will have to discuss seemingly every other thing besides. But just as the most recognizable expression of pain, the cry, is fundamentally an opening of the self to the other, a request that one not be forced to deal with one’s problems alone, so too does the

3. Saulius Geniusas, *The Phenomenology of Pain* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2020), 170.

4. Gilles Deleuze, *Coldness and Cruelty* (New York: Zone Books, 1999), 71.

study of pain in one sector invite collusion with others. This effect is most apparent in the theory chapter that follows this introduction, which necessarily draws ideas and examples from a broad number of works, and the chapter on dehumanization, which attempts to reach beyond merely understanding pain representation in order to change it.

Yet there is one work in *Agony for Others* that always demands attention, that being Elaine Scarry's *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*. In literary studies, and several other fields, Scarry's book has for roughly forty years been the paradigmatic text of any discussion in pain. If one decides to write a study of pain in relation to a body of literature, it is often the first text one reads (indeed often the first text one cites) and far too frequently is the place where one's inquiry ends. Too many texts that seek to examine pain do so through the citation of a handful of lines from Scarry's introduction, such that the frequent and too-easy adoption of the book's premises occasionally rises to the level of a thought-terminating cliché. None of these issues are Scarry's fault, of course; they are problems of reception. In truth, though *Agony for Others* will often be at odds with it, *The Body in Pain* has more than earned its renown. What is at issue, really, is its status as a paradigm, which crowds out alternative interpretations of pain and forces any dissenting opinion to begin from a position of disagreement instead of simply articulating itself on its own terms. The result has been a discourse that largely follows the contours of *The Body in Pain*, one that sees pain as thought-destroying, language-destroying, and resistant to politicization.

In seeking to ameliorate that problem, I have followed a strategy of expansion and addition. I focus less on disproving or disputing Scarry's arguments (though I occasionally do so) and instead develop on them, adding complexity where there was simplicity, contextualizing what was read in a vacuum, and materializing what was taken as ideal. Rather than a critique of specific arguments, disagreement with Scarry here most often takes the form of a counter-example or through the application of her conclusions in ways that complicate them. What I have tended to find is that even in those instances where pain *is* thought- and language-destroying, where it *does* create a private phenomenological world cut off from all relation with those who are not sharing the experience, it never *only* does that; it is never simply the end of thought and relation. There is always a trace, a lacuna, a productive absence left behind, even when one is isolated. Similarly, even when one experiences pain alone that experience is always in some kind of context, some sort of environment, and is nearly

always understood through memory and anticipation. Just as in reading a book, where one's apprehension of the text on the page *as* text on a page depends on a trained habituation going back to one's earliest education, so too does the experience of pain, like most any experience, always involve the memory of some past encounter with something like it, as well as the memory of its absence. One does not merely interpret pain through the memory of experiencing pain, but also through the memory of *not* experiencing pain, of numbness or pleasure or any number of other sensations. To say that a pain is "burning" or "stabbing" requires some reference point as to what it feels like to be burned or stabbed. As Maurice Merleau-Ponty writes, "to pay attention is not merely to further clarify some preexisting givens; rather, it is to realize in them a new articulation by taking them as *figures*."⁵ To pay attention to something—as pain is always insisting one do—is to give it a definite shape or figure (i.e., as distinct from the perceptual background) and to make note of its attributes, which requires awareness of what attributes are proper to it. It is, in short, a *thought process*, and so its opposition to thinking as such can never be total.

Broadly speaking, then, this book makes two arguments. First, it holds that the status of pain as a private experience is overstated, and that this overstating derives from a removal of the experience of pain from broader social and phenomenal contexts. Scarry's examples are too often the individual or the small group, not the community or the culture. Yet an experience of sudden extreme pain is very different in, for example, an emergency room, where one can expect medical treatment, than it would be in the middle of nowhere. The social and material context, the mindset and setting, in which the pain is experienced changes the quality of that experience, and these changes can have highly complex downstream effects (as several chapters demonstrate). Second, this book argues that pain and pain epistemology are deeply political topics and are so in ways that have been frequently overlooked. Scarry's reading of pain as resistant to political usage, as being unsuitable to the purpose of rousing collective action or of forming bonds of solidarity and allyship, is truest mainly in the narrow contexts in which her book views the matter. This book, in expanding the area of focus, shows how pain is subtly constitutive of many kinds of political consciousness (as is especially the case in the chapters on Baldwin, Wiesel, and Edson). Indeed, its relevance may have been overlooked for exactly that reason,

5. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Donald A. Landers (London: Routledge, 2014), 32.

since even when it is not the direct object of political struggle, it is often the ground upon which that struggle is fought.

The complex issues that this introduction brushes past are addressed in more detail in the book proper, but there are two matters that should be answered here. The first is what exactly I mean by pain. The International Association for the Study of Pain (IASP) defines it as “an unpleasant sensory and emotional experience associated with, or resembling that associated with, actual or potential tissue damage,”⁶ which is a good starting point for two reasons. One, because it seems to be about as useful a description as one could reasonably expect from a one-sentence definition, and two, because it says so very little. The operative term, “an unpleasant sensory and emotional experience,” is vague in and of itself, barely distinguishing pain from other unpleasant feelings. Instead, it relies on a comparison that is, in the end, tautological: “associated with . . . actual or potential tissue damage.” Pain, it says, is what you feel when you get hurt. It is what getting hurt feels like. This definition might be usefully contrasted with the one Geniusas provides, which says that pain “is an aversive bodily feeling with a distinct experiential quality, which can be given only in original firsthand experience, either as a nonintentional feeling-sensation or as an intentional feeling.”⁷ I turn to the question of pain’s intentionality in this book’s first chapter, but what is worth remarking on how both definitions appear to circle around what pain *is* without ever reaching it, and (save for calling it “aversive”) do not provide any details as to what the experience actually consists of. The definitions seem to target an audience of people who already know what pain is and just need a definition to organize their inquiries around; they would be useless to someone who had never felt or heard of pain before.

I make this point not to criticize Geniusas and the IASP—especially given the difficulty of what they have set out to do—but to point to a problem in defining what pain is. When Virginia Woolf complains in “On Being Ill” that “the merest schoolgirl, when she falls in love, has Shakespeare or Keats to speak her mind for her; but let the sufferer try to describe a pain in his head to a doctor and language at once runs dry,”⁸ she describes a real, serious difficulty.

6. Srinivasa N. Raja et al., “The Revised IASP Definition of Pain: Concepts, Challenges, and Compromises” *Pain: The Journal of the International Association for the Study of Pain* 161, no. 9 (2020): 1976–82.

7. Geniusas, *The Phenomenology of Pain*, 42.

8. Virginia Woolf, “On Being Ill,” in *Selected Essays*, ed. David Bradshaw (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 102.

Describing pain is hard, so hard in fact that physicians have developed a whole descriptive toolkit, the McGill Pain Questionnaire, just to address the very issue Woolf describes. The manner in which the questionnaire solves that problem suggests that problem's nature. Very often descriptions of pain treat it as a unitary experience; we say or are told that something "hurts" often without much elaboration. Samuel Beckett, in *Malone Dies*, provides an illustrative counterexample: "Yes, I shall be natural at last, I shall suffer more, then less, without drawing any conclusions, I shall pay less heed to myself, I shall be neither hot nor cold any more, I shall be tepid, I shall die tepid, without enthusiasm."⁹ The McGill questionnaire asks that one pay heed to oneself in precisely the way that Malone, through a falsely self-denying apophasis, does. Is the pain sharp or burning? Is it constant, throbbing, or intermittent? Does it cover a wide area or is it focused on a small point? These are, in effect, *dis-aggregating* questions. They guide one's attention such that it is able to apprehend the pain experience in greater complexity and focus on its particular attributes. And just as bodily tissues can be damaged in a thousand different ways, so too is the experience of pain highly variable.

The qualities of the subjective experience of pain are not the only ways one can disaggregate the experience. Scientists often differentiate, for example, between the localized discomfort of pain and what is called nociception, or the complex process by which the body's nerves detect and communicate real or potential tissue damage. While the first identifies the location on or in the body that requires attention, the second impels aversion to harmful stimuli, causing you to pull your hand from the stove, for instance, before you consciously notice it burning. The distinction between pain and nociception is similar to the distinction between "feeling pain" and "being in pain" that Nikola Grahek makes. These distinctions leave open the question of what this book takes to be "real" pain for its purposes: these disaggregated elements, which can in some cases be experienced independently of each other, or the full complex of their interrelation. While it is attentive to the former, I at the outset decided that the goals of *Agony for Others* were best served by prioritizing the latter, treating pain as a complex experience composed of numerous elements which not everyone who becomes hurt may universally feel. I do not hold that this kind of

9. Samuel Beckett, *Three Novels: Molloy, Malone Dies, The Unnamable* (New York: Grove, 2009), 173. For an analysis of the complex role of pain in Beckett's writing, see Hannah Simpson, *Samuel Beckett and the Theatre of Witness: Pain in Postwar Francophone Drama* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022).

pain—what I sometimes call the pain-complex—is somehow more real or more authentic than, for instance, the experience of someone with pain asymbolia, where one registers pain but does not feel localized discomfort. Rather, I am bracketing the question for what I consider to be good reasons relating to matters of scope and complexity. Many texts focus primarily on what pain is or does, rather than on what makes it up, and so much of the scholarly discourse simply treats pain as singular in itself, and it is often best, when analyzing a text, to do so, at least at the outset, within its own terms and according to its own premises. Furthermore, that pain is phenomenally complex is itself so underappreciated among humanities scholars that to jump straight to analyzing that complexity without first establishing its contours and significance would be premature. The purpose of this study is, first and foremost, to reinvigorate the analysis of pain in the humanities, and especially literature. It therefore needs to begin with the dominant premises of the discourse (including pain's assumed simplicity) and then move past them, not radically but plastically, until a new position is arrived at. Doing so will, I hope, create a discursive niche for precisely the kind of analysis this book is *not* doing: the systematic description of pain's elements and their significance to the complex.¹⁰

With the question of defining pain dealt with (if not necessarily answered), there remains the second question of why the problems this book tries to solve are best done so through the analysis of literature. What is really important here is that the analysis take place within and in relation to a particular context, preferably one that is concrete and interpretable (like a work of literature). To paraphrase Husserl, pain never happens in the abstract; it always happens *to someone*, and it always has a location and a context (even if that location happens to be the entire body). Thus, the text's role, at least at the broad philosophical level, is to serve as a context within and in terms of which a representation of a pain experience can arise; it is a source of specificity. I thus chose specific texts that would prove difficult environments for a purely Scarry-derived interpretive approach, and so allowed the examination of the new context to lead to a developed understanding of pain representation by dialogically adjusting the

10. One exception to the pattern of treating pain as a singular experience is the practice of distinguishing pain from suffering, with Eric J. Cassel's work on the definition of suffering being an especially influential example (see *The Nature of Suffering and the Goals of Medicine* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991]). His version of the distinction has, however, come under recent criticism (see Charlotte Mary Duffee, "Pain versus Suffering: A Distinction Currently without a Difference" *Journal of Medical Ethics* 47, no. 3 [2021]: 175–78). *Agony for Others* treats those experiences covered under Cassel's definition of suffering as part of the pain-complex.

interpretive framework until it could account for each new situation. This method puts the texts to work philosophically, allowing them to contribute to the philosophical argument without being instrumentalized as props. A significant problem with Scarry's work is her willingness to discuss pain as such, in itself, as a pure object of analysis, rather than as something that always occurs somewhere and always happens to someone. *Agony for Others* was designed to avoid that mistake.

One cannot have pain without flesh, and that flesh has to house some kind of thinking subject, with a history and experiences embedded in a lifeworld and a community, in order for those sensations to be communicable in a way that another person can understand. Literature thus serves as a counterweight to this idealizing tendency scholars have had with respect to pain, forcing one to contend with pain *as one finds it*, rather than as a specimen in a jar, isolated, desiccated, and soaked in formaldehyde. Just as pain cannot be felt in the abstract, it can also not be represented in the abstract. One can transcribe cries of pain or draw a screaming face, yet these representations still rely on language and a knowledge of human expressions in order to be sensible. And a novel, play, or story will be far more complex besides, representing the experience often incidentally, as part of more elaborate sequences of events or experiences and as part of a life that has a history, memories, desires, relationships, and fears. In short, artistic depictions of pain provide representations of the complex of pain experience to a degree of fidelity exceeded only by a direct encounter with that complex within one's own body and have the added advantage of being readable and interpretable by others. An investigation of what the pain experience is like, of what it amounts to subjectively, thus benefits immensely from the study of literature, and from humanistic inquiry more generally.



One difficulty this text faces is that its primary aim, the revelation of a state of complexity behind a façade of simplicity, all but forecloses neat, easily summed up conclusions. "There's a lot going on and it's complicated" is one of those positions that is almost always true and yet extremely difficult to argue. Thus the present text develops its concept of what a post-Scarry pain studies discourse could look like not only through direct argument but also through a technique of argument by example. If, for instance, someone claims that there is no such thing as black sheep, one could respond by critiquing their logic or

citing studies, or one could simply go out and find a black sheep and so win the debate without even saying a word. The present debate is, of course, much less straightforward than this example implies, yet it ought to give a sense of what this book is trying to do, for instance, in the “Three Furies” section of the next chapter. Each of the three texts discussed in that section involves in some way an attempt at communication between a person experiencing pain and one or more others, and each one, if we follow Scarry’s Cartesian understanding of the privacy of pain experience, is a thought- and language-destroying event that renders knowledge of the other impossible.

Yet each example is also clearly more complex than that, and each one is different from the other in ways that *The Body in Pain*’s theory simply does not capture. In the worlds of both *Inferno* and *Brazil*, we see multiple and clear attempts at communication thwarted, not by the inherent qualities of the pain-complex, but by the unwillingness of the listener to hear and the unwillingness of power to care. Meanwhile, the descriptions of the Schmitt Pain Scale, in their richness, reveal a complex underworld to pain experience, tones and modulations that demonstrate a multiplicity to the pain-complex that scholars have yet to appreciate, much less understand. None of these examples are a knockout blow to Scarry, but they all, individually and collectively, demonstrate the incompleteness of her theory, that there is *something* more to be said, even if what that something is remains unclear.

All of *Agony for Others* follows this approach: a dialogic analysis of the role of pain in one or more works of literature that serves as a proving ground for some aspect of pain representation, the discussion moving both by way of philosophical analysis and hermeneutic world making. *Agony for Others* is therefore an interdisciplinary text between literary studies and philosophy, which sees pain as not only a physical event, but as a social-aesthetic phenomenon with tremendous ethical and political import. Much like the nociceptor nerves that enable it and that spread throughout the body, pain infuses and affects all aspects of human culture. A study that artificially limits its scope of attention in order to stay within disciplinary bounds will thus always miss key information relevant to its research questions. Though the approach to argument found in this monograph may seem to some as needlessly difficult or circuitous, I believe that this is the difficulty the topic itself demands.

In addition to this introduction, this book contains seven chapters and a conclusion. The first, theory-oriented chapter summarizes and explains the general arguments of the book, with sections dedicated to the question of

pain's phenomenological intentionality as well as its bidirectional character. The first of these sections argues that the subjective experience of pain is intentional, which is to say that it is object-directed, much as phenomenologists understand other subjective experiences to be. Yet this intentionality is experienced far more ambiguously due to pain's role as a way to direct the perceiving subject's attention toward a damaged or endangered physical body. The experience of pain in a sense pulls one out of one's own subjective experience, of "my own body," to focus on the physical body as such, and it is this splitting of intentionality that has made the phenomenological study of pain so difficult. The second section pairs this internal splitting with an external splitting, arguing that pain demonstrates a bidirectional character, or a capacity to signify both the presence and the absence of subjectivity at the same time. As I argue, this doubling makes pain a uniquely important topic in epistemic ethics, especially with regards to forms of pain that lack easily observable physical correlates. The chapter concludes with an explanation of the importance of literary representations of pain, arguing that pain experience must be understood in relation to its own complexly woven context, a context that is often best represented aesthetically.

The next chapter reads three works by Virginia Woolf—the novel *Flush* and the essays "On Being Ill" and "Street Haunting"—in relation to Thomas Nagel's influential essay "What Is It Like to Be a Bat?" Nagel argues that in order for a physicalist model of consciousness—that is, theories of consciousness which hold that all thinking has a physical correlate in the brain—to be defensible, it must account for the embodied subjectivity of the entity described. In short, in order to reduce the mind of a bat to physical events, one must produce a physicalist account of "what it is like" to be a bat. Woolf, similarly, asks "what is it like?" questions of her own, explicitly in "Street Haunting," where she asks "what is it like to be a dwarf?" and implicitly in the other two texts, which ask "what is it like to be a dog?" and "what is it like to be ill?" *Flush*—a fictionalized biography of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's pet spaniel—is especially important here due to the role of pain, or the absence of pain. As surprisingly few critics of the novel have noted, Barrett Browning was herself afflicted with serious chronic pain throughout the period of her life when she owned *Flush*, pain that is alluded to obliquely in the novel only through what T. S. Eliot calls "objective correlatives," physical metaphors of her interior existence. Her subjectivity is thus made as inexplicable to *Flush*, who cannot read her expressions of pain, as his subjectivity is to her, thus mirroring the reader's lack of access to Barrett

Browning. Thus, I read Woolf's depiction of pain and interiority as based in her engagement with the ethics of imagining the mind of the other, and with her analysis of the role of objective correlatives for the minds of others in both literature and daily life.

The third chapter turns to the relationship between pain, racism, and religious experience in the early work of James Baldwin. Scholars of Baldwin's writing on his experience in the Pentecostal church frequently overlook the central role of pain in his description of religious experience, which recurs in both *The Fire Next Time* and his novel *Go Tell It on the Mountain*. Drawing from epistemic justice philosophy and critical phenomenology, this chapter argues that the recurrent descriptions of pain in relation to a purported encounter with God serve as a nexus point between Baldwin's understanding of the intersubjective functions of religious worship and his critique of what Charles Mills calls the "epistemological ignorance" of white supremacy. Pain's bidirectionality in Baldwin's work—as that which is completely private, and that which one can only understand in relation to others—is what gives it this metaphorical power and allows it to express the epistemic homology between the structure of Baldwin's church and the structure of racism. The examination of the role of pain in Baldwin's work shows the extent to which he anticipated many more recent philosophical developments and demonstrates the central place of epistemology in both his fiction and nonfiction. Pain for Baldwin reveals and somatizes the role of ignorance and denialism in power hierarchies, and the extent to which white supremacy depends on willful unawareness of its presence and function.

The next chapter focuses on Elie Wiesel's novelistic Holocaust memoir *Night*, specifically on the question of the relationship between failure and autobiography in the text's political project. Such texts often include, or are accompanied by, declarations of the impossibility of what they hope to achieve, the experience of the death camps being so singular that, the authors believe, only a survivor of one could ever understand it. If that is the case, then why write the text at all? As I argue, the purpose of a text like *Night* is not to convey information or build understanding per se, but rather to reverse the processes of dehumanization and exclusion that were necessary for the Holocaust to happen. Drawing on Giorgio Agamben's *Homo Sacer* and Paul De Man's essay "Autobiography as De-Facement," I read *Night* as a work that destabilizes, rather than reinforces, the singularity and isolation of its suffering protagonist, bringing his interdependency to the fore and thus reversing the process of dis-integration

that rendered him vulnerable to Nazi violence. A Holocaust memoir does not, then, *convey* something, but rather *enacts* something: the reintegration of the author into social and political life, extracting them from the state of *homo sacer*. Representations of pain in such memoirs thus do not distance the memoirist from the reader, but rather the opposite, implicating the reader in the construction of the mind and the body that suffers, and thus establishing, through the act of representation, the memoirist as always-already part of society and thus owed its protections.

Chapter 5 analyzes the role of pain and torture in the construction and destruction of subjectivity by way of a comparison of the depictions of torture in the theater of Sarah Kane and Elaine's Scarry's *The Body in Pain*. The chapter uses Kane, in conjunction with the phenomenology of Emmanuel Levinas as well as relevant work on the history and sociology of privacy and private speech, to develop an account of pain's bidirectional character. Using Kane to expand upon Scarry's account of the role of subjectivity in torture, we can see how the logic of torture structures numerous relationships in Kane's work, including *Blasted*, *Phaedra's Love*, *Cleansed*, and *Crave*. The chapter reads Kane as not only a major playwright, but also a subtle and perceptive theorist of suffering, for whom the question of intersubjectivity is a major site of dramatic struggle.

The sixth chapter focuses on Margaret Edson's one-act play *Wit*, which concerns an English professor and John Donne scholar, Vivian Bearing, who has been diagnosed with terminal cancer. The chapter makes two broad arguments: first, that readings of the play have focused too closely on its usefulness in medical school contexts as an example of "what not to do," and second, that the play makes a powerful and unappreciated argument in favor of an application of hermeneutical methods to medical diagnosis. I investigate Bearing's reading methods, which clearly derive from New Criticism, to show how the depiction of diagnosis in *Wit* shows it to be a process of reading and interpretation, one where the ambiguity of the symptom demands a literary-critical response. Drawing connections to works like *The Well-Wrought Urn* and *The Seven Types of Ambiguity*, the chapter shows how the structure of *Wit* enacts a mimesis of the process of diagnosis as well as the experience of being diagnosed. Finally, the chapter turns to the methods of phenomenological hermeneutics espoused by Hans-Georg Gadamer (who himself wrote a book on the role of interpretation in medicine) to show the centrality and importance of the patient's own understanding of their illness in medical ethics, something Edson herself enacts and performs throughout her fascinating and undercriticized play.

One of the dangers of a work like *The Body in Pain* is that it risks naturalizing the inaccessibility of the pain of the other—an inaccessibility that, as this book shows, is destabilized by pain's role and participation in intersubjectivity. Thus the seventh chapter turns from readings of how pain's privacy might be mitigated or overcome toward an analysis of how political institutions actively foster the noncommunication of pain in order to enable the acts of violence on which those institutions depend. Through readings of the role of translation in the poetry anthology *Poems from Guantánamo: The Detainees Speak*, Friedrich Nietzsche's antiwar arguments in *Human, All Too Human*, and Dave Grossman's *On Killing* (a study of the methods by which militaries overcome a person's aversion to killing through dehumanization and operant conditioning), I show how the politically motivated infliction of pain and death on others is enabled by a *mutual* dehumanization that transforms the other into a monster and the self into a machine. The chapter argues that, as distasteful as they are, texts like *On Killing* must be read and grappled with by humanities scholars, as they provide vital blueprints to the means by which systems of violence and oppression enact and sustain themselves. It is for this reason, then, that the privacy of the other's pain must be denaturalized and that the means by which that privacy is enforced must be revealed and studied: so that pain and death may be harder to inflict, such that ours might become a less violent and less painful world.

Finally, the concluding chapter responds to the 2025 U.S. Supreme Court case *United States v. Skrmetti*, which upheld a state ban on gender-affirming care for trans children. It examines the process by which childhood gender dysphoria is excluded from the discourse of trans health care, a clear example of the essentially political nature of pain expression.

Agony for Others thus establishes several bases on which to examine the representation of pain in literature that are not limited to seeing it as thought- and language-destroying and removed from intersubjectivity. Yet I do not see it as a rebuttal to Scarry's text, which is and remains invaluable, but rather an extension of it, or a step beyond it, an attempt to find what *else* could be usefully said on the subject. Pain is, has been, and will remain part of the intersubjective world that every person shapes and is shaped by. Literature provides a way to look at that world, like how one might use a pair of mirrors to see the back of one's own head. Literary representations of pain are thus of special philosophical relevance, framing and suspending the experience for study so that both the experience and the experiencer may be better understood.

ONE

Pain Between Feeling and Expression

Or, What Other Is Agony For?

One insight that injury affords is that there are others out there on whom my life depends, people I do not know and may never know. This fundamental dependency on anonymous others is not a condition that I can will away. No security measure will foreclose this dependency; no violent act of sovereignty will rid the world of this fact.

—Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*¹

[L]et us turn our attention to the fact that in our continuously flowing world-perceiving we are not isolated but rather have, within it, contact with other human beings. Each one has his perceptions, his presentifications, his harmonious experiences. . . . But in living with one another each one can take part in the life of the others. Thus in general the world exists not only for isolated men but for the community of men; and this is due to the fact that even what is straightforwardly perceptual is communalized.

—Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*²

Three Furies

My favorite circle of Hell is the ninth. I mean from among the circles of Hell in Dante's *Inferno* in which the ninth, final circle, the prisonhouse of traitors and the breakers of vows, is a vast lake of ice in which the sinners are immersed. For

-
1. Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London: Verso, 2006), xii.
 2. Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology: An Introduction to Phenomenological Philosophy*, trans. David Carr (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970), 163.

some the ice goes up to their waists, and others to their shoulders, but for the worst betrayers of all, the vilest of the vile, the ice rises up to just below the eyes. And so, as Dante tells us,

Their tears themselves do not allow them to weep,
And the grief which finds the ice blocking their eyes
Turns inwards to increase their anguish;
For the first tears form a coagulation,
And, in the manner of a crystal mask,
Fill all the cavity beneath the eyebrows.³

The tears themselves prevent their cries. Unwilling to fulfill their obligations to others in life, the sinners are permanently cut off from any kindness or assistance in death, physically separated from each other by the ice around their bodies and emotionally separated by the ice on their faces. While some might find it strange to have a favorite circle of Hell, I nevertheless remember my first reading of this passage much like the sinners in the ice remember, albeit to far less pleasure, the first and final tears they shed upon admittance to eternity. It held my attention because of how it reframed the earlier cantos, which showed people blown about by a hurricane or trapped in flaming pits or torn apart by a demon with a sword, writhing and crying out. Dante's evocative descriptions of their expressions of pain, which by their skillfulness never failed to draw out my pity, now here are revealed to have been a mercy. The victims of these higher layers of Hell are, if nothing else, permitted to express themselves, are granted this small outlet for their grief, while the betrayers of circle nine are not. The scene represents in miniature the dependency pain inflicts, in Judith Butler's words, "on anonymous others." Without security, without autonomy, the victims of this circle are reliant on the kindness of this stranger in order to be signified.

This scene finds an equal opposite, oddly yet fittingly enough, in the film *Brazil*, directed by Terry Gilliam and released in 1985.⁴ It is a loose and stylized retelling of George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, and like that book its plot turns on a moment of torture. The protagonist, Sam Lowry, is investigating the

3. Dante, *Inferno, The Divine Comedy*, trans. C. H. Sisson, ed. David H. Higgins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), XXXIII.94–99.

4. *Brazil*, directed by Terry Gilliam (1985; West Hollywood: Embassy International Pictures, 2002), DVD.

arrest of an innocent man by the incompetent and overcomplicated bureaucracy of the setting's authoritarian government and so visits the department of Information Retrieval (i.e., torture) in search of clues. When, in the course of his investigation, he approaches the threshold of Room 5,001 (an allusion to Orwell's Room 101), signs of trouble begin before he even opens the door, as he notices a smear of blood on the ground. Inside he sees a secretary rapidly transcribing something from a set of earphones. A glance at the typewriter reveals a grisly text: "WHY AM I HERE . . . WHAT IS THAT YOU ARE PUTTING ON MY HEAD? . . . AHHHH, OH GOD . . . NO, DON'T . . . I CAN'T STAND . . . AIIIEE . . . OOOOOOH . . . AAAAAHH . . . PLEASE" and so forth. (The question about something being put on the victim's head may be another allusion to Orwell, whose protagonist, Winston Smith, is tortured with a cage of rats that is placed over his head.) As the secretary speaks to Sam Lowry she removes her headphones to hear better, revealing the sound of the screaming torture victim and of whatever horrible thing is being done to them. Unlike in Dante, where the inability to express one's agony is a sign of its seriousness and power, and an indication of how terrible the damned souls of the ninth circle must be to deserve this additional punishment not inflicted on the rest of Hell's denizens, this brief detail in *Brazil* indicates the pointlessness of the torture through the accumulation of an *excessive* record of its effects. "Information retrieval" is, after all, not the same as information use, information sorting, or information analysis. The name suggests acquisition for the sake of acquisition, beyond the point where it could be even potentially useful, the needles multiplied until they form their own haystack. Yet the scene also resembles the ninth circle of Dante's Hell in one important respect: aside from what the indirect allusion to Orwell tells us, we have no idea what is actually happening to this torture victim, just as the experience of being frozen in Hell's ice lake is inaccessible to us.

That similarity brings me to the third example with which I begin this chapter, the research of biologist Justin O. Schmidt, which can best be described as an exercise in pain ekphrasis. Schmidt, an entomologist who specialized in the study of stinging insects, was the creator of the Schmidt sting pain index, or a relative measure of the subjective painfulness of various insect stings (rating them from zero at the lowest, for painless stings, to four at the highest, for the most superlatively painful). The index, however, is less interesting than what went into creating it: Schmidt, over the course of many years, allowed himself to be stung by a wide variety of insects, from the infamously

painful bullet ant to the comparatively pleasant bumblebee, and in the process produced several brief and poetic descriptions of what being stung by each insect felt like. These descriptions were later assembled in the appendix of his book *The Sting of the Wild*. Below are a handful of examples, which describe, in order, what it feels like to be stung by a tarantula hawk moth (rating 4), the ant *Platythyrea lamellose* (rating 2), the anthophorid bee (rating 1), the elongate twig ant (rating 1), the red-headed paper wasp (rating 3), and the thread-waisted paper wasp (rating 1.5):

Blinding, fierce, shockingly electric. A running hair dryer has just been dropped into your bubble bath.⁵
 Relentless prickling throughout your body. Like wearing a wool jumpsuit laced with pine needles and poison ivy.⁶
 Almost pleasant, a lover just bit your earlobe a little too hard.⁷
 Reminiscent of a childhood bully. Intimidating, but his punch only glanced your chin, and you live for another day.⁸
 Immediate, irrationally intense, and unrelenting. This is the closest you will come to seeing the blue of a flame from within the fire.⁹
 Attention getting. Like the time your classmate stabbed you with a pencil point.¹⁰

I cite these examples for a couple of reasons, one of which is to bring attention to the clearly literary quality of these descriptions, which is underappreciated. Virginia Woolf's lament that illness and pain have no vocabulary seems never to have reached Schmidt, who takes on the challenge with admirable verve and artistry. Yet the results seem to go in two directions at once (a doubling that, we will see, is a pattern with descriptions of pain). On the one hand, the descriptions provide much more information as to what the experience "is like" than either Dante or Gilliam do, in large part thanks to Schmidt's direct experience of the thing described (Dante having, presumably, never allowed himself to be frozen neck-deep in a lake). Yet at times I find the effect of read-

5. Justin O. Schmidt, *The Sting of the Wild: The Story of the Man Who Got Stung for Science* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016), 230.

6. Schmidt, *The Sting of the Wild*, 224.

7. Schmidt, *The Sting of the Wild*, 225.

8. Schmidt, *The Sting of the Wild*, 221.

9. Schmidt, *The Sting of the Wild*, 229.

10. Schmidt, *The Sting of the Wild*, 228.

ing these descriptions similar to the effect of seeing the monster in a horror movie, in that it never looks as bad as your imagination makes it seem. Even his description of a bullet ant sting—"Pure, intense, brilliant pain. Like walking over flaming charcoal with a 3-inch nail embedded in your heel"¹¹—tells more than it shows. This is the first insect sting to ever get a rating of four on his scale,¹² and the description makes it seem more like an obscure extreme sport. One needs to sit and think about what the metaphor is actually communicating to grasp the kind of pain being described, to understand how utterly horrid it would feel. It is not simply a burning at the site of the sting, but a burning that pierces deep into the body, as though a heated nail were driven into you. Do not get me wrong: Schmidt's description makes an extremely compelling case for never being stung by a bullet ant, but Dante's lake of ice and Gilliam's uselessly recorded screams better retain an edge of the terror and despair that the people suffering these agonies no doubt feel, in part I suspect because of the power of implication.

These examples together provide a rough outline of the difficulties the present book attempts to address. Much of *Agony for Others* is about what I broadly describe as *pain expression*, an intentionally general term that encapsulates all the ways that feelings of pain may be expressed, described, indicated, or otherwise communicated to another. While the book's main theoretical sources will be from phenomenology, epistemological justice philosophy, and various other related areas as befitting each individual chapter, I nevertheless consider this project to be generally under the umbrella of disability studies. I do so for several reasons, not least of which being that several types of pain (especially chronic pain) are generally considered disabilities already. But also, as Joel Michael Reynolds has persuasively argued, because pain is *in itself* a concern for disability scholars because of how pain and ideas about pain are leveraged and invoked to cast disability as inevitably tragic, sad, and lacking in value. As he writes, "ableist habits of thought repeatedly conflate disability with pain and suffering to such a degree that this conceptual confusion is a foundational problematic for critical reflection of disability,"¹³ a tendency he refers to as the

11. Schmidt, *The Sting of the Wild*, 225.

12. Justin O. Schmidt, Murray S. Blum, and William L. Overal, "Hemolytic Activities of Stinging Insect Venoms," *Archives of Insect Biochemistry and Physiology* 1, no. 2 (1984): 158. The chart that records the sting pain levels of the various insects tested (not yet accompanied by descriptions) lists the bullet ant by its scientific name, *Paraponera clavate*.

13. Joel Michael Reynolds, *The Life Worth Living: Disability, Pain, and Mortality* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2022), 18.

ableist conflation. Disability is thus a kind of intersection point, a middle term linking together many of this text's other concerns. If one considers, for instance, the well-documented tendency of hospitals to restrict pain medication for Black people when it would otherwise be prescribed,¹⁴ the clear racial discrimination can be seen as a kind of *racist conflation* of Blackness with insensibility (a conflation I discuss in more detail below). There is an axis here of needing, feeling, and deserving, all of which are assessed by the observer (e.g., a doctor) about the observed, and according to which the observed is assigned an identity as disabled or drug-seeking, pained or malingering, in terms of the observer's own conceptions of race and (dis)ability.

It is worth pausing to note the importance of the conflation of pain and disability in the broader sweep of disability activism, or the short-circuiting thereof. The ableist conflation depoliticizes disability and disabled people in two general ways. First, it encourages the adoption of either a medical model (for those whose disabilities seem amenable to medical science) or a tragic model (for those whose disabilities do not) that treats disability as an individual problem to be solved (or not) according to the expertise of doctors and scientists, the so-called obviousness of its biological origins and undesirability seemingly removing disability from the realm of political contestation. Second, it depoliticizes the pain itself, treating it as a purely individual problem suffered alone, as that which is caused purely by *one's own* disability and which can never be the source of a shared grievance around which different people can organize. The ableist conflation does not ask one to consider how, for instance, rules about access to pain medication might exacerbate someone's suffering and how such a connection might be grounds for solidarity with broader movements for disability or medical activism *even if* the pain does indeed come from an individual medical condition; again, the racist bias in the distribution of opioids is a clear example. The generalized presumption that pain is apolitical—really a self-fulfilling prophecy—is one of the main positions this book argues against.

This book also takes many cues from another well-known work, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*, by Elaine Scarry.¹⁵ As I have

14. For an examination of opioid use in the context of race and disability, see Maisam Alomar, "'This Isn't the South Bronx': Race, Criminality, and Disability in the Contemporary Opioid Epidemic," *Social Text* 38, no. 3 (2020): 27–53.

15. Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985). Future citations will be parenthetical.

written elsewhere,¹⁶ the book's massive influence on the analysis and philosophy of pain (especially in literary studies, where it remains the first text one often reads when researching the topic) has led to a certain repetitiveness and stagnation in the study of pain expression. For many scholars, her declarations that the pain of the other "has no reality because it has not yet manifested itself on the visible surface of the earth" (Scarry, 3), that pain experience lacks what phenomenologists call *intentionality* as a result of this lack of "referential content" (Scarry, 5), and that "to have pain is to have *certainly*; to hear about pain is to have *doubt*" (Scarry, 13) are the beginning and the end of the discussion.

Yet Scarry's understanding of pain is not the only model for how pain can be experienced, communicated, and understood. Alyson Patsavas, for example, argues that our understanding of pain and suffering needs to see these experiences as culturally and materially embedded, writing that "when cultural discourses construct pain as the cause of feelings of devastation, they oversimplify complex cultural, historical, and political phenomena."¹⁷ Kleinman et al. similarly emphasize how many of the underpinnings of pain experience, such as "hormonal, affective, and perceptual processes," are "all influenced by cultural categories and social relations."¹⁸ Margaret Price explains that even if one cannot understand or comprehend the experience of another, one should not dismiss the fact that the person having the experience experiences it as meaningful,¹⁹ an argument that directly applies to any model of pain experience that considers it unsharable, and that we see reflected in, for example, Ato Quayson's work on pain in Samuel Beckett.²⁰ Tobin Siebers argues that models of pain experience like Scarry's "easily enforces a myth of hyperindividuality."²¹ C. S. Lewis sees pain as "inherent in the very existence of a world where souls can meet."²² The Buddhist philosopher Nāgārjuna asks, insightfully, "who exists

16. Jeremy Colangelo, "The Body Politic in Pain," *Modernism Modernity Print Plus* 7, no. 3 (2023): np. <https://doi.org/10.26597/mod.0248>

17. Alyson Patsavas, "Recovering a Cripistemology of Pain: Leaky Bodies, Connective Tissue, and Feeling Discourse," *Journal of Literary and Cultural Disability Studies* 8, no. 2 (2014): 204.

18. Mary-Jo DelVecchio Good, Paul E. Brodwin, Byron J. Good, and Arthur Kleinman, "Pain as Human Experience: An Introduction," in *Pain as Human Experience: An Anthropological Perspective*, ed. Mary-Jo DelVecchio Good, Paul E. Brodwin, Byron J. Good, and Arthur Kleinman (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 2.

19. Margaret Price, "The Bodymind Problem and the Possibilities of Pain," *Hypatia* 30, no. 1 (2015): 279.

20. Ato Quayson, *Aesthetic Nervousness: Disability and the Crisis of Representation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 63.

21. Tobin Siebers, *Disability Theory* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008), 60.

22. C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (London: The Centenary Press, 1940), 77.

distinct from suffering?"²³ Keith Wailoo has documented the centrality of pain to many late twentieth-century American political disputes, in defiance of pain's alleged apoliticality;²⁴ Saidiya Hartman similarly documents the centrality of pain and suffering in the enforcement of slavery and racism in America's nineteenth century;²⁵ and Simone de Beauvoir has written on the relationship between pain and the construction of womanhood.²⁶ While the philosophical canonicity of *The Body in Pain* makes it a convenient starting (and, too often, ending) point for investigations of the cultural and aesthetic role of pain, there is a much larger discourse (of which I can cite only a sample) that in turns either complicates or directly opposes many of that text's central conclusions.

One of the ways in which pain experience gets misunderstood as incommunicable or lacking in intentionality is that it is often thought about homogeneously, as a singular, simple experience. Scarry, for example, might point to the frequent use of metaphors in Schmidt's descriptions as resembling her analysis of medical cases for people who suffered accidents, and how "the sentences describing the accident (the moment when the hammer fell from the ladder onto the person's spine) may more successfully convey the sheer fact of the patient's agony than those sentences that attempt to describe the person's pain directly" (Scarry, 15). She could also point to the testimony of torture victims, which, she notes, "almost invariably includes descriptions of being made to stare at the weapon with which they were about to be hurt" (Scarry, 27), as seen also in the torture scenes in *Brazil*. The argument here would be that since pain lacks its own intentional object, one must resort to the next best thing, the object that caused (or will cause) the pain rather than the object that the pain is phenomenologically "about." The ultimate point here is that pain is incommunicable, and that what Schmidt is attempting to do is, in the end, impossible.

Yet Schmidt's examples above show numerous ways in which the experience of pain is phenomenologically complex. For instance, the description "reminiscent of a childhood bully. Intimidating, but his punch only glanced your chin" says little about the localized discomfort of the sting besides its mildness. Instead, the metaphor describes the *urgency* of the pain, as well as the anxiety one might feel in anticipation of it. The description "attention getting. Like the time your

23. Nāgārjuna, *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middleway: Nāgārjuna's Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, trans. Jay L. Garfield (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), XII.6, p. 32.

24. Keith Wailoo, *Pain: A Political History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014).

25. Saidiya V. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

26. Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. H. M. Parshley (London: Jonathan Cape, 1953).

classmate stabbed you with a pencil point” makes the connection even more obvious: The metaphor about being stabbed with a pencil, which might seem at first to communicate the type and intensity of the local injury, is actually about how that injury *gets your attention*. In this sense, Schmidt’s descriptions resemble what Colin Klein describes in his book on the “imperative theory of pain,” where he argues that “pains are *imperatives*. They are sensations with a content, and that content is a *command* to protect a part of your body.”²⁷ Pain, in this framework, is comparable to the feeling of an itch, which impels you to scratch. Though I do not think the experience of pain is exhausted by this definition, this imperative function is clearly an important part of the overall experience of pain, or the pain-complex. And just as an experience must always be an experience *of* something, an imperative must always be an imperative *to* something. Put another way, if pain is directing your attention, it must be directing that attention somewhere (however well or poorly articulated).

This “somewhere” brings us back to the question of pain’s communicability. This monograph takes many of its philosophical cues from a recently developed field known as *critical phenomenology*, which is most strongly associated with the work of Lisa Guenther, whose important study of the phenomenology of solitary confinement I draw on throughout. As Guenther describes, what makes critical phenomenology different from classical phenomenology is its focus on the ways that subjective experience is constructed and understood in relation to social and material environments, with the work of philosophers like Frantz Fanon and Judith Butler often cited as predecessors for the method. As Guenther described in a talk hosted by the Université de Montréal, classical phenomenology was limited by its unwillingness or inability to critique the loci of power and hegemony and the manner in which these processes may impact a person’s perception of reality. Critical phenomenology, on the other hand, focuses on how “historical struggles,” which “function in a quasi transcendental way” that “generate and consolidate meaning” and relate to “intersubjective” “sense-making” while “attend[ing] to the ways that power and history shape lived experience.”²⁸ Similarly, as Johanna Oksala puts it, Guenther “criticizes the priority Husserl gives to *noesis* over *noema* and argues that this prioritization results in a mistaken account of the relationship between consciousness and the

27. Colin Klein, *What the Body Commands: The Imperative Theory of Pain* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2015), 1.

28. Lisa Guenther, “Six Senses of ‘Critical’ in Critical Phenomenology,” Critical Phenomenology Reading Group (lecture, Université de Montréal, Montreal, April 14, 2022).

world” such that “*noesis* cannot be absolutely prior to *noema*, but they must rather be implicated in a complex reciprocity.”²⁹ That is to say, by prioritizing the presentation of objects to the mind through the senses (*noesis*) over its relation to a corresponding mental construct (*noema*), Husserl overlooks the role that these concepts play in constructing the subject’s perceptual world. This reciprocity often takes the form of what I refer to here as intersubjective calibration, where two or more people directly or indirectly compare their apprehension of some external object so as to generate a commonality in their respective lifeworlds. Husserl describes a process somewhat like this late in the first volume of *Ideas*, where he discusses “the intersubjective thing,” which is constituted in relation to “an indefinite plurality of subjects that stand in relation of ‘mutual understanding’” such that “the intersubjective world is the correlate of the intersubjective experience.”³⁰ In Guenther’s *Solitary Confinement*, however, we see how the lack of an intersubjective community robs one of this calibration and throws the whole complex of perception out of joint.³¹

Merleau-Ponty, whose work stands out amid classical phenomenology for its attention to the physical body and the material world, provides an excellent example of how this process works:

My friend Paul and I point to certain details of the landscape, and Paul’s finger, which is pointing out the steeple to me, is not a finger-for-me that I conceive as oriented toward a steeple-to-me; rather, it is Paul’s finger that itself shows me the steeple that Paul sees. . . . I do not think of a flow of private sensations in relation to my own sensations that are mediated through some interposed signs; rather, I think of someone who lives in the same world as I, in the same history as I, and with whom I communicate through this world and through this history.³²

Thus, intentionality permits intersubjectivity through the use of an external object to correlate two lifeworlds with each other, one person recognizing the

29. Johanna Oksala, “The Method of Critical Phenomenology: Simone de Beauvoir as a Phenomenologist,” *European Journal of Phenomenology* 31, no. 1 (2023): 139.

30. Edmund Husserl, *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*, trans. W. R. Boyce Gibson (London: Routledge, 2012), 318.

31. Lisa Guenther, *Solitary Confinement: Social Death and Its Afterlives* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013).

32. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Donald A. Landers (London: Routledge, 2014), 428. For my earlier comments on this passage in relation to pain phenomenology, see Colangelo, “The Body Politic in Pain.”

other as “like me” and thus responsive to external stimuli in analogous ways. The question of whether pain, specifically, can be interpreted in relation to this example, and to the process of intersubjective calibration more generally, I address in the section below. But for now it suffices that for critical phenomenology, the “steeple” can just as easily be a government institution, an ideological construct, a work of art, or a feature of the environment, and the act of “pointing” is often tied to complex sociopolitical processes, which means that those processes are themselves embedded in the formation of an intersubjective lifeworld that must itself be analyzed complexly. All this must be understood as occurring not only at the level of conscious awareness, but through the sedimentation of habit and ideology, or what Merleau-Ponty refers to as *operative intentionality*, or the “*latent intentionality*,” which he compares to the form of memory represented in the work of Marcel Proust,³³ or what Jennifer McWeeny calls “a practical directedness toward the world that is not necessarily present to reflective consciousness but is instead made manifest in the daily operation of a person’s life.”³⁴ Broadly speaking, my argument here is that pain is subject to these forces and understandable in these terms, and thus can be subjected to the kinds of analysis that critical phenomenologists perform.

Split Intentions

My use of Merleau-Ponty’s church steeple example invites a line of questioning that I will here attempt to answer, namely: is pain intentional, in the phenomenological sense? Is it “about” something in the way that hunger is “about” an empty stomach or fear is “about” the danger (a cliff, a bear, a final exam) that prompted it? As Husserl writes in his *Logical Investigations*, “intentional experiences have the peculiarity of directing themselves in varying fashion to presented objects, but they do so in an *intentional* sense. An object is ‘referred to’ or ‘aimed at’ in them,” in a manner such that the apprehension of an object and of its intention occur as one.³⁵ He says similarly in *Ideas* that “in so far as they [experiences] are a consciousness of something they are said to be ‘intention-

33. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, ed. Claude LeFort, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 243–44.

34. Jennifer McWeeny, “Operative Intentionality,” in *50 Concepts for a Critical Phenomenology*, ed. Gail Weiss, Ann. V. Murphy, and Gayle Salamon (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2020), 255.

35. Edmund Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, trans J. N. Findlay, 2 vols. (London: Routledge, 2001), 2:98.

ally related' to this something."³⁶ The question of pain intentionality is highly complicated when posed in the abstract, but it can be simplified by reframing it in terms of the animating questions of this book: whether pain can be communicated, or represented, in a way that allows it to ground an intersubjective relation. If pain can be shown to have an analogue to the church steeple—that is, if it has something that can be “pointed at”—then it can be related to intersubjectively. One could treat statements like “this hurts” and “this is beautiful” as directly analogous in their manner of communicating a subjective experience (pain, aesthetic pleasure) by way of an empirical correlate (“this”). If not, then things become more difficult. Simply pointing to the external causes of certain pains—the knife that pierced, the flame that burned, the ground that was landed on—is insufficient when discussing pain in general, since at least some pains do not have such an obvious correlate.³⁷ But what about the site of the wound or the location of the ache? Can that (metaphorically speaking) be pointed at in the same way?

The question “can pains be correlated to some entity outside one’s subjectivity which can provide empirical sense-data to another person and so serve as a basis for intersubjectivity?” is thus closely related to the question of whether pain is intentional. Can one make an argument for the affirmative *in general*? This question immediately raises an answer, which itself prompts a new question: does one’s own body count as “external” for these purposes? Is Scarry correct when she writes that “physical pain . . . is an intentional state without an intentional object” (Scarry, 164)? This section answers yes to the first two questions and no to the third, in part by arguing that one function of pain is to draw attention to one’s own body’s status as material, as objective matter, which is as easily damaged or destroyed as any other matter. The subjective experience of, for example, my hand as *my* hand and not merely one object among others has the effect of clouding my awareness of all the ways that my hand(/foot/eye/tooth/etc.) is subject to physical damage just like any other entity. In short, in seeing it as a *hand*, I forget that it is an *object*. Pain serves to remind me that the fact that this lump of matter feels “like me” does not imply that it has ceased to act like any other tissue. In short, the question of pain’s intentionality is so trou-

36. Husserl, *Ideas*, 67.

37. Schmidt, here, also complicated the question, for what would he “point to” in this case if his goal were to communicate relative differences in painfulness? It is not as though bullet ant venom *looks* more painful than, say, honeybee venom, even though it is. But if the experience is intentional, then this issue is irrelevant.

blesome, I suggest, because it sits at a transition point between what Husserl termed the *körper* (the physical, objective body) and the *leib* (the subjective body, which includes the quality of “feeling like a part of me”). By treating the intentional structure of pain as internally directed, phenomenologists debating the question of pain intentionality have treated the “my”-ness of one’s own body as always given and not subject to disruption. But one actually has two bodies, a body as it is subjectively experienced and a body as it exists physically in the environment, and an important function of pain is to draw attention from the former to the latter when the situation calls for it.³⁸ Thus if, among all the hands inside a crowded room, I feel pain in the one being monitored by my nervous system, point to it, and say “that hurts,” I am not pointing to “my” hand as I experience it from a first-person perspective, but rather to the physical, empirical hand that everyone else can see. It is not *my* hand, but *this* hand, and it is experienced as such by the others in the room, for whom my hand is indeed just an object. I am thus in concurrence with Sara Ahmed, who observes that the experience of pain “become[s] lived as a return to the body, or a rendering present to consciousness of what has become absent.”³⁹

Elaine Scarry is not the only person to argue that pain is outside of or disconnected from intentionality; philosophers as diverse as Jean-Paul Sartre and Richard Rorty have made exactly that claim. Rorty, in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, uses the supposed non-intentionality of pain as an example of what he considers to be the limitations of phenomenology, writing that “pains are not intentional—they do not represent, they are not *about* anything.”⁴⁰ Sartre makes a far more thorough and interesting argument, holding in effect that the body in itself cannot be an object of intention because “consciousness of the body is comparable to the consciousness of a *sign*” and “the sign is that which is surpassed *toward meaning*, that which is negated for the sake of meaning, that which is never apprehended, that beyond which the look is perpetually directed,” from which it follows that

[I]f I have a “headache” I can discover within me an intentional affectivity directed toward my pain so as to “suffer” it, to accept it with resignation, or to

38. After completing this chapter, I came across a similar, albeit much less developed, argument in Jessica Stanier and Nicole Miglio, “Painful Experience and Constitution of the Intersubjective Self: A Critical-Phenomenological Analysis,” in *Phenomenology of Bioethics: Technologies of Lived Experience*, ed. Susi Ferrarello (Cham: Springer, 2021), 107.

39. Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (London: Routledge, 2015), 26.

40. Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 22.

reject it, to evaluate it (as unjust, as deserved, as purifying, as humiliating, etc.) so as to escape it. Here it is the very intention which is the affection; it is pure act and already a project, a pure consciousness of something. This cannot be what we should consider consciousness (of) the body.⁴¹

Whereas Rorty's objection, in its brusqueness, seems to assume its own point—a flaw it shares with Scarry's contention that pain is "exceptional" among subjective states "for being the only one that has no object . . . in the external world" (Scarry, 161)—Sartre's objection is much more thorough and indeed more challenging for one who wishes to defend the opposing view. While one could criticize the characteristic conflation of the sign with absence, which Jacques Derrida critiques in *Of Grammatology* and elsewhere, that argument would miss the mark. Sartre is using "the sign" here as a metaphor to explain something else: the way that the intentionality of pain seems at times to overshoot it, such that the object is not the lived body, but rather the unpaired body that one presumably wishes to return to. One should not focus on critiquing the metaphor but rather what it conveys.

I think Sartre is indeed on to something here. His argument is in part similar, especially given its metaphorical use of the "sign," to Virginia Woolf's complaint in "On Being Ill" that "literature does its best to maintain that its concern is with the mind; that the body is a sheet of plain glass through which the soul looks straight and clear"⁴² (a tendency, it should be said, she is critiquing here). It also resembles her observations of the general poverty of ways of talking about pain and illness, such that one could "let a sufferer try to describe a pain in his head to a doctor and language at once runs dry."⁴³ As Peter Fifield ably describes, Woolf's own work seems to defy this pessimism, indicating not that illness and pain (which the essay seems to conflate) are undescribable, but that they "deman[d] an unusual, evocative style of writing."⁴⁴ And indeed, there *does* seem to be a sense in which pain is, if not ungraspable by language, at least fickle and difficult, requiring far greater effort for far less success than other subjective states.

The history of the phenomenology of pain bears out this difficulty, and

41. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Washington Square Press, 1984), 435.

42. Virginia Woolf, "On Being Ill," in *Selected Essays*, ed. David Bradshaw (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 101.

43. Woolf, "On Being Ill," 102.

44. Peter Fifield, *Modernism and Physical Illness: Sick Books* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 4.

indeed the research area reflects pain's fickleness in its own lack of cohesion. Saulius Geniusas's invaluable *The Phenomenology of Pain* is one of only two books that focus exclusively on the topic, Christian Grüny's *Zerstörte Erfahrung. Eine Phänomenologie des Schmerzes*⁴⁵ being the other. As Geniusas lays out, the question was an active topic of debate between two of Husserl's own influences: Franz Brentano, who first developed the concept of intentionality (and argued that pain was intentional), and Carl Stumpf, a philosopher and musicologist (who argued that pain was not intentional). Geniusas suggests that it was for the purpose of splitting the difference, so to speak, between the two that Husserl briefly and inconclusively addressed the question of pain intentionality.⁴⁶ In the *Logical Investigations*, Husserl starts off by affirming the intentionality of pleasure, writing that "the specific essence of pleasure demands a relation to something pleasing," not simply as a matter of cause and effect but rather in terms of what pleasure essentially is.⁴⁷ As for pains, however, "the sensible pain of a burn can certainly not be classed beside a conviction, a surmise, a volition etc. etc., but beside sensory contents like rough or smooth, red or blue etc."⁴⁸ (It is interesting to read this passage in relation to Scarry's repeated association of pain experience with conviction and a sense of certainty; one might ask, how do the definitions of "conviction," "surmise," etc. differ between these two philosophers?) This argument resembles a comment he makes in *Ideas*, where he distinguishes "sensory contents" like "colour, touch, sounds, and the like" from "appearing phases of things, their colour-quality, their roughness, and so forth, which rather 'exhibit' themselves experientially though their means," which he compares to "sensile impressions of *pleasure, pain*, tickling, etc." that he considers to be "concrete data of experience [which] are to be found as components in concrete experiences of a more comprehensive kind which as wholes are intentional."⁴⁹ I will not speculate as to what happened in the time between the *Logical Investigations* and *Ideas* that resulted in pleasure suddenly being categorized with pain, but it is nevertheless clear that Husserl considered pain to be more like an ingredient or component of an intentional experience rather than an intentional experience in itself.

45. Christian Grüny, *Zerstörte Erfahrung. Eine Phänomenologie des Schmerzes* (Würzburg: K&N, 2004). For an analysis and discussion of the text in English, see Agustín Serrano de Haro, "New and Old Approaches to the Phenomenology of Pain," *Studia Phaenomenologica* 12 (2012): 227–37.

46. Saulius Geniusas, *The Phenomenology of Pain* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2020), 52–55.

47. Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, 2:108.

48. Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, 2:109.

49. Husserl, *Ideas*, 174–75. My emphasis.

I do not find Husserl's comparison all that convincing. Consider, for example, the experience of wiping one's hand with a rough towel compared with the experience of cutting one's hand with a knife. The roughness of the towel seems to adhere to it, such that the feeling of roughness goes away when the towel is removed from one's hand. But if you stab your hand with a knife and then remove the knife, the pain does not leave with it. Indeed, even if, in pressing the blade to my hand, I stop short of inflicting actual tissue damage, the feeling of pain lingers far more readily than the feeling of roughness does. It therefore seems wrong to conflate the two experiences. I would also question the applicability of Husserl's comparison to, for example, chronic pain, or pain that is otherwise internal to one's body (like from nerve damage or a burst appendix). Yet the question seems moot, as Husserl's remarks on pain seem not to have settled the matter. One need only look at José Ortega y Gasset's *Man and People*, the text of a course he delivered in 1949–50 that was published in 1957, where he writes quite confidently that "I cannot now enter into a strict phenomenology of pain—which, by the way, *no one has ever undertaken*."⁵⁰ The ungraspability of pain seems to have resulted in a fragmenting and dissipation of the research into its phenomenological character, such that a philosopher of Ortega's stature could overlook the explicit (albeit insufficient) study of this question by phenomenology's founders and precursors.

So let us return then to Sartre's objection to the idea of pain intentionality, which can now be seen in a broader context. The question "what is the experience of pain pointing at?" is resolved in his reading with the answer "beyond itself"; Sartre resembles Husserl here in seeing pain as something that, if it points at all, points toward something else, some greater concern or more complex entity to which the experience is intended. Yet this argument implicitly treats the experience of pain as somehow unitary, as though pain is an element on the periodic table of subjectivity waiting to combine into a molecule of intentional experience. But there are many good reasons to see pain as itself a composite experience with layers of complexity of its own. For example, the analytic philosopher Nikola Grahek in his provocative *Feeling Pain and Being in Pain*, divides the experience of pain into two broad components that give the book its title, that being the experience of "feeling pain" and the experience of "being in pain." He likewise argues that the two components can, in certain circumstances,

50. José Ortega y Gasset, *Man and People*, trans. Willard Ropes (New York: Norton, 1957), 141. My emphasis.

be experienced separately from each other. His text is based on two primary examples, pain asymbolia, which he describes as feeling pain without being *in* pain (i.e., a localized feeling of painfulness that “no longer reflects danger or threat”⁵¹), as well as analgesia, a condition that causes one to be aware of where and what the problem is without the immediate sensation of painfulness in that area.⁵² These conditions reveal that the full experience of pain, the subjective pain-complex, has at minimum two components, those being the localized experience of discomfort at a particular place in or on the body as well as the experience of distress or care with relation to that location and whatever is causing the problem (if such a source can be identified). The latter component, the experience of “being in pain,” which those with pain asymbolia lack, is at least as important to pain’s preservative function as the localized experience on which most of phenomenology’s focus has been cast. Those with pain asymbolia “fail to recoil spontaneously from threatening stimuli such as aggressive gestures and verbal menaces,”⁵³ and Grahek even cites one instance of a test subject who “appeared to be quite disinterested when a match was struck close to his face or eyes[!]”⁵⁴ As Grahek argues, “although pain appears to be a simple, homogenous experience, it is actually a complex experience comprising sensory-discriminative, emotional-cognitive, and behavioural components,” which though usually linked can in rare cases occur on their own.⁵⁵

At least some of the difficulty that phenomenology has had with the question of pain is, I think, attributable to the error of treating it as a homogeneous experience. Certainly in the passages from Husserl quoted above we can see him making this exact mistake, and I think Sartre and Rorty make it as well. A critical phenomenology of pain requires attention to its multiplicity. As Gail Weiss has written, citing Husserl, there is “no such thing as a simple act of perception since anything we are perceiving appears against a dense backdrop of past, present, and future experiences.”⁵⁶ What pain reveals to us is that this multiplicity is not merely temporal, but relates to the manner in which the physical body and one’s subjective experience of it intersect and interrelate. This complexity also provides us with clues as to how pain intentionality arises and functions.

This matter returns us to the distinction between *körper* (the material body)

51. Nikola Grahek, *Feeling Pain and Being in Pain* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2007), 3.

52. Grahek, *Feeling Pain and Being in Pain*, 98–99.

53. Grahek, *Feeling Pain and Being in Pain*, 47.

54. Qtd. in Grahek, *Feeling Pain and Being in Pain*, 48.

55. Grahek, *Feeling Pain and Being in Pain*, 2.

56. Gail Weiss, “The Body as a Narrative Horizon,” in *Thinking the Limits of the Body*, ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen and Gail Weiss (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), 27.

and *leib* (the experienced or subjective body) and its relevance to the feeling of pain. As Jenny Slatman writes, the *leib* “implies the body as a subject, a zero point of perception and action,”⁵⁷ and yet is nevertheless dependent and built upon the *körper*, never being fully distinct from it.⁵⁸ In this manner she reflects Merleau-Ponty’s use of the distinction, such as when he writes that “when it comes to my body, I never observe it in itself. I would need a second body to be able to do so, which would itself be unobservable.”⁵⁹ Sartre’s description of the “symbolic” nature of the body, the ease at which it is looked past or looked beyond, is clearly describing this unobservability, this inability to, so to speak, look at one’s own eyes. Merleau-Ponty reaches different conclusions on the question of pain, however, writing that

If I say that my foot hurts, I do not simply mean that my foot is a cause of the pain in the same way as the nail piercing it, the only difference being that my foot is closer to the me in the causal chain. Nor do I mean that my foot is the last object of the external world, after which a pain would begin in the intimate sense, namely, a consciousness of pain by itself and without a location that would only be linked to my foot through a causal determination and in the system of experience. Rather, I mean that the pain indicates its place, that it is constitutive of a “pain-space.” . . . [M]y body is not presented as an object of external sense . . . perhaps such objects only appear perspectively against this affective background that first throws consciousness outside of itself.⁶⁰

The description of “a consciousness of pain by itself and without a location that would only be linked to my foot through a causal determination and in the system of experience” seems similar to Grahek’s examples, and this similarity suggests that Merleau-Ponty was more aware of pain’s multiplicity, and basic uncanniness, than were his fellow phenomenologists. He appears also to have grasped that the experience of pain, and its intentionality, relates in some way to the conjunction of *leib* and *körper*, a relation I think goes quite far in explaining why pain has been and remains the center of so many philosophical problems.

Thus, what I put forward here is an understanding of pain as an infliction of

57. Jenny Slatman, “The *Körper-Leib* Distinction,” in *50 Concepts for a Critical Phenomenology*, eds. Gail Weiss, Ann. V. Murphy, and Gayle Salamon (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2020), 203.

58. Slatman, “The *Körper-Leib* Distinction,” 206.

59. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 93.

60. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 96.

a parallax view of one's own body, a shift of attention that oscillates from *leib* to *körper* and back again, brought about so that the damage to one's physical, empirical body may be accounted for. This interpretation answers the question of what one can "point to" when communicating the pain in one's hand: One may simply point at one's physical hand, the place where the pain is located and that serves as one-half of the intentional object to which the apprehension of pain is directed.

To explain why I use the metaphor of a parallax—a term from astronomy that designates instances where an object can seem to be located in two different places based on the viewpoint it is observed from—allow me to use the simple example of a paper cut. I turn the page of a book the wrong way and, without me realizing it (at first), the edge of the page is drawn in such a way that it cuts a small flap of skin loose from my finger, leaving it held on only by a hinge of white tissue.⁶¹ The experience is complex, as all experiences are, but it begins with a drawing of attention: I stop thinking about whatever I had on my mind before and instead start thinking about my finger. I look at the finger and apprehend the nature and status of the wound. Is it a cut? What kind of cut? How deep is it? What caused it? Could that cause have been avoided somehow? Is it bleeding, and if so how much? Is it in an awkward place, like near a joint, that will result in it being aggravated as I use my hand? And so on. While these are certainly not the only things one thinks when getting a paper cut, they are certainly *among* them, and they all share a number of traits in common. They are, first of all, practical questions relating to either the healing and care of the wound or the prevention of similar wounds in the future. They happen automatically, or at least without conscious motivation; these are not the thoughtful questions of a medical study, but habituated questions triggered by a sudden harmful occurrence. But most importantly, each question is directed *at the physical body*, not merely at the hand but at its tissue, and at the other types of inanimate matter (e.g., the paper) that it interacts with. And yet these empirical questions do not occur purely on their own but coexist with and are motivated by a subjective pain experience. Thus the parallax: subjective pain pulling the mind toward empirical observation, while continuing to insist upon itself as an object of attention in its own right. As we see with Grahek, at least one impor-

61. An unusual consequence of this example is that those reading a physical copy of this book have the unique opportunity to test my description of what a papercut feels like for themselves using the very same page on which it is written. Readers of the e-book, unfortunately, will just have to take me at my word.

tant part of the full complex of pain experience is a feeling of urgency and self-preservation, such as the instinctive pulling away from a match lit in front of one's face, which the pain asymbolia test subject so notably failed to exhibit.

This function shows how pain intentionality might work and suggests why the question has been so difficult to answer: pain is a subjective feeling that draws a subject's attention toward the physical body which, having been damaged, needs to be attended to at the level of its *matter* in order to be healed. I need to look at my hand as a physician would look at my hand, which is to say not as "my" hand at all, but as one more example of this particular arrangement of flesh. Yet it is the subjective feeling of the pain-complex within this "my"-ness that prompts that very response. When I ask "how deep is the cut in my hand?" I am inquiring about something very different than, for example, "does my hand feel comfortable in this position?" This function is important because, in daily life, our physical bodies typically fade from direct conscious attention. Sartre makes very much this point when arguing for why pain cannot be an intentional experience, and Merleau-Ponty likewise describes what he calls the "body schema," writing that "my entire body is not for me an assemblage of organs juxtaposed in space. I hold my body as an indivisible possession."⁶² That kind of self-perception makes the sorts of questions I asked about my paper cut difficult to investigate, and so one function of the pain experience seems to be to temporarily pull me out of it, out of my subjective body, so that I might pay enhanced attention to my flesh.

Yet it would be wrong to say that in experiencing pain I am completely torn from my usual way of experiencing my own body. It so happens that as I sit writing this paragraph I have a slight transient pain in my right ankle from an unknown cause, and it is *not* the case that I suddenly feel like my ankle is now dismembered from my body, that it has taken on the appearance of a detached chunk of meat. What *is* the case, however, is that I have an apprehension of it as though it were a separate section; I feel my ankle *as an ankle* and not as an invisible part of a homogeneous whole. The general region of the pain feels distinct somehow, as though a circle were drawn around it. The *leib*, the subjective body, is still there and is still underpinning my overall experience: if I move my leg, though the ankle still hurts somewhat, the movement is still as smooth and thoughtless as it usually is; the schema is still in place, even if it is disrupted. What the pain does, then, is not so much remove the *leib* and replace it with the

62. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 100–101.

körper but rather create a parallax between them, such that even when one is in my attention the other remains in the background. This doubling makes a certain sense, for while the *körper* is where my attention needs to go in the case of a physical injury, the trigger for that change of attention, the localized feeling of pain and the sense of distress that accompanies it, is still subjective. Indeed, the experience of one's own body cannot help but be subjective, and Scarry is correct that the feeling of pain's discomfort, its qualia, cannot be shared in itself. The two bodies cannot be detached, and so drawing attention to one's own physical body must always involve the subjective body schema to some extent.

I would hardly consider the question of pain intentionality to have been solved here, but by articulating pain experience as a parallax oscillation of attention between the lived and material bodies I think I have answered at least some questions (en route to raising many others). This model accounts for the experience Sartre describes, the way in which pain seems to go beyond or through its purported object, while also allowing one to focus on pain's non-communicable elements without overly exceptionalizing it. Pain is not nonintentional but rather is intentional in a way that few other experiences are as a result of its functional relationship to the physical body.

This framework can also describe several aspects of the experience of chronic pain, especially how it, in Michael Snediker's words, "wreaks a peculiar damage to what one calls a self that feels like the experience of disappearing into it."⁶³ There are many ways this constant, unrelenting reminder of the flesh can diminish one's sense of selfhood. Chronic pain resists and refutes the agency one presumes to have over one's body, a presumption that at once conflates the physical and subjective bodies (treating the physical matter of one's arm as coextensive with the self rather than something the self exists within and in relation to) and proves it to be misguided (pain that refuses to go away, like a physical wound that refuses to heal, directly confounding our ability to control the shape and feeling of who we are). Chronic pain disrupts the body's temporality, much like how, as Lee Edelman describes, queerness disrupts the expected life trajectory of adulthood-marriage-children.⁶⁴ What scholars like Alison Kafer and Ellen Samuels call "crip time"⁶⁵ should be understood as coex-

63. Michael D. Snediker, *Contingent Figure: Chronic Pain and Queer Embodiment* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2021), 52.

64. Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004).

65. See Ellen Samuels, "Six Ways of Looking at Crip Time," *Disability Studies Quarterly* 37, no. 3 (2017): np; Alison Kafer, *Feminist, Queer, Crip* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 25–46.

tensive with *pained time*, the manner in which pain, in all its forms, alters both the subjective experience of time's passing and a person's relationship to expected temporal milestones. Chronic pain takes the trajectory of youth into old age, of the slow tapering off of physical capacity and strength over an extended period of time, and shoves one's nose against it all at once. It is in this way an acceleration, but also a refusal to move, healing being a temporality all of its own, a transition from injured toward well, which chronic pain, in being chronic, casts aside. Like a mirror image of Herman Melville's *Bartleby*, chronic pain would prefer to do so and will hear no word to the contrary. It is the flesh, as flesh, rebutting the idealism of the ego: a Johnsonian "I refute it *thus*" where one's body is both the kicker and the stone.

Ethics, Pain, and the Other

The parallax experience of pain implies a certain doubling of pain subjectivity; in this section I discuss the doubling of pain expression by way of what I refer to as its *bidirectional character*, or the quality of another's pain indicating either the presence or the absence of thought depending on the framework in which that pain expression is interpreted. As before, this doubling does not create a binary relation in which pain is either one thing or the other, but rather expresses pain's multiplicity, its capacity to be and to mean several things at the same time. The gist of the argument is that pain expression is not without meaning but rather overloaded with it. Scarry's argument that pain is language-destroying and world-destroying, that it undermines the very basis for subjectivity, would be at one end of the spectrum, with the opposite end being occupied by philosophers like Jeremy Bentham, who, in relation to animal rights, argued that the primary question that should determine whether one has an ethical obligation to another being or not is "can they suffer?"⁶⁶ This reasoning has had many practical applications, such as in laws protecting animal welfare.⁶⁷ Thus for at least some philosophers, and a great many scientists and legislators as well, an expression of pain is an expression of ethical subjecthood

66. Jeremy Bentham, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1907), 311n. For a discussion of Bentham's thinking on pain as it relates to disability and animal studies, see Maren Tova Linett, *Literary Bioethics: Animality, Disability, and the Human* (New York: New York University Press, 2020), 16–25.

67. Manish Pandey, "Octopuses Feel Pain and Need Legal Protection, Say Mps," BBC News (BBC, June 18, 2021), <https://www.bbc.com/news/newsbeat-57528249>

and of one's right to be legally or morally protected from mistreatment. Both arguments rely on, and express, certain assumptions about the relationship between linguistic expression, subjecthood, and ethics. For Scarry, being in extreme pain itself eliminates the foundation for thought, and so it follows that if one is really in pain then one is not thinking, that one cannot engage with pain cries as one would everyday language because everyday language is supposed to have a mind behind it (or so the thinking goes). For Bentham, however, pain, and by extension pain expression (for how else would one be aware of the other's suffering?), ground the ethical relation as such. It is the goal of ethics, in his view, to maximize pleasure and minimize pain and so the capacity to feel pain and express it grounds one's position as an ethical being. Both philosophers see the same thing but come to irreconcilable conclusions.

This section, however, looks elsewhere for its examples, in this case to the work of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, especially his "Essay on the Origin of Languages" and his *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*, and the ancient Greek tragic play *Philoctetes*, by Sophocles. I draw on *Philoctetes* due to Scarry's analysis of the play, which focuses on its depiction of pain cries at the expense of any discussion of its plot or characters, and because it quite elegantly shows my argument in action through its dramatic push-and-pull of the characters' sympathies. Rousseau I bring in for more complicated reasons. First, because he, unlike Scarry and Bentham, seems to oscillate at times on the question of what pain says about subjectivity, which makes his work a fitting laboratory for this discourse. I also use his "Essay" specifically due to its critique in Jacques Derrida's *Of Grammatology*, which includes an extensive discussion of Rousseau's analysis of the feeling of pity. My general conclusion here is that just as in phenomenology where the feeling of pain creates its own intentional object by inducing a parallax vision of one's own body, so too does the expression of pain create its own object, its own church steeple (to use Merleau-Ponty's example). As I will explain, it accomplishes this goal through performativity. The gestures, screams, and other articulations one makes when expressing pain are, in fact, performative utterances, utterances that produce the reality they reflect.

How can pain expression be performatively constructed? In discussing *Philoctetes* (specifically the way the Greek pain cries of its protagonist are translated into English), Scarry makes the case that it cannot. Though she concedes that "the existence of culturally stipulated responses to pain—for example, the tendency of one population to vocalize cries; the tendency of another to sup-

press them—is well documented” (Scarry, 5), she goes on to argue that the many examples one could find of these variations “constitute only a very narrow margin of variation and would thus in the end work to expose and confirm the universal sameness of the central problem” (Scarry, 5). It is unclear why we should take her word that such is the case, since it is not as though she provides a survey of global pain cry variations to serve as evidence. Furthermore, it is unclear why the narrowness of the variation should be important. Is the purported fact that pain cries *do* vary not in itself evidence that they are at least partially subject to the same processes of linguistic differentiation that other words and expressions are? One could just as easily argue that the similarity of laughter across cultures indicates that the experience of humor is not socially conditioned. There could easily be other limiting factors, such as the physical structure of the mouth and throat, which explain that similarity without recourse to the alleged invariability of the experience.

This position is also not without its detractors. To draw examples from philosophy, W. V. Quine argues, in relation to the pain cry “Ouch,” that “such use of the word, like the correct use of language generally, is inculcated in the individual by training on the part of society; and society achieves this despite not sharing the individual’s pain.”⁶⁸ Similarly, Ludwig Wittgenstein saw pain as intersubjective and questioned whether it was truly impossible for two people to share the same pain.⁶⁹ More empirically, scientific research on the language development of newborns has shown that even the melodic variations of an infant’s cries may be subject to variations tied to their native language.⁷⁰

I do not invoke Quine, Wittgenstein, and psychology necessarily to argue that Scarry is wrong here, but rather to show that her position is only one half of the picture, from which several notable thinkers dissent. Far more interesting is the question of why pain is like this, why there are these two broad interpretive tendencies with such a vast gulf between them. One could return again to the scene I cited from *Brazil*, where the secretary types out, without appearing bothered at all, the verbatim pain cries of a torture victim seemingly so that they can be filed away somewhere and then forgotten: transcribed, idealized, and then discarded as meaningless, indeed seemingly *made* meaningless by the act of

68. W. V. Quine, *Word and Object* (Mansfield: Martino Publishing, 2013), 5.

69. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe, P. M. S. Hacker, and Joachim Schulte (Malden: Blackwell, 2009), §253. See also Joanna Bourke, *The Story of Pain: From Prayer to Painkillers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 6.

70. Birgit Mampe et al., “Newborns’ Cry Melody Is Shaped by Their Native Language,” *Current Biology* 19, no. 23 (2009): 1994–97.

transcription (another reason for Derrida's relevance here). But a more elaborate expression of this very danger, this making-meaningless to which all pain cries are vulnerable, is *Philoctetes*, a play concerned principally with the question of whether and how someone in pain can demand to be treated ethically by someone not in pain. The play, along with Sophocles's *Trachiniae*, which depicts the suffering of Heracles, provide "the most intense focus on physical pain" to be found in the surviving corpus of classical Greek tragedy,⁷¹ and this depiction provides a powerful example of pain's bidirectional character.

The character Philoctetes is often associated with Heracles, and indeed the spirit of Heracles and his heroism looms literally and figuratively over the trajectory of the play. It is the death of Heracles that sets events in motion. Having been tricked and infected with an agonizing poison, Heracles decides to end his life by burning himself on a funeral pyre so that he may ascend to godhood.⁷² Of the people he implores to light the pyre, only his friend Philoctetes is willing to go through with it. For that good deed, Philoctetes is given Heracles's magic bow and arrows, which never miss their target. Later, he is bitten by a magic snake when he accidentally trespasses into a shrine on the island of Chryse, and this bite leaves him with a permanent festering wound that is not only quite painful but also revolting in its smell and appearance. When Philoctetes goes with the Greek army to attack Troy, the smell of his wound and the sound of his wailing leads Odysseus to abandon him on the deserted island of Lemnos, where, by the start of the play, he has remained for nine years.

The play begins with Odysseus and Neoptolemus, the son of Achilles, preparing a scheme to return Philoctetes to the Greek lines after a seer proclaimed that the walls of Troy would only fall after he and his bow were retrieved. Philoctetes quite understandably despises Odysseus for leaving him to die on a desert island, but has no idea who Neoptolemus is, since the young man came to the war late, only after hearing that his father had died. This triad of major characters creates a spectrum of relations to pain, spanning Odysseus-Neoptolemus-Philoctetes, which also reflects the characters' relationship to a complex and changing idea of heroism. Philoctetes, the friend and confidant of Heracles and Achilles, represents the old style of heroism, which valued

71. Felix Budelmann, "The Reception of Sophocles' Representation of Physical Pain," *American Journal of Philology* 128 (2007): 444.

72. In Greek myths there are often multiple versions of a given story. Sometimes, for example, it is Diomedes and not Odysseus who returns to collect Philoctetes. This summary recounts the version that aligns with the events of the play in question and is based on the descriptions of its backstory throughout the text.

strength and straightforwardness in both battle and everyday life, a form of heroism that would prefer to lose the war with Troy rather than resort to underhanded tricks. At the complete opposite end of the spectrum is Odysseus, the man who goes on to devise the underhanded trick through which the Greeks win the war against Troy. As Oliver Taplin describes in his introduction to the play, Odysseus is “the exemplar of the other, new sort of hero, the pragmatic strategist.”⁷³ Neoptolemus stands between them, a naive and inexperienced warrior who is useful to Odysseus due to his malleability and his relationship to Achilles; it is he who serves as the play’s barometer of both the model of heroism that stands triumphant as well as the relationship to the pain of others, which will win the day.

Though the play is often read as being about pain, it is really about pity and the role of pity in war, since it is the question of whether and how to act on pity that drives the action of the plot. Philoctetes was given his magic bow because he pitied Heracles’s pain, while it is Odysseus’s lack of pity—his hatred of the smell and the crying out that the festering wound elicited—that left that bow trapped on an island far from the war for nine years, and its owner unwilling to cooperate. Much of the tension in the plot comes from the question of whether or not Neoptolemus will be willing to go along with Odysseus’s schemes to trick Philoctetes and steal the bow, or whether he will take pity on the poor old man and help him get home instead. In the end, pity wins twice: Neoptolemus agrees to help Philoctetes return to Greece and fend off any vengeful Greeks with the magic bow, only for, in the very last pages, the spirit of Heracles to descend from Olympus and proclaim that not only is it the will of the gods that Philoctetes return willingly to battle Troy, but that if he does so his wound in the end will be cured.⁷⁴ Odysseus’s story about hearing a prophecy to this effect having now been proven true, the two erstwhile heroes agree to return and help win the war. In this tale, then, Neoptolemus is allowed to have it both ways: acting on his feelings of pity while securing the material benefits of pitilessness. But absent the intercession of the gods he would have had to choose one or the other.

Lauren Berlant calls compassion “a social and aesthetic technology of

73. Oliver Taplin, “Introduction to *Philoctetes*,” in *Oedipus the King and Other Tragedies*, ed. Oliver Taplin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 143.

74. Sophocles, *Philoctetes*, in *Oedipus the King and Other Tragedies*, trans. Oliver Taplin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015): lines 1410–1445.

belonging”⁷⁵ and argues that it should be less thought of as a “good in itself” and more like “a particular kind of social relation.”⁷⁶ The role of pity, a close cousin of compassion, plays a similar role in Rousseau’s writings on language, as well as Derrida’s analysis thereof. Derrida discusses the relation of pity to language in the context of auto-affection, or the experience of one’s own selfhood. Communication between two people, in his account, occurs by way of a process of auto-affection and idealization, where each participant in a conversation creates a mental idealization of the other to which they relate, rather than relating to the other in itself. The perceived other is therefore really a projection of the self but must be thought of and spoken to as though they were otherwise. Thus, he writes, “speech and the consciousness of speech . . . are the phenomenon of an auto-affection lived as suppression of difference.”⁷⁷ Pity has a special role in this schema, being in Derrida’s words “*the first diversion of the love of self*” such that “it is in the difference between absolute proximity and absolute identity that all the problematics of pity are lodged.”⁷⁸ In short, one can only ever experience the other as an extension or projection of the self, as an idealization in the mind, and yet to pity another is to recognize and act upon the actually existing differences between oneself and another person. Pity is thus problematic because it catches one between two worlds: the world of language and communication where the otherness of the other is suppressed, and the world of empiricism and experience where the otherness of the other is inescapable. Central to this problematic is the question of whether or not pity is automatic and instinctual or whether it arises from reflection, a question Derrida inherits from Rousseau. The problem with Rousseau is that he himself went back and forth as to what the correct answer to this question is.⁷⁹

The question of whether a feeling or act is automatic or not was highly relevant to Enlightenment-era debates as to the nature and scope of the human, as well as debates about the nature and meaning of pain. René Descartes, for instance, in *The Passions of the Soul*, uses the automaticity of pain avoidance to argue that the body (in this case the eye specifically) is separate from the mind and soul:

75. Lauren Berlant, “Introduction: Compassion (and Withholding),” in *Compassion: The Culture and Politics of an Emotion*, ed. Lauren Berlant (London: Routledge, 2004), 5.

76. Berlant, “Introduction,” 9.

77. Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 166.

78. Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 174.

79. Derrida remarks on this vacillation and even uses it as part of an argument for when Rousseau’s texts were likely written and in what order (172), though the technicalities of that particular discussion are not relevant here.

Suppose someone quickly moves his hand towards our eyes, as if he meant to hit us: even if we know that he is our friend . . . we can nonetheless hardly help closing our eyes. Which shows that our eyes have closed without the involvement of the soul, because they did so against our will (volition being the only or at least the principle action of the soul).⁸⁰

One wonders what Descartes would have thought of the test subject who was unfazed by the lit match. More relevant to this discussion—as well as to that of animal pain in the chapter in this book on Virginia Woolf—is the way Descartes uses his concept of automaticity to argue for the *lack* of souls (and therefore volition) in nonhuman animals. As he writes in a letter, “the reason why animals do not speak, as we do, is that they have no thoughts . . . they are acting by nature, and by mechanisms, like a clock.”⁸¹ Pain for Descartes is a way for the body to talk to the soul,⁸² and to be overtaken by pain is thus to be overtaken by the body, to lack a mind, for thought to be obliterated entirely. It is thus fundamentally different from speech, which for him indicates the presence of reason and volition.

Rousseau differs from his contemporary, though the matter here is complex. In his *Discourse on Inequality*, pity requires thought, imagination, and reflection, and yet at the same time seems to link humans to the animal kingdom, which was thought to lack such qualities. For like Descartes, Rousseau writes that “in any animal I see nothing but an ingenious machine to which nature has given senses” and that “nature alone does everything in the operation of an animal.”⁸³ I point to these passages in part due to the fact that recent scientific advances have shown that at least some nonhuman animals probably feel pain, such that, for example, scientists who work with laboratory animals now routinely consider ways to minimize their pain and suffering.⁸⁴ The fact that Descartes and Rousseau—philosophers of no small renown and no little perceptiveness—could look at what many scholars now understand to be genuine expressions of pain and consider them to be meaningless is itself evidence

80. René Descartes, *The Passions of the Soul and Other Late Philosophical Writings*, trans. Michael Moriarty (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 201.

81. Letter to the Marquess of Newcastle, Egmond-Binnen, November 23, 1646, in Descartes, *Passions*, 179–80.

82. Descartes, *Passions*, 250.

83. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality Among Men*, in *The Basic Political Writings*, ed. and trans. Donald A. Cress (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2011), 52.

84. See for example Larry Carbone, “Pain in Laboratory Animals: The Ethical and Regulatory Imperatives,” *PLOS ONE* 6, no. 9 (2011): np. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0021578>

of pain's two-sidedness, as well as a sign of the ethical and epistemological challenge that pain presents.

In any case, pain in Rousseau complicates the association between speech and thought, so straightforward in Descartes and Scarry, as it serves as both an impetus to language and automaticity at once. "Man's first language," he writes, "... and the only language he needed before it was necessary to persuade men assembled together, is the cry of nature ... elicited *only by a kind of instinct* in pressing circumstances."⁸⁵ A pain cry would certainly fall into this category, which would mean that for Rousseau a pain cry is linguistic and thus an example of language preceding reflection, which would for him amount to a contradiction. In the *Discourse*, Rousseau attempts to resolve this conflict by arguing that in humans, though the "impetus" is the same, the cry is subject to reflection and can therefore be resisted.⁸⁶ Yet the problem of pity, which in the *Discourse* "precedes ... any kind of reflection,"⁸⁷ is also the problem of how that pity leads to the formation of society, for in Rousseau it is the foundation of the other "virtues" and the basis for the intersubjective bonds on which any complex social relation is built, "benevolence and even friendship" being "the products of a constant pity fixed on a particular object."⁸⁸ But if that is the case, what separates human society from the state of nature? What role do reflection and volition play in social formation if it is pity, a pre-reflective emotion, that grounds the whole process?

The "Essay on the Origin of Languages" solves the problem by arguing that pity depends on reflection, namely an imaginative process similar to the role auto-affection plays in Derrida's concept of communication. Here, Rousseau's argument is different:

Although pity is native to the human heart, it would remain eternally quiescent unless it were activated by imagination. How are we moved to pity? By getting outside ourselves and identifying with a being who suffers. We suffer only as much as we believe him to suffer. ... He who imagines nothing is aware only of himself; he is isolated in the midst of mankind.⁸⁹

85. Rousseau, *Discourse*, 58. My emphasis.

86. Rousseau, *Discourse*, 53.

87. Rousseau, *Discourse*, 62.

88. Rousseau, *Discourse*, 62–63.

89. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, "Essay on the Origin of Languages," in *Two Essays on the Origin of Language*, trans. John H. Moran and Alexander Gode (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 32.

In the "Essay," Rousseau retains his belief that "speech distinguishes man among the animals"⁹⁰ without raising thorny contradictions by splitting pity in half. The feeling in itself is "native to the human heart," yet requires thought and imagination—the idealization of the other that Derrida describes—in order to take effect. Elsewhere in the "Essay," Rousseau argues that when seeing an "afflicted person" one is "not likely to weep. But give him time to tell you what he feels and soon you will burst into tears."⁹¹ Pitilessness, then, is here a kind of animality, arising not from the fire of hatred or the frigidness of pure reason, but from a simple lack of imagination. To be pitiless is to *refrain* from thinking. As Derrida puts it, for Rousseau "pity is innate, but in its natural purity it is not the property of man in particular, it belongs to all living beings in general. . . . Without imagination, this pity does not awaken itself in humanity . . . [and] does not produce identification with the other as with another me. Imagination is the becoming human of pity."⁹² Pity founds the social, yet it does so through a deflected auto-affection, where what is pitied is not the other in itself but rather the other experienced as an aspect of the self.

Part of the problem in *Philoctetes*, then, is that pitiless Odysseus seems not to have a fixed identity at all. Throughout the play, and in keeping with his depiction elsewhere, Odysseus is a shapeshifter, always lying and misrepresenting himself and assuming fake identities. A self-proclaimed Noman come in search of an island, he arrives on Lemnos and immediately begins plotting schemes. Indeed, the plan he convinces Neoptolemus to follow (at first) not only has the young warrior disguise his intentions, but cleverly does so in a way that takes advantage of Philoctetes's anger:

ODYSSEUS: So when he asks you who you are and where you're from,
 reply "Achilles' son"—no need to juggle that—
 but say you're sailing home,
 and that you've left behind the naval expedition
 of the Greeks because you loathe them utterly.
 . . .
 [for] when you arrived and asked, as was your right,
 that they should pass to you the armour of Achilles,
 they did not agree, but made them over to Odysseus.

90. Rousseau, "Essay," 5.

91. Rousseau, "Essay," 8.

92. Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 185.

And add whatever nasty things you like of me,
the foulest of the foul—that won't hurt me a bit.⁹³

Odysseus seems unconcerned not only with lying about himself, but also with having others lie about him. His identity is in flux, while Philoctetes's identity is inescapably bound to the wound and the bow with which he is identified. His "but words can never hurt me" attitude also contrasts the fate of Philoctetes, who was, on Odysseus's own words, stranded and left to die. Interestingly, when Neoptolemus meets Philoctetes, it is his use of Greek that identifies him as a possible ally,⁹⁴ in keeping with Rousseau's remark that "one does not know where a man comes from until he has spoken."⁹⁵ As the play continues, Odysseus's instability grows, until at last he claims to have no definite selfhood at all. Philoctetes remarks that he "would utter anything, try any scheme,"⁹⁶ a claim Odysseus eagerly confirms near the play's end: "whatever sort of man is called for, that is me. / So when the challenge is for righteous folk, / you will not find one single person more high-minded."⁹⁷ Given the above discussion, might it follow then that Odysseus in *Philoctetes* is pitiless because his sense of self is so unstable? Or, perhaps, his ability to adapt to every situation has allowed him to evade pity by simply becoming someone who does not feel it?

Philoctetes is thus heavily invested in the question of interiority: does your interior match your presentation? Are you who you say you are? It is a play about the intersection of performance and performativity, one that is constantly asking or talking about "who you really are." Odysseus is an extreme example of dishonesty, and yet we always know what he wants—the bow—because circumstances have left him no way to succeed at his goals without acquiring it. The real pinnacle of honesty is Heracles, who embraces pain and death and becomes a god when burned on the pyre. Philoctetes tries and fails to misrepresent himself at several points, but, like with Odysseus and the Trojan war (the fact of which makes his real goals obvious), the pain enforces a certain honesty about what his goals and desires are. Because we see the wound, we *also see* he is in pain and can therefore be confident that he would like that pain elimi-

93. Sophocles, *Philoctetes*, lines 53–65.

94. Sophocles, *Philoctetes*, line 226.

95. Rousseau, "Essay," 5.

96. Sophocles, *Philoctetes*, line 632.

97. Sophocles, *Philoctetes*, lines 1049–1051.

nated, and indeed part of what convinces him is that going to Troy will eventually heal it; pain is what compels his attempts at guile and betrayal while also thwarting them. *Philoctetes* is a depiction of the way pity *works*, and the way it can be made to not work. Odysseus, who is able to be anything, sees nothing in other people, the same nothing, the same Noman, that in his constant changing he sees within himself. (Who *is* Odysseus? What is he like when he isn't lying?) The play is thus *about* pain's bidirectional character, its capacity to mean two things at once, and how that character permits it a highly ambiguous place in discourse, ethics, and politics.

Derrida writes that the "experience of suffering as the suffering of the other" through a process of imagining "opens us to a certain nonpresence within presence," in that "the suffering of others is lived by comparison, as our nonpresent past or future suffering."⁹⁸ Yet the fact that this process is at least partially conscious and subject to volition means that in situations where one might benefit from ignoring or overlooking the pain of the other, it is far more easily ignored than one's own imminent pain. It is often simply enough to find a reason why the other one wishes to exploit or ignore is different from the self. A notable historical example is Thomas Jefferson, who, in *Notes on the State of Virginia*, defends the institution of slavery in part by claiming that Black people have a diminished capacity to suffer, writing that "their griefs are transient" and that "those numberless afflictions which render it doubtful whether heaven has given life to us in mercy or in wrath, are less felt, and sooner forgotten with them."⁹⁹ Judith Butler's analysis of what makes a particular life "grievable" is also highly relevant here, especially her argument that "specific lives cannot be apprehended as injured or lost if they are not first apprehended as living."¹⁰⁰ If one's status as alive, sentient, and suffering is ambiguous (as it surely always must be to at least a small extent), and if that ambiguity can only be resolved in the mind of an observer, then it will tend to be resolved in the manner that best fits the observer's desires, including when those desires imply the infliction of slavery, torture, or war.

Pain is compulsory, while pity is optional; pain inflicts a reality from within

98. Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 191.

99. Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, ed. Frank Shuffelton (New York: Penguin, 1999), 146. For a discussion of this passage, see the introduction in Colangelo, "The Body Politic in Pain."

100. Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* (London: Verso, 2016), 1. See also Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London: Verso, 2004).

the body experiencing it, while pity is always imbricated in political networks both personal and global; the experience of pain requires only the physical capacity to feel it, while pity either requires or is greatly dependent on powers of imagination and thought; pain is insistent and disruptive and in extreme cases can compel the sufferer to take actions that go against their best interests, while one feeling pity may keep those feelings private, possibly by using the very reason and imagination that allow that pity to be experienced in the first place. The very power of reason that allows one to imagine an other that is like oneself can also be used to imagine an other that is far more different from the oneself than they actually are, different in such a way that they seem less deserving of aid, less able to suffer, or more likely to tell lies. Thus while this reading does retain several aspects of Scarry's framework, her position that the problems of leveraging the pain of others (or oneself) for political ends is primarily a problem of communication misunderstands the nature of the challenge. As she writes, if "it were easier to express intellectual aspiration than bodily hunger, one would expect to find that the problem of education had a greater degree of social recognition than the problem of malnutrition or famine . . . given any two phenomena, the one that is more visible will receive the more attention" (Scarry, 12). But Thomas Jefferson lived with and directly oversaw his slaves and was not merely numb to their suffering but seriously argued in print that their pain did not exist: he used his powers of imagination not to empathize with them, but to convince himself that they were animals.¹⁰¹ If, following Derrida, we take communication to be an act of mutual idealization, it follows that pity itself depends on whether or not the observer's idealization of the sufferer includes the feeling of pain. But if the observer believes that the sufferer is not a sufferer—that they cannot feel pain, or that their pain is somehow insignificant, or exaggerated, or that they have a tendency to lie about their subjective experience—then that pain *will not be communicated*. One ends up like Odysseus in *Philoctetes*, becoming the sort of person one needs to be to get what one wants (even if it means ignoring the pains of others), or like the secretary in *Brazil* mechanically transcribing tortured cries to be filed away as "information."

101. Historians estimate that over the course of his life Jefferson enslaved approximately six hundred people. See Cassandra Pybus, "Thomas Jefferson and Slavery," in *A Companion to Thomas Jefferson*, ed. Francis Cogliano (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2012), 272.

The Ethics of Unavoidable Ignorance

Many of the problems of pain communication are in one way or another extensions of the so-called “problem of other minds,” or the inability to know the thoughts of others. My pain is no more directly communicable, in its subjective totality, than my joy, boredom, fear, or tiredness (the last of which can be at least as “thought destroying” as pain). Pain differs, however, in that its existence implies, or even directly amounts to, a problem to be solved, in part because pain is usually in itself a problem, and often because pain is also indicative of external problems. Jefferson *needs* to argue that Black people do not feel pain, because the reality of the situation, the fact that they do feel it, shows him to be monstrous: one simply cannot defend slavery on its merits and expect to succeed, since it has no merits on which it can be defended and so relies instead on the self-interested reasoning of the slave master to smooth over any irregularities of logic that might slow the extraction of capital. Though I do not wish to psychologize Jefferson or those like him, the tactic he uses with regards to the pain he inflicts strongly resembles what Fredric Jameson calls “strategies of containment,” or “the systematic (and sometimes unconscious) efforts to block off parts of reality we do not wish to see or know; to live in a sheltered world in which they do not exist; to ignore them and live in splendid and guilt-free isolation.”¹⁰² He first introduces this term in *The Political Unconscious*.¹⁰³ To recognize, even only in one’s own mind, the pain of another is to recognize the other as a version of the self. Far better, then, to not even be aware of that pain, to invent ways of never seeing it.¹⁰⁴

It is for the above reasons that the field of epistemic justice philosophy has such a strong presence in this book.¹⁰⁵ The field began in 2007 with the publica-

102. Fredric Jameson, “Criticism and Categories” *PMLA* 137, no. 3 (2022): 565.

103. Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (London: Routledge, 2002), 37–38.

104. I discuss several examples of this problem throughout the book, but I would like to draw attention here to the question of “malingering,” or the avoidance of one’s responsibilities under false pretenses. The accusation that one is faking or exaggerating one’s pain is often used as a way to compel one to work or to otherwise deny one relief from one’s obligations. I discuss the matter in more detail in the chapter on Margaret Edson’s *Wit*.

105. I discuss this connection in Jeremy Colangelo, *Diaphanous Bodies: Ability, Disability, and Modernist Irish Literature* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2021), 80. Earlier analyses of the intersection of pain and epistemic justice include Daniel Z. Buchman, Anita Ho, and Daniel S Goldberg, “Investigating Trust, Expertise, and Epistemic Injustice in Chronic Pain,” *Journal of Bioethical Inquiry* 14 (2017): 31–42; Mar Rosàs Tosas, “The Downgrading of Pain Sufferers’ Credibility,” *Philosophy, Ethics, and Humanities in Medicine* 16, no. 1 (2021): np.; Ian James Kidd and Havi Carel, “Epistemic Justice and Illness,” *Journal of Applied Philosophy* 34, no. 2 (2017): 172–90.

tion of Miranda Fricker's *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing*, where she defined "epistemic injustice" as "a wrong done to someone specifically in their capacity as a knower."¹⁰⁶ To disbelieve the claim of someone who says they are in pain overlaps in part with what Fricker calls "testimonial injustice," or an injustice inflicted on a speaker when "prejudice on the hearer's part causes him to give the speaker less credibility than he would otherwise have given."¹⁰⁷ Scarry refers to injustice of this kind (though not by that name) in *The Body in Pain*, when she describes how it is common for doctors to "perceive the voice of the patient as an 'unreliable narrator' of bodily events" (Scarry, 6), a tendency that, given how often genuine pain lacks empirical correlates, results in a widespread lack of attention to the suffering of medical patients. Yet the experience of pain relates to epistemology more broadly, especially when the acknowledgment of pain by another implies or creates a duty of care. To declare yourself to be in pain is often a way to secure access to some resource or acquire some favorable result in a process: seeking painkilling drugs from a doctor, giving a victim impact statement in court, applying for disability aid, requesting time off from work or school, begging for change on the street, or even just seeking sympathy from those around you are attempts to inform others about your suffering in order to get some kind of assistance. Pain expression thus has an important rhetorical element. When it comes to claims about pain, belief and compulsion are often closely linked, and in several cases (such as laws requiring that certain animals be sedated before surgery) that recognition is directly connected to a legal requirement to alleviate the pain of another. One who does not wish to give that aid, consciously or unconsciously, has a strong incentive to develop strategies of containment to keep the recognition of these pains as far from their awareness as possible.

Thus, pain's bidirectional character makes it unusual among subjective states in terms of how it intersects with ethics. Pain expression can signify that an animal is due a minimum of ethical consideration (Bentham) or that it is merely an excellent machine (Descartes, Rousseau); it can elicit a pity response that is high automatic (Rousseau) or simply provide an impetus that becomes pity only thanks to the imagining of the observer (Derrida, Rousseau again); it can be utterly destructive to language (Scarry) or an example thereof (Quine, Wittgenstein). The problem, however, is that the decision as to which side the

106. Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 1.

107. Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, 4.

coin lands on does not belong to the person who feels the pain, but to the person or people who observe it. And whether the observer does not believe the pain exists or does not care, from the perspective of the person in pain callousness and apathy look identical. It is wrong, then, to ask whether pain can be a tool for politics, since really it is a site upon which political struggle occurs: Whose pains are believed or disbelieved, which strategies of containment are enacted or thwarted, what system of recognition exists to formally acknowledge or deny a person or group's claims to suffering—such are the nature of the disputes, which freely mingle epistemology, phenomenology, law, science, prejudice, and superstition.

Yet questions there are, important ones, especially once one considers some of the practical implications of the analysis above. We can see Saidiya Hartman, for instance, navigating the epistemic and ethical pitfalls of pain's bidirectional character in the introduction of *Scenes of Subjection*, where she writes that

I have chosen not to reproduce [Frederick] Douglass's account of the beating of Aunt Hester [in *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*] in order to call attention to the ease with which such scenes are usually reiterated, the casualness with which they are circulated, and the consequences of this routine display of the slave's ravaged body. Rather than inciting indignation, too often they immune us to pain by virtue of their familiarity . . . especially because they reinforce the spectacular character of black suffering.¹⁰⁸

Later on in the same book she observes similarly that "the impossibility of adequately representing the violence of slavery is due not only to the enormity of the degradation and the unwillingness of the reader to believe . . . but also to the fact that by speaking of these crimes the narrator carries the burden of the indecent and the obscene."¹⁰⁹ Hartman's historical research shows how the spectacularization of Black suffering was used as a way to inure the white beneficiaries of slavery from the reality of what they were doing, to blunt their pity so they could continue inflicting misery without internal resistance. To put the matter more generally, and to return to the matter of Scarry's text, the history of slavery is, among other things, an example of what happens when the idea of pain's incommunicability is put to use by those who would prefer that it were

108. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 3.

109. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 107.

true. The belief in the incommunicability of pain obscures the ethical and political import of the failure to perceive or acknowledge it. Since pity is optional and since, as Hartman shows, a kind of reflexive pitilessness can be created through repeated exposure to spectacles of suffering, the idea that pain can never be a site of political struggle can easily become the ground of a permission structure for violence, giving license to the cultivation of a callousness too easily misunderstood as natural.

In Dante, whose most famous verses are unequaled as a spectacle of suffering, we can see one example of the connection between pitilessness and alleged indescribability. In the opening stanzas of *Inferno* Canto XXXII, when Dante and Virgil first reach the lowest pit of Hell and its frozen lake, Dante laments the insufficiency of his descriptions of what he sees:

If I could write in harsh and raucous verses,
As would be suitable to the sad pit
On which all the other rocks weigh down,
I could press out the juice of my conception
More fully, but because I have not that skill,
Not without fear I bring myself to speak¹¹⁰

This trepidation has a strange effect on the cantos that follow, for it puts them in a similar epistemic-hermeneutical relation as the pain of the other: present only in the form of an inadequate expression, superseded by a reality that is inaccessible. In this case, the details of Hell are only knowable to us through Dante, who himself calls these descriptions insufficient. It is no accident that this pair of cantos depicting the frozen lake ends with an act of pitilessness. For at the end of Canto XXXIII, after the famous encounter with the cannibal Count Ugolino, another frozen sinner begs Dante to “Remove the stony veils from my face, / So that the grief can issue from my heart.”¹¹¹ Dante agrees if the sinner will reveal who he is, and the man says he is Fra Alberigo, condemned for murdering his houseguests, whose sins were so terrible that he was brought down to Hell before he died, his body on Earth puppeted by a demon. Dante, who just a moment ago has promised Alberigo “Tell me who you are, and if I give no relief, / May I go down to the bottom of the ice,”¹¹²

110. Dante, *Inferno*, XXXII.1–6.

111. Dante, *Inferno*, XXXIII.112–113.

112. Dante, *Inferno*, XXXIII.116–117.

gives no relief, deciding instead that “It was a courtesy to treat him ill.”¹¹³ As James Nikopoulos has argued, this pitilessness is precisely what the moral universe of Dante’s Hell requires, for “if readers find reprehensible the way that even a single soul is punished in the afterlife, then they have begun to find aspects of this afterlife’s internal logic reprehensible, which makes part of God’s judgment itself reprehensible.”¹¹⁴ In the world as Dante represents it, it was God who put that ice on Alberigo’s face, and it would be sacrilege to remove it. A section that begins with an inability to express ends with an unwillingness to help, with an act of betrayal in the pit of betrayal, committed fearlessly because the victim has already been cast out by God. The inability of the sinners to express their pain is mirrored in Dante’s inability to record it, and if the grief cannot “issue” from their hearts, no parallel grief, no pity, may form in the hearts of others. Thus, Dante rejects knowledge of their pain at the same time he becomes party to that pain, while blaming the paucity of his descriptions on the limitations of his skill instead of on the limits of his curiosity, overlooking his refusal to even hear the cries of a sinner lest he learn their truth. But his reasons are, perhaps, more mercantile, more similar to the reasons of those who defended slavery, the dim recognition that the suffering one sees is the direct consequence of one’s own morality, and that continued benefit from that morality requires the acceptance of the other’s pain as not only necessary, but right.

In this way, the testimonial injustice of dismissing another’s cries of pain can lead to a second kind of epistemic injustice, called hermeneutic injustice. As Fricker defines it, hermeneutic injustice denotes a harm done to a person’s self-knowledge or capacity as a knower. For example, denying a queer person knowledge of nonnormative sexualities harms them by denying them the context needed to understand their feelings and experiences, which can result in a great deal of suffering. As Fricker writes, “relations of unequal power can skew shared hermeneutical resources so that the powerful tend to have appropriate understandings of their experiences ready to draw on as they make sense of their social experiences, whereas the powerless are more likely to find themselves having some social experiences through a glass, darkly.”¹¹⁵ What then is the benefit of a strategy of containment, or of this reflexive, sometimes culti-

113. Dante, *Inferno*, XXXIII.150.

114. James Nikopoulos, “Ethical Criticism in Hell: The Sympathetic Fallacy of *Inferno* 32–33,” *Philosophy and Literature* 46, no. 2 (2022): 474.

115. Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, 148.

vated turning away? Why does it seem to benefit an oppressor class to think this way, when it denies them context for understanding their own behavior?

One possible reason would be pain's essential performativity, in the sense that J. L. Austin uses the term, which follows from its bidirectional character. As Judith Butler writes:

Performative acts are forms of authoritative speech: most performances, for instance, are statements that, in the uttering, also perform a certain action and exercise a binding power. Implicated in a network of authorization and punishment, performatives tend to include legal sentences, baptisms, inaugurations . . . statements which not only perform an action, but confer a binding power on the action performed.¹¹⁶

However, as Butler goes on to say,

[W]here there is an 'I' who utters or speaks and thereby produces an effect in discourse, there is first a discourse which precedes and enables that 'I' and forms in language the constraining trajectory of its will. Thus there is not 'I' who stands *behind* discourse and executes its volition or will *through* discourse.¹¹⁷

Pain expression's relationship to performativity is not unproblematic; indeed it seems to have many of the limitations of a performative utterance without its power to bind and compel, as we saw in the discussion of pity and as I discuss further in my chapter on Wiesel. The complex intentionality of pain further estranges it from the authoritative subjectivity into which the performing "I" interpolates. The *leib*, after all, only exists discursively insofar as it is performed or described, and only if that performance or description is accepted by the observers. An unbelieving pain cry is much like Austin's example of naming a ship one does not own, in that it lacks the social license and recognition that gives such acts their reality.¹¹⁸ Refusing to believe the genuine sufferer is effectively to clear their subjective body from the discursive field and rob it of an intersubjective reality, and in extreme cases (like with Jefferson) to assert that the sufferer has no subjective reality to which any other person is ethically responsible. It is the denial of the sufferer's capacity to know themselves *by way*

116. Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (London: Routledge, 1993), 171.

117. Butler, *Bodies*, 171.

118. J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, ed. J. O. Urmson and Marina Sbisa (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975), 23.

of excluding those areas only accessible via self-perception from relevancy, of dismissing the “merely subjective” from the discourse of subjectivity. You cannot “know thyself” if you are conditioned to not consider “thyself” a valid subject of knowledge. If one follows those like Bentham who sees the capacity to suffer as the main criteria for whether one is owed ethical treatment, then it follows that the acceptance or denial of the pain of certain people or groups sketches on a discursive level the outer boundaries of ethical practice.

This outlining effect brings us back to the matter of hermeneutical injustice. If pain expressions can be said to perform a certain identity—that of a person who not only needs assistance but is *owed* assistance—then the acceptance of the reality of another’s pain, the acceptance of pity, is effectively also the acceptance of one’s own ethical responsibility to that other person or group. There are all sorts of instances in everyday life in which one might avoid knowing about the pains of certain others in order to avoid confronting the beliefs or actions that knowledge would imply, from avoiding eye contact with a homeless person whom one does not intend to give change, to not thinking too hard about all the suffering required for a *filet mignon* to exist. This sort of knowledge provides what José Medina calls “epistemic resistance,” or an external or internal force that abuts or disrupts one’s preconceptions and that potentially forces one to adopt new ideas or attitudes.¹¹⁹

To resist this resistance—which Medina would call a type of *epistemic vice*—amounts to the infliction of hermeneutic injustice in two ways, both having to do with the place of the oppressor class on the top of a discursive hierarchy. First, it denies marginalized groups public recognition of their suffering as well as documentation thereof.¹²⁰ The effects of this injustice are discursive and ideological—reinforcing the subaltern subject’s exclusion by obscuring epistemically resistant information—as well as practical, obscuring these injustices from historical scrutiny (e.g., by destroying records or discouraging certain subjects of inquiry). Second, it limits the possibility of that pain acquiring any intersubjective reality at all, cutting the sufferer off from historical, political, or even self-knowledge that might be useful to them. To choose a simple example, without hermeneutic context a series of migraine headaches goes from being

119. José Medina, *The Epistemology of Resistance: Gender and Racial Oppression, Epistemic Injustice, and Resistant Imaginations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 48–51.

120. Gayatri Spivak’s analysis of the manner in which Europe came to understand itself (absurdly) as the only true subject of history, with the colonial subject as its subaltern other, provides an especially thorough explication of how this process can work. See Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), chap. 3.

an identifiable medical condition with a name and several treatments to being merely a personal, individualized problem, or perhaps even an attempt at malingering.¹²¹

This problem is everywhere in pain communication, for it is the function of a pain cry to compel, to demand, to impinge, to require, to be a call for help. Pain expression cannot help but be resistant when perceived by another, and because its capacity to resist is tied to its performativity, and because that performativity places the power of recognition in the mind of the observers, the (conscious or unconscious) decision to ignore or deny the pain of another is nearly always in itself a political act. And it is important to remember here those areas where Scarry is correct: one can never know the pain of another with the same degree of certainty that one knows one's own pain, and so any person who holds a positive belief in the pain of another must arrive at that belief through a series of affordances and interpretations, what is colloquially referred to as "the benefit of the doubt" (a benefit that seems most often to accrue to members of dominant social groups). What pain ultimately asks us, then, is what role certainty has to play in ethics. *Must* I know for a fact that lobsters, for example, can feel pain, or is the mere likelihood itself a good enough reason to refrain from boiling them alive and eating them? Relatedly, how is the belief that a lobster does not feel pain differ from (hypothetically) a belief that one's own mother or father do not feel pain? One can cite the greater certainty stemming from, among other things, our greater scientific knowledge of the nervous systems of mammals (as opposed to invertebrates, like crustaceans), as well as a person's capacity to speak, yet there are many humans for whom these advantages have historically proven insufficient. One never truly *knows* the other's pain after all, and in any case mere knowledge of the other's pain does not by itself compel ethical action. Weighing heavily on the scales in this decision may in fact be simple preference, the fact that one usually knows and likes one's parents better than one knows or likes a lobster, which leads to greater affordances and a stronger application of the precautionary principle, in short, a greater felicity in the performance of their pained identities. At least some people more easily recognize human pain because, I suspect, they are simply more willing to be ethically responsible to humans than to lobsters; many humans exhibit species chauvinism, or the belief that their species is

121. For an analysis of the rhetorical complexities of headaches, see Judy Z. Segal, *Health and the Rhetoric of Medicine* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2005), 37–58.

inherently better or more deserving than others, and thus consider other animals' pain irrelevant, leading them to deny that pain's existence so as to never have to acknowledge it. That this strategy of containment can also function in relation to human pain would indicate that pain is more, not less, significant to politics than is typically believed.

The complexity of pain expression should thus be clear. It both has and lacks a discursive reality, is constitutive of and constituted by the ideas and assumptions that underly pity and ethical treatment, and is both of one's own body and not. Given that complexity and ambiguity, this book has adopted a "case study" format, analyzing pain from a variety of perspectives through its instantiation in a number of literary texts. Literary pain studies is a complex and rewarding field, and one that has only begun to reveal its true breadth. While *Agony for Others* cannot encompass that breadth, it can at least sketch its outline so that the map might be far more easily filled.

TWO

What Is It Like to Be a Body in Pain?

Imagining the Other in Virginia Woolf

Touch it; the marble eyelids are not wet:
If it could weep, it could arise and go.

—Elizabeth Barrett Browning, “Grief”

The Likeness of What-It’s-Like-Ness

“What is it like?” is a complex question, in the sense that it conceals many questions beneath a single phrase. What is it like to be in pain? What is it like to be a bat? What is it like to be disabled? Though posed seemingly in a spirit of openness and curiosity, the phrase can just as easily, perhaps more easily, be the prelude to a single answer: Nothing. One can think of many examples, from the use of such arguments in furtherance of white supremacy to the so-called “worldlessness” Martin Heidegger ascribed to Judaism in his *Black Notebooks*.¹ Indeed, as the primatologist Chris Herzfeld documents, the presumed “worldlessness” of the nonhuman animal has been so powerful that not even the great

1. Martin Heidegger, *Ponderings VII–XI: Black Notebooks 1938–1939*, trans. Richard Rojcewicz (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2017), 76. A page earlier he writes that “the ‘victor’ in this ‘struggle’ [over the truth and history of being], which contests goallessness pure and simple and which can therefore only be the caricature of a ‘struggle,’ is perhaps the greater groundlessness that, not being bound to anything, avails itself of everything (Judaism)” (75). Heidegger thus seems to have bought wholesale the nonsensical antisemitic mythologies of so-called Jewish “rootlessness” that were used by the Nazis and others as a justification for their exclusion from civil society and from the protection of the law (a process I discuss in more detail in my chapter on Elie Wiesel in this book).

apes, humanity's closest evolutionary relatives, have been protected from even the most ruthless exploitation.²

This chapter investigates a triad of topics—animal consciousness, pain, and disability—in the work of Virginia Woolf through the lens of the question “what is it like?” a question made famous by the philosopher Thomas Nagel in his essay “What Is it Like to Be a Bat?” Though the various permutations of this question investigated here—what is it like to be an animal? what is it like to be in pain? what is it like to be disabled?—are all different in significant ways, they are all united in the limitations of the subject position of the asker. One asks “what is it like to be” something because one is not that thing, and in so doing reinscribes the division between self and other. In cases where a direct answer is unavailable (because the animal cannot speak, or because pain, in Elaine Scarry's words, “has no voice”³) or in cases where a direct answer goes unheard (because of ableist beliefs or practices that silence or exclude the voices of disabled people) the asker's only recourse will be to their own presumptions and imaginations. It is a kind of dubious empiricism where the limited objective information available is processed through the asker's presumptions, prejudices, and projections in order to arrive at an idea of what it is like to be that other. Nagel's essay thus serves as an access point to broader questions about the political and ethical perils of asking “what is it like?” and of the unequal power dynamics of the question itself, of asking “what is it like to be a bat?” safe in the assumption that no bats are conducting their own investigation into what it is like to be human, of an abled person asking “what is it like to be disabled?” silently to themselves so that no disabled person may speak up and dispute the asker's imperious gaze. Often framed and understood as an exercise in empathy, the question can often serve the opposite role, imagining the mind of the other, through the observer's privileged standpoint, as absent, impoverished, or limited, and so serve as a basis for further injustice, absence of evidence taken as evidence of absence.

In terms of its theoretical and philosophical goals, this chapter seeks to extend the fruits of Nagel's essay beyond the domain of animal studies and the philosophical discourse on physicalism in order to better understand the political and ethical implications of imagining the mind of the other. It takes the

2. Chris Herzfeld, *The Great Apes: A Short History*, trans. Kevin Frey (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017). See especially chapter 3, “Apes as Guinea Pigs: Primates and Experimental Research.”

3. Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 3.

basic conclusion of Nagel's essay—that in the absence of knowledge of the mind of an animal, we are forced to substitute imagination—and uses it to show the similarities in how the epistemic limit imposed by the other spurs acts of imagination meant to fill the hole where knowledge of the other should be. Important to this analysis is the role of pain, especially animal pain, in that it takes an experience that is unknowable and unrepresentable (the pain of the other) and places it in the body of that which is seemingly most other (nonhuman animals). Yet as we will see, imagining what it is like to be something is not an apolitical act, inflected as it is with whatever presumptions and stereotypes one might have about the entity so imagined. Any imagining of what it is like to be a dog will be inflected with presumptions about what a dog is, indeed, presumptions about the very *what it is like* that the act of imagining seemingly tells us, the tail of assumption wagging the dog of investigation. As seen in the discussion of disability, this effect is not limited to nonhuman animals: while disabled people and nonhumans are by no means the same, an ableist observer might treat them as such, for example by imagining that both disabled people and dogs experience the world in a limited or impoverished way and thus limiting and impoverishing the mind they imagine. Likewise, we see in Elaine Scarry's examination of pain, which posits that the pain of the other cannot be known while simultaneously asserting facts about that very same pain: that it is thought-destroying and language-destroying, which is to say that to be in pain is to experience one's thought and language being destroyed. Thus even this act of disclaiming knowledge, indeed the possibility of knowledge, of the mind of the other-in-pain involves imagining their mind to at least some extent, and thereby substituting what one thinks one knows about the mind of the other for the other's mind. In this case, it is important to distinguish the claim that "I know nothing" from the act of suspending judgment, of refusing to imagine or make claims at all, of accepting the other's alterity. It is for this reason that the present chapter's analysis combines a reading of animal consciousness with analyses of pain, illness, and disability, not to conflate them but to show how each represents a different permutation of the same phenomenon. This chapter thus uses its analysis of Virginia Woolf to draw attention to the essentially political nature of the act of imagining the other and the complex instances of epistemic injustice it can instigate.

Arguing that something or someone "has no voice" can often serve as an excuse to not listen to it. This problem, which is as much ethical as it is epistemological, accounts for the influence of Emmanuel Levinas on this discussion,

which hides in the background before being developed more fully near the end. In his *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas marks an important ethical distinction between the book's two eponymous concepts with respect to the manner in which one relates to the "face" of the other. As he writes, the "radical separation between the same and the other means precisely that it is impossible to place oneself outside of the correlation between the same and the other so as to record the correspondence or the non-correspondence" of that other with the self.⁴ Ethical relation instead relies on an encounter with the "infinity" of the other, the fact that they cannot be encapsulated, the fact that one's imagining of "what it is like" to be them will always be partial and flawed. It is this mutual insufficiency, the fact I am a mystery to you and you are a mystery to me, that serves as the basis of ethical relation and that demonstrates the ethical dangers of imagining the what-it's-like. To relate ethically to another, Levinas argues, does not require overcoming the limits of the what-it's-like, the impossibility of knowing the mind of another empirically, but rather of accepting and embracing the question's unanswerability (as I discuss below in relation to Woolf's use of the word "perhaps"). As this chapter shows, the risk in an act of imagining, of totalizing the other that one wishes to understand, producing an imagined mind that lacks this "infinity" that is encapsulable and knowable, is not unnavigable, despite the instances where Woolf fails to navigate it. The commonality of this totalizing also serves as connective tissue between the various concerns of this chapter and demonstrates the value of interdisciplinary exchanges between disability studies, pain studies, and animal studies.

Virginia Woolf, in her essay "Street Haunting: A London Adventure," asks a what-is-it-like? of her own, one with startling, indeed disturbing, relevance to this chapter.

[W]e may ask . . . "What, then, is it like to be a dwarf?"

She [a dwarf] came in escorted by two women who, being of normal size, looked like benevolent giants beside her. Smiling at the shop girls, they seemed to be at once disclaiming any lot in her deformity and assuring her of their protection. She wore the peevish yet apologetic expression usual on the faces of the deformed. She needed their kindness, yet she resented it.⁵

4. Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969), 36.

5. Virginia Woolf, "Street Haunting: A London Adventure," in *Selected Essays*, ed. David Bradshaw (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 179.

Though this chapter focuses primarily on her novel *Flush* and her essay “On Being Ill,” I begin with “Street Haunting” to emphasize the limits of Woolf’s capacity to imagine others. Scholars of modernist disability studies have quite rightly criticized this scene for its insensitivity and objectification. Maren Linett, for instance, notes the scene’s contrast with the earlier descriptions of London’s picturesque winter scenery, writing that “it is as if [Woolf] has conjured [the dwarf] from her own desire for something other than beauty.”⁶ Similarly, Elizabeth Outka writes that Woolf “maintains a strict hierarchy of impairments: illness may be redefined as strength, but not structural or cognitive differences.”⁷

A less charitable reading might argue, in comparison to *Flush*, that Woolf seems more able to imagine the mind of a dog than the mind of a disabled person, perhaps because the stereotypes and presumptions normate minds and bodies often bring to disability get in the way of her empiricism. As she writes in the paragraph before the above-cited passage, “the eye has this strange property: it rests only on beauty; like the butterfly it seeks out colour and basks in warmth.”⁸ At first, as we have seen, Woolf’s narrator’s eye sees but does not “rest on” the dwarf, flitting to the other women who came in with her, and then this way and that. Only when the dwarf woman begins to take on normate qualities, begins to resemble a so-called average person, does the narrative eye begin to dwell on her:

[T]he giantesses, smiling indulgently, had asked for shoes for “this lady” . . . the dwarf stuck her foot out with an impetuosity which seemed to claim all our attention. . . . [F]or behold it was the shapely, perfectly proportioned foot of a well-grown woman. It was arched; it was aristocratic. Her whole manner changed as she looked at it resting on the stand. She looked soothed and satisfied. Her manner became full of self-confidence. She sent for shoe after shoe; she tried on pair after pair. . . . She was thinking that, after all, feet are the most important part of the whole person; women, she said to herself, have been loved for feet alone. Seeing nothing but her feet [in the mirror], she imagined perhaps that the rest of her body was of a piece with those beautiful feet.⁹

6. Maren Tova Linett, *Bodies of Modernism: Physical Disability in Transatlantic Modernist Literature* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2017), 19.

7. Elizabeth Outka, “Disability, Illness, and Pain,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Virginia Woolf*, ed. Anne E. Fernald (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 511.

8. Woolf, “Street Haunting,” 179.

9. Woolf, “Street Haunting,” 179–80.

Or perhaps this woman was just happy to be out buying some nice shoes with her friends. The passage involves a kind of projection that resembles what in animal studies is called anthropomorphization, but which in this case requires a more general term *automorphization*, or the act of imagining another as though they were like oneself. The word here describes the tendency of abled people to imagine disabled subjectivity as if the disability were happening to them instead of another and so project their own anxieties over illness or dependency onto that other person, similarly to what Ato Quayson called “aesthetic nervousness.” In many cases this process, when it applies to disability, involves assuming the presence of immense pain and suffering on the part of disabled people, such that abled people’s “visions assume a future of relentless pain, isolation, and bitterness,”¹⁰ reflecting what abled people imagine they would feel if they became disabled, a thought pattern resulting in an “ableist conflation of disability with pain and suffering.”¹¹ A related process is the one we see in “Street Haunting,” where the failure to imagine a life with disability results in a failure to imagine disabled people as having lives or subjectivities at all, such that their status as disabled is taken to exhaust the scope of their thought and identity. Woolf’s imagining of the dwarf’s subjectivity (right down to refusing to give the woman a name or any way to refer to her other than with pronouns or as “the dwarf,” a term I retain here only for consistency of reference) shows how her identity has been subsumed into her status as disabled. Woolf quite uncharacteristically forgets that every other person has as much subjectivity as she does, and that other people carry mental worlds inside them that are not fully readable from the outside, that disabled people do things and think things for reasons that have nothing to do with their disability. The structure of the passage, the way it lingers on the “beauty” of the dwarf’s normate feet and assumes that she can only imagine herself as beautiful in relation to those feet, emphasizes this reading; it implies that if her feet were also nonnormate then there would be nothing about her worth resting the eye on at all.

The American philosopher Thomas Nagel asked, and much more thoroughly answered, a what-is-it-like? of his own in his famous essay “What Is it Like to Be a Bat?” (later republished as a chapter in his book *Mortal Questions*). The essay—which, in Brian Massumi’s words, is “endlessly cited” but “less often

10. Alison Kafer, *Feminist, Queer, Crip* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 2.

11. Joel Michael Reynolds, *The Life Worth Living: Disability, Pain, and Mortality* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2022), 4.

read”¹²—is often taken to argue that imagining the mind of another creature is impossible, which overstates Nagel’s claims. He does not at any point in the essay actually deny or reject physicalism—that is, the belief that all mental states are in some way reducible to physical processes in the brain—but rather argues that physicalism’s account of how the mind works is incomplete with respect to phenomenal states, that, essentially, even if the theory is correct it nevertheless lacks sufficient data or insight to provide a full account of how subjectivity works. “If physicalism can be defended,” he writes, then “the phenomenological features must themselves be given a physical account.”¹³ And as he goes on to describe, “at present we are completely unequipped to think about the subjective character of an experience without relying on the imagination—without taking up the point of view of the experiential subject.”¹⁴

Nagel’s definition of “what it is like” should be distinguished from merely knowing that a bat is conscious and from knowing assorted facts *about* bat consciousness. What he is discussing is instead “the subjective nature of experience,” a nature

not captured by any of the familiar . . . reductive analyses of the mental, for all of them are logically compatible with its absence. It is not analyzable in terms of any explanatory system of functional states, or intentional states, since these could be ascribed to robots or automata that behaved like people though they experienced nothing. . . . For there is no reason to suppose that a reduction which seems plausible when no attempt is made to account for consciousness can be extended to include consciousness. *Without some idea, therefore, of what the subjective character of experience is, we cannot know what is required of physicalist theory.*¹⁵

Similarly, he distinguishes the subject (so to speak) of his essay from a mere assertion of the “privacy of experience to its possessor”¹⁶ (though that privacy will be relevant to the discussions below), but rather makes it clear that he is referring to a class or type of experience, something that a species may be said

12. Brian Massumi, “Becoming Animal in the Literary Field,” in *Animals, Animality, and Literature*, ed. Bruce Boehrer, Molly Hand, and Brian Massumi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 267.

13. Thomas Nagel, *Mortal Questions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 167.

14. Nagel, *Mortal Questions*, 178.

15. Nagel, *Mortal Questions*, 166–67. My emphasis.

16. Nagel, *Mortal Questions*, 171.

to possess *as a group*. There is something it is like to be a human, a particular way or manner or quality of experiencing the world that is characteristic of humans as a species, of the state of being human itself, whatever differences there may be between individual humans, or at least so the argument presumes. What characteristics are these? What is it that differentiates what it is like to be a human from what it is like to be a bat? The question is, at least at present, unanswered, which is precisely the problem. If we could answer it then, at least in theory, we could work backwards to the physical substrate of this human experience and then work forwards from the physical substrates of bat experience to thereby learn something about it. But until that first step is completed, it is impossible to know, and so our only recourse is to imagine.

How then is one to imagine, if one must? It is on this point that Nagel's essay has the greatest import for reading Woolf's representation of the pains (and pleasures) of others. As Nagel notes, "members of radically different species may both understand the same physical events in objective terms, and this does not require that they understand the phenomenal forms in which those events appear to the senses of members of other species,"¹⁷ the sonar sense of a bat, which we can only understand in objective terms, being but one example. As he goes on to write, "the less it depends on a specifically human viewpoint, the more objective is our description."¹⁸ This observation applies to "Street Haunting," I think, due to the degree to which the dwarf is dehumanized. Woolf, either unable or unwilling to imagine the dwarf's subjectivity to the extent she does for her other characters, withdraws instead to the objective—the face, the clothes, the movements, the posture—and then surmises what the dwarf is possibly thinking based on deduction. Yet there is nothing to deduce: whether or not this scene was based on a real encounter, the dwarf in the essay is as much a fictional character as Clarissa Dalloway is. What stands between Woolf and the dwarf's thoughts is the narrator's posture as an outside observer, their apparent lack of imagination, and the way the essay uses the first person and the present tense "to enlist the reader in [the narrator's] wandering . . . [as] her shifting perceptions and observations apostrophize an unseen interlocutor."¹⁹ Really, "Street Haunting" is not about other people; it is about *watching* other people, consuming their appearances, being entertained by them, attempting to

17. Nagel, *Mortal Questions*, 175.

18. Nagel, *Mortal Questions*, 177.

19. Michael Davidson, *Invalid Modernism: Disability and the Missing Body of the Aesthetic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 135.

deduce their inner selves in much the same way Sherlock Holmes might deduce someone's profession from the dirt on their shoes.

In his essay Nagel asks, "what would be left of what it was like to be a bat if one removed the viewpoint of the bat?"²⁰ It may in fact look something like the above. A bat after all is not only a bat in the instant we observe it. It has been a bat for its whole life, and its memories, expectations, feelings, or whatever other elements there might be to its subjectivity (and whatever that subjectivity may amount to) are also both from the perspective of the bat and also constituent of that perspective. If bats have feelings, those feelings would be unlikely to resemble those of most humans with respect to mosquitoes, for example, since their experience of relating to mosquitoes, and the lifetime of habituation those experiences create, would be radically different from those of the vast majority of people. On the other hand, while Woolf describes the woman's dwarfism as a "deformity," there is no actual evidence in the essay that the dwarf thinks of herself that way. Indeed, why would she? This is the way her body has looked for her entire adult life; it is not a deformed or broken body, but *her* body, and that life experience is precisely what the essay fails to imagine. Instead, like a human trying to imagine the mind of a bat, it attends to the objective. Or, as Rebecca Colesworthy puts it, the narrator of "Street Haunting" "gives herself . . . [the] *illusion* of multiplicity, the illusion that one can divest oneself of the strictures of selfhood."²¹

The fact that the life-world of an animal would necessarily include not only its immediate experience but also the history of that experience—including interpretations and memories, yes, but also unconscious habits of thought and action—is the missing element in many discussions of Nagel's essay, including attempts to apply it to literary criticism. For example, in an effort to debunk Nagel in his book *Consciousness Explained*, Daniel Dennett attempts to construct what he calls a "heterophenomenology" of a bat through a sort of question-and-answer format, making presumptions and then critiquing them to dialogically calibrate his way to the right answer. To give an example, as he writes while attempting to construe what it would be like for a bat to perceive (via echolocation) an eagle swooping in on it from two meters away: "Just what are the resolution limits of a bat's echolocation? Is it used to identify objects at all, or just an alerter and tracker for capture? Would a bat be able to distinguish

20. Nagel, *Mortal Questions*, 173.

21. Rebecca Colesworthy, *Returning the Gift: Modernism and the Thought of Exchange* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 60.

pinfeathers spread from pinfeathers closed just using echolocation,” and so forth, eventually concluding that

the sorts of investigation suggested by this exercise would take us a long way into an account of the structure of the bat’s perceptual and behavioral world, so we could rank order heterophenomenological narratives for realism, discarding those that asserted or presupposed . . . dispositions, demonstrably not provided for in the ecology and neurophysiology of the bat.²²

One need not posit any particular subjective states to note how presentist this method is, taking as relevant only what sense perceptions the bat would be exposed to *at that moment*, pushing aside any idea of memory or habituation. Even just the fact that a bat would (in whatever way) identify one of its predator species *as* a predator species where a human (or lion, or elephant, or shark) would not indicates the relevance of its subject position, a subject position that we humans, as Nagel argues, simply lack the data to properly fathom. We can surmise and we can guess—we might even be able to surmise and guess accurately—but that is not the same thing as *knowing* what it is like to be a bat.

Real knowledge in this area would, at minimum, require an account of whether, how, and to what extent sense perceptions in the present, memories of the past, and expectations for the future are integrated into a coherent picture of the environment and a sense of one’s place in it, into a “world” in the phenomenological sense. Perhaps we will find that bats and dogs simply lack a world or are “poor” in it (to use Heidegger’s terminology),²³ but what we cannot do is escape having to answer the question at all, as Dennett tries to. As for the argument that one cannot yet even know *whether* bats, dogs, or other non-human animals integrate their sensory experiences in a way analogous to worlding, the burden of proof is ultimately on the party claiming to know, even if what they claim to know is an absence. (Indeed, anyone who claims to

22. Daniel C. Dennett, *Consciousness Explained* (London: Little, Brown and Company, 1991), 443.

23. “We are undertaking the aforementioned comparative examination of stone, animal, and man, according to which the stone is worldless, the animal poor in world, and man world-forming” (Martin Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude*, trans. William McNeil and Nicholas Walker [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995], 185). As Heidegger elsewhere writes, “ontologically, ‘world’ is not a way of characterizing those entities which Dasein essentially is *not*; it is rather a characteristic of Dasein itself” (*Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson [New York: Harper, 2008], 92). If Dasein is characterized by a world, it thus follows that to be poor or lacking in world is to be poor or lacking in that being-there on which (and from which) Heidegger constructs his phenomenology.

know for a fact that nonhumans lack consciousness has given themselves the unenviable task of *proving* an absence.) It may well be the case that applying these phenomenological concepts to nonhumans is simply anthropomorphism, but it would be just as hasty to assume that the only possible results are either human-like phenomenology or no phenomenology at all. Perhaps dog or bat consciousness simply take permutations hitherto unimagined by philosophers. In the absence of more information one way or the other, the only defensible position is Nagel's Socratic doubt, the admission that the only thing we know is that we know nothing.

This problem brings us back to Nagel's proposed stopgap ("solution" seems like too strong a word) to this problem: imagination, or the use of supposition and guessing to fill in the blanks of our understanding. It is the act of imagining that sets novels like *Flush* apart, and indeed what makes literature so useful a tool for the study of pain, in that by simulating a possible subject position, and by doing so richly with an array of life experience and unconscious impulses, these texts allow us readers to think more usefully about these seemingly intractable problems. As for the role of objectivity and deduction in this process, a useful model might not be Daniel Dennett, but rather T. S. Eliot, whose concept of the "objective correlative" serves as a literary analogue to Dennett's reductionism. The term describes "a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that *particular* emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked."²⁴ In other words, according to Eliot, one understands the what-it's-like of a fictional character in a manner similar to how Dennett claims one can understand the what-it's-like of a bat, but with an added temporal element ("a chain of events") that lends one's mental model of that character's subjectivity greater depth and coherence. I have previously elaborated on the relevance of Eliot's concept to the study of pain in my book *Diaphanous Bodies*, where I propose an opposite concept, the *subjective* correlative, which denotes the hidden subjectivity of an externally observed subject that correlates with and lends coherence to events and actions that might otherwise seem unconnected.²⁵ For example, in the work of Samuel Beckett, the hidden subjec-

24. T. S. Eliot, "Hamlet," in *The Complete Prose of T.S. Eliot: The Critical Edition: The Perfect Critic, 1919–1926*, eds. Anthony Cuda and Ronald Schuchard (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), 125.

25. See chapter 2 of Jeremy Colangelo, *Diaphanous Bodies: Ability, Disability, and Modernist Irish Literature* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2021), 61–101.

tive experience of pain makes coherent otherwise inexplicable actions by the characters. The existence of a subjective correlative—which need not amount to subjectivity as human beings experience it—is precisely what Dennett denies the existence of in his response to Nagel’s essay, and it is what Eliot attributes to the fictional characters who he can observe only externally.²⁶ The spaniel Flush’s subjective correlative is also what Woolf reconstructs in *Flush* through the use of letters, biographies, and her encounters with other dogs.

On Pain of Correlation

Flush, unlike “Street Haunting,” is at pains to imagine the life experience of its subject as that subject lived it. The novel is a biography of Flush, the pet spaniel of the Victorian English poet Elizabeth Barrett Browning, and begins even before the beginning, with the history of the spaniel breed and Flush’s own genealogy. The novel has been nearly ignored by Woolf scholars, many of whom have taken Woolf at her word when she describes the novel as a “joke” in one of her letters.²⁷ Yet as Derek Ryan argues, this reference was possibly “a defense mechanism when anticipating that its merits would be dismissed.”²⁸ In a similar vein Caroline Hovanec has persuasively read *Flush* as “a philosophical animal constructing knowledge from his vantage point of a dog”²⁹ and notes that “Flush’s perspective helps [Woolf] to satisfy an intellectual curiosity about other worlds.”³⁰ It is this phenomenological benefit of the doubt—which Nagel gives to bats and which Woolf gives to dogs (but not, it seems, to disabled people)—that allows the imagining of the what-it’s-like of the other to take place at all.

Yet the pursuit of the what-it’s-like of Flush, and the novel’s strict focalization (after the early section) through Flush’s mind, creates, in an equal and

26. Eliot’s essay principally focuses on the plays of William Shakespeare, especially *Hamlet*, which represent subjectivity either through the objective correlative or by externalizing it through techniques like soliloquy rather than by representing it directly as, for instance, in a stream-of-consciousness novel.

27. Virginia Woolf, *The Letters of Virginia Woolf: Vol. 5 (1932–1935)*, ed. Nigel Nicolson and Joanne Trautmann (Boston: Mariner, 1982), 162.

28. Derek Ryan, “‘Was it Flush, or Was it Pan?’: Virginia Woolf, Ethel Smyth, and Canine Biography,” in *Reading Literary Animals: Medieval to Modern*, ed. Karen L. Edwards, Derek Ryan, and Jane Spencer (London: Routledge, 2020), 264.

29. Caroline Hovanec, *Animal Subjects: Literature, Zoology, and British Modernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 187.

30. Hovanec, *Animal Subjects*, 187.

opposite reaction, another subjectivity that can only be correlated and that demands of us readers a degree of imagination, that of Elizabeth Barrett Browning herself, and in particular the chronic pain condition she lived with. Much of Barrett Browning's life is told to us in *Flush* indirectly, through the half-understanding perception of a dog who simply lacks sufficient context to understand poetry, marriage, letter writing, chronic pain, or the gender and class hierarchies of nineteenth-century England. What we learn about Barrett Browning's medical condition likewise only comes to us indirectly: "she coughed. She complained of feeling ill—but not so ill as she usually felt when the wind was in the east. . . . So much Flush could see, from his station at her feet. But he could make no sense of the words that Miss Barrett was murmuring to herself."³¹ Yet in her letters, which Woolf drew from extensively in *Flush*, Barrett Browning wrote that "the suffering" of her illness "is agony,"

and the paroxysms continue from a quarter of an hour to an hour and upwards. . . . The attack seems gradually to approach its acme, and then suddenly ceases—during its progress the mind is for the most part conscious of surrounding objects but towards its close, there is generally some, and occasionally, very considerable confusion produced by it.³²

Another letter from one of her physicians, Dr. William Cother, provides an account of her symptoms based on a conversation he had with her. As Cother writes, the pain begins with headaches but then moves to "the right side, that is about the center of the angle formed by the greatest projection of the ribs. . . . [The pain] is carried to the corresponding region of the back, up the side to the point of the right shoulder, and down the arm."³³ In *Flush* it is a mystery what exactly keeps Barrett Browning in bed; like with the mind of a bat, there is simply too little to be found among the empirical data, too few objective correlatives, to overcome the distance and thwart the privacy of one's own pain experience, which Elaine Scarry so thoroughly describes. Yet unlike with bats and Flush, we have testimony from Barrett Browning herself, as well as from the doctors with whom she discussed her symptoms, which allow us to fill in these blanks, to do, that is, what *Flush* purports to do with its biographical subject.³⁴

31. Virginia Woolf, *Flush: A Biography*, ed. Kate Flint (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 36. Hereafter cited parenthetically as F.

32. Quoted in Fiona Sampson, *Two-Way Mirror: The Life of Elizabeth Barrett Browning* (London: Profile Books, 2021), 45.

33. Quoted in Sampson, *Two-Way Mirror*, 39.

34. A notable exception to the critical tendency to ignore the details of Barrett Browning's disability in

This symmetry between the private experience of Barrett Browning (unseen in the novel yet historically traceable) and the private experience of Flush (untraceable in the historical record yet vividly imagined in the novel) lends complexity to the overly binaristic debates over the novel's relationship to anthropomorphization. Justin Prystash, for instance, argues that scholars have in many cases "interpret[ed] the representation of Flush as the reflection or projection of human desires, either neglecting the question of what the narrative tells us about the desires of dogs or denying that it can give us any insight whatsoever."³⁵ Rasheed Tazudeen writes that *Flush* "ultimately subordinates Flush's being to the story . . . [of the Brownings'] courtship,"³⁶ and Dan Wylie holds that "despite being fully aware of the dog-human language barrier . . . Woolf demonstrates a countervailing desire to assimilate Flush to the human."³⁷ Jutta Ittner on the other hand argues that "the literary imaginary reflects a paradigm shift from the traditional anthropomorphic view, where the animal is inextricably linked to human consciousness and deprived of its own agency to a new anthropomorphism that views the animal as a separate and unknowable entity,"³⁸ and Alison Booth notes throughout *Flush* the "intermittent contacts with the reader that squander 'our' reputation for omniscience . . . [and] ironic hints that the entire work is a virtual apparatus for reaching a dog's inner experience."³⁹

The missing piece in this debate is that while a reader of *Flush* might relate to its protagonist the way one might relate to any protagonist of a novel written roughly in the shape of a biography, said reader can only relate to the novel's version of Barrett Browning as Flush does, through a dark glass of correlation, perceiving *her* pain the way one might perceive the pain of a pet. This reading should not be taken to imply that Barrett Browning is dehumanized but rather that the reader's closeness to Flush's experience comes at the cost of an epis-

readings of *Flush* is Sebastian Williams, whose essay "Anthropocentric Ableism and Virginia Woolf's *Flush*" (*Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal* 53, no. 1 [2020]: 107–23) explicitly addresses the novel's relevance to disability studies.

35. Justin Prystash, "Learning from the Human: Virginia Woolf, Olaf Stapledon, and the Challenge of Behaviorism," *Configurations* 28, no. 4 (2020): 444.
36. Rasheed Tazudeen, "'Discordant Syllabing': The Language of the Living World in Virginia Woolf's *Between the Acts*," *Studies in the Novel* 47, no. 4 (2015): 493.
37. Dan Wylie, "The Anthropomorphic Ethic: Fiction and the Animal Mind in Virginia Woolf's *Flush* and Barbara Gowdy's *The White Bone*," *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 9, no. 2 (2002): 120.
38. Jutta Ittner, "Part Spaniel, Part Canine Puzzle: Anthropomorphism in Woolf's *Flush* and Auster's *Timbuktu*," *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal* 39, no. 4 (2006): 182–83.
39. Alison Booth, "The Scent of a Narrative: Rank Discourse in 'Flush' and 'Written on the Body,'" *Narrative* 8, no. 1 (2000): 9.

temic distance from Barrett Browning's. Furthermore, as Jane Goldman writes, those elements that for some critics "exonerat[e] *Flush: A Biography* from charges of anthropocentric allegorization of the dog . . . is his historical, 'real life' counterpart, Flush, the pet spaniel of the poet Elizabeth Barrett Browning, who immortalized him in her poetry but also records observations of his daily behaviour in her letters."⁴⁰ What we are ultimately seeing when we read *Flush* is not Woolf's reconstruction of Flush the dog, but rather Woolf's reconstruction of Barrett Browning's reconstruction of Flush the dog, a correlation of a correlation, further supplemented by the divergent creativities of these two writers along with whatever assumptions or knowledge of canine behavior and psychology the two of them might have possessed.⁴¹ So *of course* the novel anthropomorphizes Flush to at least some extent; it could hardly have done otherwise. The more interesting question is what that imaginative anthropomorphization says about Woolf's methods for representing the (so-called) unrepresentable: in this case, pain.

Woolf's most well-known discussion of pain occurs in her essay "On Being Ill," a work that has rarely been compared to *Flush*, despite the texts' many similarities. Janine Utell, in one of the few publications to venture the comparison, argues that the novel is "an attempt at pathography" and notes the importance of the "sickroom" in *Flush*'s early chapters.⁴² Indeed, there are passages in *Flush* and "On Being Ill" that closely resemble each other, as though Woolf were directly developing on her earlier arguments within the novel.⁴³ Take this well-known passage from the essay:

Finally, to hinder the description of illness in literature, there is the poverty of the language. English, which can express the thoughts of Hamlet and the tragedy of Lear, has no words for the shiver and the headache. It has all grown one way. The merest schoolgirl, when she falls in love, has Shakespeare or Keats to speak her mind for her; but let a sufferer try to describe a pain in his head to a doctor and language at once runs dry. There is nothing ready made for him. He

40. Jane Goldman, "*Flush: A Biography*: Speaking, Reading, and Writing with the Companion Species," in *A Companion to Virginia Woolf*, ed. Jessica Berman (Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2019), 167.

41. As Pauline Macadré describes, "in writing *Flush*, Virginia Woolf offered a doubly displaced representation of reality, so that one is not merely faced with a historically distant and critical recollection of the Victorian era, but also with a reconfiguration of the world enabled by the distance between human and animal worlds" ("Solving the problem of reality" in Virginia Woolf's *Flush*," *Cahiers victoriens et édouardiens* 88 [2018]: 3, para. 6).

42. Janine Utell, "View from the Sickroom: Virginia Woolf, Dorothy Wordsworth, and Writing Women's Lives of Illness," *Life Writing* 13, no. 1 (2016): 33.

43. "On Being Ill" was written in 1925, while *Flush* was published in 1933.

is forced to coin words himself, and, taking his pain in one hand, and a lump of pure sound in the other (as perhaps the people of Babel did in the beginning), so to crush them together that a brand new word in the end drops out. Probably it will be something laughable. For who of English birth can take liberties with the language?⁴⁴

Already one comparison to *Flush* comes to mind: Woolf's pre-emptive dismissal of the work as a "joke," which mirrors her fear in this earlier work that taking "liberties" with the English language would result in "something laughable." Readers of this essay have tended to take the passage to mean that English simply lacks the vocabulary for rich descriptions of a headache or an illness, which is in fact only half of what it claims. One could, Woolf says, invent words for these feelings just as Shakespeare and Keats invented ways of conveying love, provided perhaps that one possessed sufficient literary talent. As Peter Fifield has argued, by the time she wrote "On Being Ill" Woolf was already well aware of the literary possibilities of illness writing. "Illness," he says, "brings home the strangeness of other humans, as well as the renewed foreignness of an experiential world once habitual."⁴⁵ Furthermore, "before writing of her own ill health, Woolf had . . . a recent identity as one who observed and cared for the unwell" due to the many illnesses that afflicted her family.⁴⁶ Yet, as Sarah Pett writes, when "On Being Ill" is cited it is often in service of an argument in favor of pain and illness's inaccessibility. She writes:

Citations of the essay in illness memoir and critical work support this assertion [of opaqueness], indicating that Woolf's stylistic choices often prevent sustained engagement with her argument. The writings of Elaine Scarry . . . [and others] are cases in point—all reproduce one or more of the essay's more provocative statements in direct quotation, but not one engages with the piece as a whole.⁴⁷

What Woolf's essay seems to describe is not the inaccessibility of pain and illness to language—a reading that in Scarry contributes to the treatment of pain as a simple and homogeneous experience—but rather the inadequacy of

44. Virginia Woolf, "On Being Ill," in *Selected Essays*, ed. David Bradshaw (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 102.

45. Peter Fifield, *Modernism and Physical Illness: Sick Books* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 2.

46. Fifield, *Modernism and Physical Illness*, 73.

47. Sarah Pett, "Rash Reading: Rethinking Virginia Woolf's 'On Being Ill,'" *Literature and Medicine* 37, no. 1 (2019): 27–28.

literary language to address the immense complexity of these experiences. Woolf complains that there is too little writing that represents illness not because it cannot be represented, but because it *should* be, because this vast trove of human experience has been squandered and abandoned by authors more interested in tragedy and love. Take for example this passage from later in the essay:

Meanwhile, with the heroism of the ant or the bee, however indifferent the sky or disdainful the flowers, the army of the upright [as opposed to the reclining ill] marches into battle. Mrs Jones catches her train. Mr Smith mends his motor. The cows are driven home to be milked. Men thatch the roof. The dogs bark. The rooks, rising in a net, fall in a net upon the elm trees. The wave of life flings itself out indefatigably. It is only the recumbent who know what, after all, nature is at no pains to conceal—that she in the end will conquer; heat will leave the world; stiff with frost we shall cease to drag ourselves about the fields; ice will lie thick upon factory and engine; the sun will go out.⁴⁸

How much like *Mrs Dalloway* this reads, with its evocation of the interconnectedness of simultaneity (think for example of the scene with the skywriter plane) and rhapsodies of “life; London; this moment in June.”⁴⁹ The essay is also of a kind with other works like *A Room of One’s Own* and “Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown,” which advocate for greater literary attention to be paid to un- or under-represented forms of experience. It is a problem Woolf had already begun to address in *Mrs Dalloway* with the development of what Outka calls the “hallucinatory-delirium mode” of writing, which is associated most strongly with the character Septimus Smith and which “blends mental and physical suffering and allows Woolf to place the body’s experience as the basis for both language and perception . . . [and] becomes a way to create a novel and a language devoted to influenza—and to all that influenza represented at the time both for Woolf and the larger culture.”⁵⁰

Flush, which was published after both “On Being Ill” and *Mrs Dalloway*, continues Woolf’s drive to explore these unplumbed depths. Illness, pain, and

48. Woolf, “On Being Ill,” 106.

49. Virginia Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway*, ed. David Bradshaw (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 4.

50. Elizabeth Outka, *Viral Modernism: The Influenza Pandemic and Interwar Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2020), 105–6.

animal experience are alike in the way they resist the methods of correlation discussed earlier in relation to Nagel and Eliot, where objective acts and events can be used to infer subjective states. While certain acts—screaming, thrashing about, etc.—call for subjective explanation, a *subjective* correlative (in this case pain) that might link and explain these phenomena, there is nothing about pain and illness that necessarily require that such acts be taken. While ill, one may be in the throes of agony and hallucination, complex involutions of experience that defy everyday existence and demand nothing less than an exertion of imagination and creativity in order to even approximate with words, all while appearing to an outside observer to be in a totally comatose state without any thought whatsoever. But most, if not all, authors have been ill at some point in their lives, such that the experience may provide some reference point for hypothesizing. But, as Nagel says, we have no idea what it is like to be a bat, or a dog; humans by definition lack any first-person experience of being another animal, just like other animals lack any first-person experience of being us (as we see in Flush's frequent bafflement at the behavior of his human companions).

Yet despite this important difference an analogy can still be made, and in fact it would seem that Woolf herself made it. The scene in question takes place late in the novel when the Brownings have gone to live in Italy and have had a child together. Walking with Barrett Browning and the baby, Flush enters a town and is overwhelmed by the complex scents therein:

It was the human scene that stirred him. Beauty, so it seems at least, had to be crystalized into a green of violet powder and puffed by some celestial syringe down the fringed channels that lay behind his nostrils before it touched Flush's senses; and then *it issued not in words, but in a silent rapture*. Where Mrs Browning saw, he smelt; where she wrote, he snuffed.

Here, then, the biographer must perforce come to a pause. Where two or three thousand words are insufficient for what we see . . . *there is no more than two words and one-half for what we smell*. The human nose is practically nonexistent. *The greatest poets in the world have smelt nothing but roses on the one hand, and dung on the other*. The infinite gradations that lie between are unrecorded. Yet it was in the world of smell that Flush mostly lived. *Love was chiefly smell*; form and colour were smell; music and architecture, law, politics and science were smell. To him religion itself was smell. To describe his simplest

experience with the daily chop or biscuit is beyond our power. Not even Mr Swinburne could have said what the smell of Wimpole Street meant to Flush on a hot afternoon in June . . . perhaps Shakespeare, had he paused in the middle of writing *Anthony and Cleopatra*—But Shakespeare did not pause. (F, 85–86, my emphasis)

There are simply too many parallels between this passage and those in “On Being Ill” for the similarity to be an accident. Note how Flush’s specifically canine senses, his sense of smell in particular, lead not just to a different assessment of objective inputs (as in Dennett) but to a wholly different relationship with sensing as such. And it is this difference, the uniqueness of his experience, that causes it to defy language, not because humans are incapable of describing it (Shakespeare, the passage suggests, might have been) but because the relative unimportance of the sense of smell in the construction of human subjectivity has left us no incentive to explore its variations. Love, for Flush, is “chiefly smell!” What is there in Keats or Swinburne that might help him put that experience into words? While the great authors have failed humanity in the subjects of pain and illness, for dogs their insufficiency is total. The reservoir of language has run dry. Woolf is, perhaps, bragging here, gesturing to her own considerable literary talent and attentiveness in contrast with Shakespeare, Keats, Swinburne, and the like, as if she were saying “*those* authors may have dropped the ball, but *I* have not.” She is rising to her own challenge, or at least attempting to, much as she does in the many representations of illness throughout her work. She is doing the imaginative work that Nagel tells us is necessary to represent animal experience, and that “On Being Ill” suggests is needed to represent sickness and pain.

The nonrepresentation of Barrett Browning’s pain thus has a roundabout explanation: it is the counterpoint, the equal-opposite, to the text’s representation of the submerged elements of Flush’s experience. Barrett Browning, after all, does not know—*cannot* know—that her dog experiences love via smell. How could she? There is simply no objective correlative sufficient to the task, whether for the real Barrett Browning or the fictional one. This ignorance is mirrored by Flush’s own ignorance, of his companion’s chronic pain, of writing, of love as humans know it. It repeats and reinscribes the chasm of experience that exists between species, the place where supposition ends and knowledge fails to begin. Pain is thus a fitting metaphor for this lack of representation.

Flush or Fiction

It would be wrong, however, to assume that the act of imagining the other always leads to understanding. As we have seen already in “Street Haunting,” to ask “what is it like to be” something or someone can easily be a prelude to the answer “nothing at all.” A person observed but not spoken to—like the dwarf in that essay—lacks the opportunity to respond, much like Flush and other dogs lack the ability to respond. The act of imagining puts the power in the hands of the imaginer, not the imagined, and as we see in “Street Haunting” one cannot dispute an idea that goes unexpressed, a prejudice that lives silently in another’s mind.

The problems of imagining lie also at the heart of *Flush*’s ending, and with its status as a mock biography. But it is a biography of a certain kind, what in another of her essays Woolf called “the new biography,” or biography that is not merely a transmission of facts about a historically important person (or dog). It is rather a way to “transmit personality,”⁵¹ to not only know about another person, but to know them. In order to perform this alchemy, Woolf argues, “facts must be manipulated; some must be brightened; others shaded; yet, in the process, they must never lose their integrity.”⁵² By far the most significant practitioner of this form of biography is Woolf’s friend and fellow Bloomsbury Group member Lytton Strachey, who ends his biography of Queen Victoria (which he dedicated to Woolf) with an act of blatant fictionalization:

She herself, as she lay blind and silent, *seemed to those who watched her to be divested of all thinking* . . . Yet, *perhaps*, in the secret chambers of consciousness, she had her thoughts, too. Perhaps her fading mind called up once more the shadows of the past to float before it, and retraced, for the last time, the vanished visions of that long history—passing back and back, through the cloud of years, to older and even older memories—to the spring woods at Osborne . . . to Lord Palmerston’s queer clothes and high demeanour, and Albert’s face under the green lamp . . . and the old King’s turkey-cock ejaculations, and Uncle

51. Virginia Woolf, “The New Biography,” in *Selected Essays*, ed. David Bradshaw (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 95.

52. Woolf, “The New Biography,” 95. For an excellent reading of Woolf’s relationship to biofiction, see Michael Lackey and Todd Avery, “Virginia Woolf and Biofiction,” *Virginia Woolf Miscellany* 93 (2018): 12–29.

Leopold's soft voice and Claremont . . . and a yellow rug, and some friendly flounces of sprigged muslin, and the trees and the grass at Kensington.⁵³

What is it like to die? I have no idea, and neither does Lytton Strachey (or at least, he didn't when he wrote *Queen Victoria*). Like pain and the lives of animals, the essential what-it's-like-ness of it, the detail-rich first-person experience of death, cannot be represented faithfully, but rather only supposed (that is, imagined). It, like pain, has that "element of blank" of which Emily Dickinson speaks. It is an experience that is forgotten in the process of experiencing it; to know it is to know nothing whatsoever. Someone dying also cuts them off from being known by others: it is impossible to even hypothetically get to know Queen Victoria, to learn "what she is like" as a person, to become acquainted with her, because she is no longer here and so cannot be interacted with: thus the need for imagination in biography. It makes sense then that *Flush*, which as we have seen is obsessed with what people and animals do not or cannot know, ends much like *Victoria* does:

He slept as dogs sleep when they are dreaming. Now his legs twitched—was he dreaming that he hunted rabbits in Spain? . . . Then he lay still again. And now he yelped, quickly, softly, many times in succession. *Perhaps* he heard Dr Mitford egging his greyhounds on in the hunt at Reading. Then his tail wagged sheepishly. Did he hear old Miss Mitford cry "Bad dog! Bad dog!" as he slunk back to her, where she stood among the turnips waving her umbrella? And then he lay for some time snoring, wrapt in the deep sleep of happy old age. Suddenly every muscle in his body twitched. He woke with a violent start. Where did he think he was? In Whitechapel among the ruffians? Was the knife at his throat again? (F, 104, my emphasis)

David Herman, who also compares the end of *Queen Victoria* to the end of *Flush*, argues that Woolf composed her novel "as something of a spoof or parody—in particular, a sendup of Lytton Strachey's biographical methods."⁵⁴ I think this reading buys too much into Woolf's claim that *Flush* was simply a "joke" and ignores the ways it differs in the process of repetition. Both share a recourse to the hypothetical—note their uses of "perhaps"—yet while Strachey

53. Lytton Strachey, *Queen Victoria* (New York: Blue Ribbon Books, 1921), 423–24. My emphasis.

54. David Herman, *Narratology Beyond the Human: Storytelling and Animal Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 161.

is content to merely note the intrusion of fantasy at its beginning, Woolf is far more overt in her act of supposition. Constantly the passage goes back to the objective, to what Flush is *doing* as he dreams his final dreams, as if the narrator were standing over him and wondering on his thoughts in real time. Contrast this with Victoria's final moments, where she appeared to an outside observer to be "divested of all thinking," such that anyone standing over her would have no basis whatsoever to suppose anything about her inner thoughts at all (which I should note, does not mean she was thoughtless; research on brain injury patients shows that some can still "willfully modulate" their thinking even when unresponsive from outside⁵⁵). Woolf thus makes Flush's subjectivity *more* accessible than Victoria's by providing it with objective correlatives. The narrator's conclusions remain guesses, yes, but they are *educated* guesses at least. The novel heightens this distinction further by setting the moment slightly earlier in time, not at the instant Flush is dying but a short while before while he sleeps. Instead at that final moment the hypothesizing eye turns to Barrett Browning, writing that "as [Flush] leapt on to the sofa and thrust his face into hers, the words of her own poem came into her mind" that poem being Barrett Browning's sonnet "Flush or Faunus," which Woolf records in its entirety (F, 105).

"Flush or Faunus" is an interesting choice of poem in the context of the foregoing discussion. Written in 1850, it describes Flush leaping up on Barrett Browning as she cries, it would seem in order to comfort her:

You see this dog. It was but yesterday
 I mused forgetful of his presence here
 Till thought on thought drew downward tear on tear,
 When from the pillow, where wet-cheeked I lay,
 A head as hairy as Faunus, thrust its way
 Right sudden against my face,—two golden-clear
 Great eyes astonished mine,—a drooping ear
 Did flap me on either cheek to dry the spray!
 I started first, as some Arcadian,
 Amazed by goatly god in twilight grove;
 But, as my bearded vision closelier ran
 My tears off, I knew Flush, and rose above

55. Martin M. Monti et al., "Willful Modulation of Brain Activity in Disorders of Consciousness," *New England Journal of Medicine* 362, no. 7 (2010): 579–89.

Surprise and sadness,—thanking the true Pan,
Who, by low creatures, leads to heights of love. (qtd. in F, 105)⁵⁶

As Kevin A. Morrison writes, “it has been difficult for critics to recognize any linguistic or theoretical complexity in Barrett Browning’s many references to Flush.”⁵⁷ In this matter, then, Woolf seems to have been ahead of her time, for as Morrison goes on to argue, the poem is “an attempt to describe love outside of the literary tropes and conventions that force a feeling into words,”⁵⁸ a refusal of conventionality that may have contributed to the poem’s muted reception. The sonnet likewise enacts many of the techniques of correlation Woolf employs in her imagining of Flush. The end of the first quatrain notes that the speaker lies “wet-cheeked,” crying on the pillow. Why? Perhaps, if we take the speaker to be Barrett Browning, because she is in pain, yet the poem does not say so. Like *Flush* it provides only the barest objective hint of her inner pain and turmoil, an agony we could only account for in our reading by recourse to the author’s biography. Yet *Flush*, the poem argues, does know it: the dog of “Flush or Faunus” having attained perhaps a greater awareness of his human companion’s experience than the dog of *Flush: A Biography*. Jumping up to dry her tears, Flush amazes Barrett Browning with his perceptiveness; in fact, the speaker takes his act as *evidence* of his perceptiveness, concluding that “I knew Flush,” and knew as well that her feelings are in some way reciprocated. Each provides the other with an array of objective correlatives, and over time (perhaps) they reach a kind of understanding, not a translation between the minds of dogs and humans, but a sort of pidgin, a hybrid mind they both share, so that however imperfectly some aspect of the other can be known.

Did the real Barrett Browning actually think of this poem when *Flush* was dying? Despite the lack of a “perhaps” in Woolf’s narration of this moment, we cannot know. Even though she, logically, must have thought *something*, and even though this chain of thought is at least possible, the fact that it is a private thought (indeed, the private thought of someone now long dead) makes it as unknowable to us readers as the possibly nonexistent thoughts of the dying Queen Victoria. Even when based on events that could at least have possibly

56. See also Elizabeth Barrett Browning, “Flush or Faunus,” in *The Complete Poetical Works of Elizabeth Barrett Browning*, ed. Horace Elisha Scudder (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1900), 196. This version’s punctuation differs from its reproduction in *Flush*, but the poem is otherwise the same.

57. Kevin A. Morrison, “Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s Dog Days,” *Tulsa Studies in Women’s Literature* 30, no. 1 (2011): 101–2.

58. Morrison, “Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s Dog Days,” 105.

happened, and on a poem which did actually exist and which Barrett Browning did actually write, the act of hypothesizing inevitably results in fiction. This problem arises inevitably in imagining the pain of others. Though one can in some cases know things about that pain based on observable information—that is, that a person with a wound on their leg probably feels their pain as being localized in that area—this knowledge is paltry compared to the full brunt of the experience, which like any experience contains far more information than any description could accurately reflect.

This fact brings us, finally, to a question this chapter has so far assiduously dodged: Do nonhuman animals actually have subjectivity? Is there something it is like to be them? And do nonhuman animals actually feel pain? I have avoided this matter in part because I have no satisfying answer to it (Nagel proves correct once again), though if I had to guess I would answer tentatively in the affirmative to the above questions for at least some animals, in part because of the similarity between the brains of other animals (especially mammals) and those of humans. As the science journalist Ed Yong puts it, “in other senses, the actions of sensory receptors and the subjective experiences produced by the brain don’t get different names. Scientists who study eyes don’t get into arguments about whether humans have vision and fish merely have photoreception.”⁵⁹ One can find a more thorough and scientific articulation of this principle in what has become known as the “Cambridge Declaration of Consciousness,” a statement released in 2012 by neuroscientists gathered at the University of Cambridge to discuss the evidence for the existence of consciousness in nonhuman animals. The statement reads in part:

The neural substrates of emotions do not appear to be confined to cortical structures. In fact, subcortical neural networks aroused during affective states in humans are also critically important for generating emotional behaviors in animals. Artificial arousal of the same brain regions generates corresponding behavior and feeling states in both humans and non-human animals.

...

The absence of a neocortex does not appear to preclude an organism from experiencing affective states. Convergent evidence indicates that non-human animals have the neuroanatomical, neurochemical, and neurophysiological

59. Ed Yong, *An Immense World: How Animal Senses Reveal the Hidden Realms Around Us* (Toronto: Knopf Canada, 2022), 123.

substrates of conscious states along with the capacity to exhibit intentional behaviors. Consequently, the weight of evidence indicates that humans are not unique in possessing the neurological substrates that generate consciousness.⁶⁰

It would of course be hasty to simply take the declaration at its word, in part because such questions are at least as philosophical as they are scientific. Yet the fact that the empirical evidence in favor of consciousness in nonhumans has grown strong enough for such a declaration to exist is itself notable, and notable also is the extent to which its claims track with the foregoing discussion of the epistemic role of objective correlatives to consciousness.

On the other hand, does this not bring us back where we started with Dennett and Nagel? Is the attempt to prove the existence of nonhuman animal consciousness or nonhuman animal pain (matters which, due to pain's bidirectional character, are inevitably linked) thus always doomed to become an asymptote of diminishing epistemic returns, where more and more evidence brings us closer and closer to certainty on the matter without ever allowing us to reach it? The answer depends on the nature of the question and on the degree to which one is willing to accept ambiguity and the need for imagination. As we have seen already with Woolf, Barrett Browning, and Flush, the mind of the other, in all its qualia, remains incommunicable whether that other is a human, a dog, a bat, or otherwise. Yet that is not really the problem that *Flush*, "Flush or Faunus," or the "Cambridge Declaration" seek to solve. Rather, their concerns are ethical rather than empirical, having to do with one's relation to the other rather than to knowledge. As Jacques Derrida (citing Emmanuel Levinas) observes in *The Animal that Therefore I Am*, "if I am responsible for the other, and before the other, and in place of the other, on behalf of the other, isn't the animal more other still . . . than the other in whom I recognize my brother?"⁶¹ It is this relationship that Woolf and Barrett Browning represent in their depictions of Flush, and I believe also that the signers of the "Cambridge Declaration" have attempted to foster. Their frequent and heavy-handed invocations of scientific authority should be read less as demand to be believed and more as a

60. Philip Low, "The Cambridge Declaration of Consciousness," ed. Jaak Panksepp, Diana Reiss, David Edelman, Bruno Van Swinderen, Philip Low, and Christof Koch. Cambridge, UK, 2012, <https://fcmconference.org/img/CambridgeDeclarationOnConsciousness.pdf>. The end-note of the declaration records that "The Declaration was signed by the conference participants that very evening, in the presence of Stephen Hawking, in the Balfour Room at the Hotel du Vin in Cambridge, UK."

61. Jacques Derrida, *The Animal that Therefore I Am*, ed. Marie-Louise Mallet, trans. David Willis (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 107.

rhetorical maneuver meant to short-circuit the reflexive dismissal of the idea of nonhuman consciousness as (to quote Woolf) a “joke,” a dismissal that serves as a justification for the abuse of animals that are, in fact, very likely conscious, and very likely able to experience pain.

Imagining that anyone or anything does not have consciousness or does not experience pain is often a way of giving oneself permission to use or abuse it as one sees fit. Yet as Derrida and Levinas argue, it is precisely the *inability* to perceive the mind of the other that is the basis of one’s ethical relation *to* the other (any other, whether human or not). As Levinas writes early in *Totality and Infinity*, “if totality cannot be constituted it is because Infinity does not permit itself to be integrated. It is not the insufficiency of the I that prevents totalization, but the Infinity of the Other.”⁶² The inability of the I to fully understand and integrate the extent of the other’s subjectivity—which would include knowledge of what it is like to be that other—is precisely the basis, for Levinas, of ethical relation, in that it is the existence of the other that produces the need for ethics as such. It is thus not merely the case that one *can* act ethically without knowledge of the other, but rather that whenever one acts ethically it is *always* in the absence of such knowledge. To deny the other’s capacity for pain, to dismiss as ridiculous any argument that a dog, for example, could have a mind of its own, is to reject in advance the possibility of one’s ethical responsibility toward it. It is in this manner that Levinas’s thought converges with Nagel’s and with the authors of the “Cambridge Declaration.” The first asserts the ungraspability, the infinity, of animal experience, the very basis of its otherness, while the second asserts the likely presence of that which has not been grasped. Though constituted well outside the traditions of continental phenomenology and Jewish mysticism in which Levinas bases his philosophy, they have arrived in their own manner to analogous positions.

The ethical stakes of Woolf’s acts of imagining should thus be clear. In “Street Haunting” she simplifies, to the point of it nearly vanishing, the mind of a disabled person, rejecting in advance the idea that there could be an otherness within, an infinity that cannot be empirically derived from her appearance and behavior. In *Flush* she performs the opposite act, taking an other with which she has never had direct contact (the real Flush died in 1854) and filling in and fleshing out his mind based on Barrett Browning’s accounts and interpreta-

62. Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969), 80.

tions, as well as her own personal experience with other dogs. Both forms of imagining essentially substitute one's own mind for that of the other, whether out of necessity or malice, though in the case of *Flush* her recourse to anthropomorphism, much like the assertion that "humans are not unique in possessing the neurological substrates that generate consciousness" in the "Cambridge Declaration," heuristically asserts the humanity of the animal so as to offer a basis for an ethical relation to it. Yet as Levinas argues, it is not what we know about other humans, but rather what we *do not* know about them, that produces our ethical responsibility to each other. You are not me; I cannot treat you like me. I must instead attend to your specificity, your individuality, even if the nature of that individuality cannot be fully understood, if I am to live up to my responsibilities toward you. Thus it is in the "perhaps" of its final scenes that *Flush* at last escapes the pitfalls of "Street Haunting." In foregrounding the act of imagining, of interpretation, of the basic fictiveness of the scene, Woolf restores the possibility of Flush's difference, the possibility that he is really, truly other, admitting at last that the trajectories of knowing and supposing, like two facing asymptotes, will never meet.

THREE

An Episteme of Agony and Faith

Pain and Religious Experience in James Baldwin

[T]here is scarcely a divine personality who does not retain a quality of impersonality. Those who conceive it most clearly in a concrete and visible form, think of it both as an abstract power which cannot be defined except by its own efficacy and as a force spread out in space, which is contained, at least in part, in each of its effects.

—Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*¹

Vaguely alarming yet unreal, laden with consequence yet evaporating before the mind because not available to sensory confirmation, unseeable classes of objects such as subterranean plates, Seyfert galaxies, and the pains occurring in other people's bodies flicker before the mind, then disappear.

—Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain*²

“an anguish that he could not endure”

What do pain and religious experience have to do with the epistemology of race in the work of James Baldwin? This is not an arbitrary question but is instead a central lacuna of his literary and political project. Take, for example, *The Fire Next Time*, where he describes his first encounter with what he took to be the

1. Émile Durkheim, *Selected Writings*, edited by Anthony Giddens (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 227.

2. Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 4.

divine, which leaves him lying on his back on the floor of the storefront Pentecostal church he visited: "I did not know what I was doing down so low, or how I had got there. *And the anguish that filled me cannot be described.* It moved in me like one of those floods that devastate countries, tearing everything down. . . . All I really remember is the pain, the unspeakable pain; it was as though I were yelling up to Heaven and Heaven would not hear me."³ In *Go Tell It on the Mountain* the protagonist John Grimes's experience is described in much the same way: "something moved in John's body which was not John. He was invaded, set at naught, possessed. This power had struck John . . . filling him with an anguish that he could not endure."⁴ Baldwin criticism has been strangely quiet as to the significance of this pain, yet it is essential to the function of religious experience in his work, and especially in his debut novel. For while in William James the study of religious experience has to do with "the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude,"⁵ what unites the encounter (or attempted encounter, as in *Fire*) with the divine and the experience of pain is not merely their co-incidence but also their unspeakability, and the denial of a desire for communion with others.

This chapter thus takes the co-incidence of pain and religious experience as its problematic and argues that their linkage is central to Baldwin's larger engagement with the epistemology and phenomenology of race and of American racism. Drawing insights from recent developments in critical phenomenology and epistemic justice philosophy, along with critical race theory, I argue that the co-incidence of pain and religious experience in Baldwin is not merely accidental. Instead, these ritualized encounters with the ineffable serve the important function of managing and rendering coherent the community's collective experience of unspeakability and isolation by translating them into particular somatic experiences they resemble, a metaphor of feeling through which they experience what cannot be known. Thus, the "abstract power" that Émile Durkheim attributes to representations of godhood, such that divinity can only be known by its "efficacy" in the world makes it a fitting metaphor, a fitting replacement, for the unspeakability of pain, that which Scarry compares to "unseeable classes of objects such as subterranean plates" and mysterious "Sey-

3. James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*, in *Collected Essays*, ed. Toni Morrison (New York: The Library of America, 1998), 304. My emphasis. Hereafter cited parenthetically as F.

4. James Baldwin, *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, in *Early Novels and Stories*, ed. Toni Morrison (New York: The Library of America, 1998), 187. Hereafter cited parenthetically as GM.

5. William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature*, ed. Martin E. Marty (New York: Penguin, 1982), 31.

fert galaxies” far beyond our own. For it is not merely pain and God that are unspeakable in *The Fire Next Time*, but racism as well. As Baldwin writes:

Yes, it does mean something—something unspeakable—to be born, in a white country, an Anglo-Teutonic, antisexual country, black. You very soon, without knowing it, give up all hope of communion. Black people, mainly, look down or look up but do not look at each other, not at you, and white people, mainly, look away. . . . And if one despairs—as who has not?—of human love, God’s love alone is left. But God—and I felt this even then, so long ago, on that tremendous floor, unwillingly—is white (F, 304).

Baldwin here is describing in part what Charles Mills discusses in his essay on “White Ignorance,” where he notes (with echoes of Ralph Ellison) that “what people of colour quickly come to see . . . is that they are not seen at all.”⁶ Yet his despair is deepened by the realization that God, who is said to see and to love everyone, neither sees nor loves him, because he had at that moment come to believe, as he would go on to accuse Richard Wright’s character Bigger Thomas of believing, in “a theology that denies him life” such that he “admits the possibility of his being sub-human.”⁷

Christianity’s understanding of the divine as inaccessible to direct human experience, as that which one can only know “through a glass, darkly,”⁸ makes it conceptually homologous to pain. Intense pain resembles religious experience in that both are overwhelming subjective encounters with something ungraspable that one is largely unable to communicate in simple and direct terms. Pain, however, in being felt in and through the physical body, is epistemically closer than the divine, even if it is still not directly communicable. And yet, as Baldwin shows, the intersubjective network formed by the church grants both experiences a social legibility. In an essay on pain epistemology, Alyson Patsavas describes how “my experience living with pain does not match my lover’s . . . or with my friend’s, or my family’s. Rather, these experiences bleed and leak onto one another in a way that makes talking about *my* pain both problematic and reductive. . . . The boundaries blur between our

6. Charles Mills, “White Ignorance,” in *Race and Epistemologies of Ignorance*, ed. Shannon Sullivan and Nancy Tuana (New York: State University of New York Press, 2007), 18.

7. James Baldwin, “Everybody’s Protest Novel,” in *Collected Essays*, ed. Toni Morrison (New York: Library of America, 1998), 18.

8. 1 Corinthians 13:12.

experiences.”⁹ The emphasis on pain in Baldwin’s descriptions of religious experience emphasize not only the encounter’s unspeakability, but also the speakability that follows it, and so serves as an analogue for racism and white supremacy, which Baldwin also consistently describes as unspeakable. For while of course Black people in America cannot help but to learn about and be shaped by racist discourses, as Baldwin emphasizes over and over again, the isolation of living among white people can lead some to internalize racist frameworks such that one’s own subordination can appear naturalized. A politically active Black church would explicitly work against such false consciousness, but the more isolated and quietist Pentecostal church that Baldwin found himself in was in his estimation unwilling or unable to see itself as part of a larger struggle for justice. Unable to deal with the question, Baldwin’s church transposed it, analogized it, and thereby avoided it, serving its parishioners’ need for intersubjective recognition of their experiences without addressing the class of experiences in most need of validation. The pain therefore appears as the experience of this intersect, a bodily signal to a social and epistemic wound where the body draws attention to and resists a trajectory and a course of action that risks exposing it to even greater harms.

This chapter thus sees the pain of religious experience in Baldwin as a somatization of the unspeakability of the experience of racism and the divine. As Saulius Geniusas explains in his *The Phenomenology of Pain*, somatization “is an umbrella term that covers multiple expressions of personal and social distress in an idiom of bodily complaints” and “embraces a large variety of ways in which the sufferer transforms nonbodily modes of distress into embodied feelings.”¹⁰ The depiction of pain in Baldwin thus both confirms and subverts Elaine Scarry’s influential argument for the unspeakability of pain: confirming, by associating pain with other unspeakable experiences and using pain as a somatic translation of those experiences, and subverting, by expressing through the body the nature of these complex social relationships. This fact is significant, for, as Geniusas goes on to write, “somatization is not just a matter of a somatic response to psychological rupture, but the expression, reinterpretation, and transformation of psychic trauma as though it were somatic.”¹¹ Baldwin and John Grimes thus do not merely translate their experiences of religion and

9. Alyson Patsavas, “Recovering a Cripistemology of Pain: Leaky Bodies, Connective Tissue, and Feeling Discourse,” *Journal of Literary and Cultural Disability Studies* 8, no. 2 (2014): 215.

10. Saulius Geniusas, *The Phenomenology of Pain* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2020), 166.

11. Geniusas, *The Phenomenology of Pain*, 169.

racism into pain, but also, in so doing, reinterpret and re-evaluate those experiences based on that pain. Thus the origin of the revelation, at the end of the divine encounter, that “God . . . is white”: the experience, the pain, has revealed something new about the religion and its relationship to race, that being that it has failed to uplift or organize anyone and failed to foster material or psychological resistance to the injustices from which they all suffer. The connection between racism and religion is thus felt *as* pain and likewise revealed *by* pain, and is expressed in the epiphanic conclusion that “God . . . is white.” This chapter thus does not merely situate Baldwin as an author whose work could be profitably read in terms of critical phenomenology, but also as someone who could speak *back* to critical phenomenology, a valuable contributor to the field *avant la lettre*. It also shows that pain can function as a form of knowledge, that one may learn something about the world through experiencing it, a fact that calls for greater attention to the way pain, instead of destroying thought, may help create it. This chapter thus engages in what disability scholars refer to as “cripistemology,” or the acquisition of knowledge with or through impairment. One may therefore read Baldwin *against* Scarry, seeing in his work a model of pain experience that goes beyond its privacy into unexplored territory.

Baldwin argues that as a Black person in America he goes unseen by white people and by God. So who might see him and recognize his experience? The obvious answer is for the Black people who “look down or look up but do not look at each other” to look at each other. Jay Garcia argues that it was overlooking this possibility and embracing isolation that Baldwin considered the chief limitation of Wright’s *Native Son*. The Black church is one way of escaping this fate: as we see in both *Go Tell It* and *The Fire Next Time*, the person undertaking the experience draws everyone’s gaze and is unambiguously seen and recognized despite (or possibly because of) the unspeakability of what they just went through.¹² In this matter, hooks resembles Emile Durkheim, who writes that religious beliefs “are not merely replicated individually by all the members of the group” but instead “are what gives the group its unity,”¹³ the structure of

12. As bell hooks describes, “for generations, black churchgoers had used the gospel to re-vision our understandings of black experience, to make radical sense of our history, and to build communities of resistance.” bell hooks, *Remembered Rapture: The Writer at Work* (New York: Holt, 1999), 108.

13. Émile Durkheim, *Selected Writings*, ed. Anthony Giddens (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 222–23. I am not the only person to make the link between the kind of religious experience found in the Pentecostal church—speaking in tongues for instance—with Durkheim’s writing on the social function of religion. Religion scholars Donald E. Miller and Tetsunao Yamamori, for example, make the same comparison. See *Global Pentecostalism: The New Face of Christian Social Engagement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 132–34.

worship serving what the philosopher Lisa Guenther calls “the co-construction of meaning . . . [as] an intersubjective or intercorporeal practice” that “create[s] the common ground upon which it relies for its knowledge claims.”¹⁴ That is to say, for Durkheim and, I would argue, for Baldwin, modes of collective religious worship, by way of a process of phenomenological calibration, help form the intersubjective structure within which the world is understood, including those parts of the world that are unspeakable. Baldwin’s innovation is seeing how that unspeakability reflects back upon the body, being felt as pain due to its privacy, and how the translation of this intersubjective meaning making into a physical sensation allows it to be understood. That which is unspeakable is not unfeeling, and feeling it is a way of knowing it.

Critical Race Phenomenology

As Baldwin writes later in *Fire*, “for the horrors of the American Negro’s life there has been almost no language. The privacy of his experience, which is only beginning to be recognized in language, and which is denied or ignored in official and popular speech—hence the Negro idiom” (F, 326). In this manner it is unsurprising that Baldwin would employ physical pain as a tool for developing this idiom, characterized as it is often understood to be by a powerful internal certainty that is difficult, perhaps impossible, to express. As Scarry writes, “pain enters into our midst as at once something that cannot be denied and something that cannot be confirmed. . . . To have pain is to have *certainty*; to hear about pain is to have *doubt*.”¹⁵ That pain would sit at the intersection of religion and racism is thus less unusual than one might think. For after all, is not this dynamic of certainty and doubt also the experience of religious faith? For instance, when Baldwin describes “the Grimes family on their way to church” with “sinners along the avenue watch[ing] them—men still wearing their Saturday-night clothes, wrinkled and dusty now . . . and women with harsh voices and tight, bright dresses, cigarettes between their fingers” (GM, 10), the family’s certainty that their neighbors are bound for damnation seems impossible to communicate. The true believer asks, “are they not afraid of Hell?” and is baffled that the answer, in the end, is “no.” Similarly, as Scarry

14. Lisa Guenther, “Epistemic Injustice and Phenomenology,” in *The Routledge Handbook of Epistemic Injustice*, ed. Ian James Kidd, José Medina, and Gaile Pohlhaus (London: Routledge, 2017), 200.

15. Scarry, *The Body in Pain*, 13.

observes, pain has often served as part of “a story about the expansive nature of human *sentience*,”¹⁶ and one finds ample instances of white supremacist authors denying that Black people can feel pain as much as white people can for the purpose of justifying their oppression.

Before this study turns (in the final part) to a close examination of *Go Tell It on the Mountain* it must first untangle what Baldwin is attempting to accomplish in that novel, *The Fire Next Time*, and elsewhere so that we might better see how the linkage of these terms furthers his goal. I read his nonfiction, especially *Fire*, as an important precursor text for the more recent fields of epistemological justice philosophy and critical phenomenology, his work having arrived at many of the same conclusions decades before these philosophers did.¹⁷ The first field has its origin in Miranda Fricker’s 2007 book *Epistemic Injustice*, which articulates an approach to epistemological ethics concerned with harms both to a person’s ability to acquire knowledge and to their ability to be perceived as trustworthy or knowledgeable by others. Of particular relevance to Baldwin is what Fricker calls “hermeneutical injustice,” which concerns “the injustice of having some significant area of one’s social experience obscured from collective understanding” due to structures of marginalization.¹⁸ The lack of collective understanding, she goes on to say, can rebound and diminish self-understanding, such that “someone is socially constituted as, and perhaps even caused to be, something they are not, and which it is against their interests to be seen to be.”¹⁹ Baldwin’s reading of Bigger Thomas in “Notes of a Native Son” diagnoses precisely this process: isolated from a positive model of Black masculinity, he is unable to understand himself by any framework save for the racist one that white America has provided for him, to terrible results.²⁰

Fricker’s description of how collective understanding can influence self-understanding links her work to the second framework Baldwin anticipates: critical phenomenology. Lisa Guenther writes that critical phenomenology is “a

16. Scarry, *The Body in Pain*, 22.

17. Charles Mills makes a similar point about Baldwin in *The Racial Contract* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 97.

18. Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 154.

19. Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, 168.

20. For an excellent analysis of the construction of self-knowledge in Baldwin, see Ernesto Javier Martínez, “Dying to Know: Identity and Self-Knowledge in Baldwin’s *Another Country*,” *PMLA* 124, no. 3 (2009): 782–97. For a more comprehensive analysis of Baldwin’s writing on Black masculinity, see Brad Congdon, *Leading with the Chin: Writing American Masculinities in “Esquire,” 1960–1989* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018), 60–87.

practice of both reflecting on the structures of meaningful experience and also transforming those structures through collective action in order to make different experiences possible and intelligible” for the purpose of liberating subjects “not only from the natural attitude but also from the naturalized and normalized forms of oppression that shape our social, epistemic, and existential worlds.”²¹ In short, it is the use of the phenomenological method to study the ways that social and material structures construct and modify self-understanding, usually for the purpose of critiquing and dismantling unjust power relations. In addition to the major figures of traditional phenomenology, Gayle Salamon sees critical phenomenology’s predecessors in such people as Michel Foucault, Judith Butler, and Eve Sedgwick,²² while Guenther links it also to the work of Frantz Fanon.²³ Baldwin’s work should also be included on this list. For whereas most scholars of critical phenomenology focus on how certain structures create certain phenomenal states, Baldwin’s analysis of his church and the way it controls and shepherds religious experience (and its pain) in order to direct it toward preferred ends, shows that process operating dialogically. The church acts in response to the experience, which then (usually) supports and lends credence to the claims of the church. The calibration is thus, at times, mutual. The pain Baldwin describes thus acts as an irritant to this process, diverting him, and his protagonist, to a different path. The experience informs the structure, which in turn informs the experience, but at no point is the process completely deterministic, and there are always chances for it to swerve into an unexpected trajectory.

If someone spends their life being consistently told, over and over again, that they are essentially and unavoidably inferior, how might they avoid coming to believe in that inferiority? This question is a persistent concern in Baldwin’s work, animating his first novel and forming the basis of his critique of Richard Wright. It is central as well to *The Fire Next Time*, and urgently so as we see in its first section, Baldwin’s letter to his young nephew (also named James), which serves as the book’s opening chapter. As Baldwin says of his father, who was the basis of John Grimes’s father Gabriel in *Go Tell It*, “he had a terrible life; he was defeated long before he died because, at the bottom of his heart, he really believed what white people said about him. This is one of the reasons that he

21. Lisa Guenther, “Epistemic Injustice and Phenomenology,” 203.

22. Gayle Salamon, “What’s Critical about Critical Phenomenology?” *Puncta: Journal of Critical Phenology* 1 (2018): 8–17.

23. Lisa Guenther, *Solitary Confinement: Social Death and Its Afterlives* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), xiii.

became so holy” (F, 291). Having witnessed his father’s suffering under racist hermeneutical injustice, he warns his nephew against the same fate and spells out the process by which it would come for him:

You were born into a society which spelled out with brutal clarity, and in as many ways as possible, that you were a worthless human being. . . . Wherever you have turned, James, in your short time on this earth, you have been told where you could go and what you could do . . . The details and symbols of your life have been deliberately constructed to make you believe what white people say about you. (F, 293)

As he says later in the book, “the person who distrusts himself has no touchstone for reality—for this touchstone can be only oneself” (F, 312).²⁴ Thus *Fire*, and especially the opening letter, is not just a warning to Baldwin’s young nephew, but also as an epistemological and phenomenological provocation, an attack on the hermeneutical injustice upon which the system of white supremacy cannot help but depend.²⁵

Ideally for Baldwin, the Black church serves on a larger scale the same function as his letter. J. Young writes that the Black preacher was for Baldwin one who “enabled his enslaved people to define themselves with their own traditions and memories. Resisting their captors’ definitions of them, [so that] they invested Christian symbols . . . with their own values.”²⁶ Likewise, Keith Clark, commenting on Baldwin’s story “Sonny’s Blues,” describes the story’s “barroom ceremony” as “a masculine ritual in which black men face and exorcise their common demons,” recuperating the useful aspects of Christianity “without what Baldwin considers the pungent and alienating ideology.”²⁷ The role of religion in Baldwin and *Go Tell It* will be discussed in more detail below, but suffice

24. Charles Mills writes that in a racist society “knowing thyself, knowing thy society, would mean coming to ‘know’ one’s identity as a victim of an oppressive . . . socio-political order,” and argues that if such an order is to be preserved such forms of self-knowledge must be kept away from both the oppressors and the oppressed (Charles Mills, “Epistemological Ignorance,” in *50 Concepts for a Critical Phenomenology*, ed. Gail Weiss, Ann V. Murphy, and Gayle Salamon [Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2020], 109), which Baldwin too acknowledges in his letter, writing that white Americans “are, in effect, still trapped in a history which they do not understand; and until they understand it, they cannot be released from it” (F, 294).

25. For a similar reading of Baldwin’s work, including *Fire*, see Kelly Walter Carney, “Brother Outsider: James Baldwin, Ta-Nehisi Coates, and Exile Literature,” *CLA Journal* 60, no. 4 (2017): 448–57.

26. J. Young, *James Baldwin’s Understanding of God: Overwhelming Desire and Joy* (London: Palgrave, 2014), 27.

27. Keith Clark, *Black Manhood in James Baldwin, Ernest J. Gaines, and August Wilson* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 46.

to say that in this context Baldwin's description of his religious awakening on the church floor that culminates in his belief that "God . . . is white" could not possibly condemn that church's practice in stronger terms. If we contextualize Baldwin's writing in terms of critical phenomenology and epistemic injustice and interpret the Black church, in relation to Durkheim, we can begin to understand it as a process of generating a shared counterhegemonic social reality.²⁸ It is outside the epistemic structures of white supremacy that socially vouchsafes a counternarrative to prevalent tales of Black inferiority. Such epistemic resistance is needed, says Baldwin, to directly oppose the epistemic ignorance of white supremacist hegemony, which could wreak psychological havoc if not opposed. And if that resistance does not come from without, then it may come from within, in the form of pain.

Turning back to Scarry, I want to draw attention to what Kristine Taylor describes as "Baldwin's attention to the double-ness of the nation's racial crimes—original sin and denial."²⁹ By now the function of this denial should be clear: to maintain precisely the epistemic-phenomenological environment that Baldwin warns his nephew against, and so maintain white supremacy and everything that comes with it. This point is comparable to a distinction that Scarry draws between "knowing" the pain of another and "confirming" it. Scarry acknowledges that "if the felt attributes of pain are . . . lifted into the visible world, *and if the referent for these now objectified attributes is understood to be the human body*, then the sentient fact of the person's suffering will become knowable to a second person."³⁰ Yet what does not travel from person to person is the certainty thereof: I can see that someone is *indicating* their pain by describing it or performing it, but I do not have the same certainty of its existence that they do.

Scarry's point is not strictly inaccurate, but rather it is misleading due to the way it individualizes the pain sufferer, who most often in Scarry suffers either alone or among a small number of interlocutors. But as critical phenomenologists argue, self-understanding is socially embedded: I must learn to under-

28. Such an institution then would ideally take the form that Lincoln and Mamiya describe in *The Black Church and the African American Experience*, that of "the cultural womb of the black community." C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, *The Black Church and the African American Experience* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990), 8. Elsewhere they call the Black church "a shared group experience that . . . shaped and influenced the cultural screens of human communication and interpretation" (2).

29. Kristine Taylor, "Racial Capitalism and the Production of Racial Innocence," *Theory and Event* 24, no. 3 (2021): 706.

30. Scarry, *The Body in Pain*, 13.

stand my own pain as both *pain* and as *my own* through a lifetime of intersubjective calibrations. As Guenther writes in her study of the phenomenology of solitary confinement, “deprived of meaningful human interaction, otherwise healthy prisoners become unhinged. They see things that do not exist, and they fail to see things that do. Their sense of their own bodies—even the *fundamental capacity to feel pain and to distinguish their own pain from that of others*—erodes to the point where they are no longer sure if they are being harmed or harming themselves.”³¹ In short, I understand my subjective experiences through acts of intersubjective calibration, adjusting the manner by which I categorize and name such feelings based on the behavior and responses of others. This process is so essential and fundamental to how subjectivity works that even the fact of my own pain—for Scarry, that most certain of certainties—can become confused if I am subject to extended periods of isolation. Thus, if we are to understand pain, we must think about it communally and collectively.

Baldwin’s work acknowledges this process through an analysis of what we might (following Mills) call epistemic whiteness: that is, the epistemic framework that supports white supremacy through the promotion of what José Medina calls “epistemic vices”³² (habits of thought and inquiry that limit one’s understanding), which encourage the overlooking of white supremacy’s reality and effects. For example, in his author’s note to the play *Blues for Mister Charlie*, Baldwin writes that “what is ghastly and really almost hopeless in our racial situation now is that the crimes we have committed are so great and so unspeakable that the acceptance of this knowledge would lead, literally, to madness. The human being, then, in order to protect himself, closes his eyes.”³³ There are a number of characters in the play to whom this assessment could apply, but the most relevant one here is Parnell James. The play is very loosely based on the 1955 murder of Emmett Till and follows the arrest, trial, and acquittal of the racist killer Lyle Britten. Parnell throughout the play tries to be—and no doubt sees himself as—“one of the good white people,” leveraging his connections and the newspaper he owns to ensure that Lyle is tried for the murder. Lyle con-

31. Guenther, *Solitary Confinement*, xi. My emphasis. Merleau-Ponty makes a similar point in *The Visible and the Invisible*, where he writes that “as soon as I see, it is necessary that the vision . . . be doubled with a complementary vision or with another vision: myself seen from without, such as another would see me” (Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, ed. Claude Lefort, trans. Alphonso Lingis [Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968], 134).

32. José Medina, *The Epistemology of Resistance: Gender and Racial Oppression, Epistemic Injustice, and Resistant Imaginations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 30–39.

33. James Baldwin, *Blues for Mister Charlie* (New York: Vintage, 1995), xiv.

fesses at the end of the play (after his acquittal), but even before that he is a likely suspect, having been the last person to see the victim, Richard, alive. He is also an outspoken racist who has gotten away with killing a Black person before. And yet Parnell considers Lyle his friend and at times sticks up for him, even to the point of refusing to ask Lyle outright whether he killed Richard or not. For while he “knows” that Lyle is a violent racist, he seems to not be certain, for if he were certain then he would have to acknowledge that he has been a good friend to a racist for many years, and that he is, despite his protestations, a racist himself, as he acknowledges only in the play’s final pages.³⁴ If we return to Taylor’s point about racism taking a doubled form of sin and denial, Lyle is the sin but Parnell is the denial, and, as Baldwin shows, both are needed to make racism function.

The Making of the Unmaking of the World

Having established the interrelated roles of intersubjective calibration and epistemic justice in the phenomenologies of race and pain, there remains the question of how religion, and specifically Baldwin’s early membership in the Pentecostal church, relates to these processes. Following Lincoln and Mamiya’s study of the Black church and Durkheim’s study of religion, one function of religion and religious ritual is the creation of socially mediated frameworks of intersubjectivity. Religious ritual actively shapes and conditions the processes of calibration Guenther describes, thereby helping to construct the worshipers’ socially mediated reality.

Baldwin’s criticism of his former church parallels strands of thinking in his work elsewhere and principally concerns its isolation and political quietism. As he writes in *Fire*, describing his time as a teenage preacher, “when I faced a congregation, it began to take all the strength I had not to stammer, not to curse, not to tell them to throw away their Bibles and get off their knees and go home and organize, for example, a rent strike” (F, 309). What is the barrier to organizing a rent strike at a church? Primarily that, unless all of the parishioners happen to live in the same building, they would not be able to do so unilaterally: in order to be effective, the strike would have to incorporate people

34. Baldwin, *Blues for Mister Charlie*, 117.

from outside their church, including the many people they have come to regard as agents of sin. “The passion with which we loved the Lord,” Baldwin writes, “was a measure of how deeply we feared and distrusted and, in the end, hated almost all strangers, always” (F, 310). Solidarity is impossible under such circumstances, since you cannot organize with people you hate and fear. But we should also pay attention to the implications that this fear has for the social epistemology of the church members.³⁵

What is at stake for Baldwin in his critique of his church is the way it contributes to a certain kind of atomized and apolitical subjectivity, one that has no effective rejoinder to the discourse of white supremacy.³⁶ It, in part, is this cutting-off, this reduction in political efficacy and thwarting of class consciousness, that connects the unspeakability of religion to that of racism, producing the connection that is experienced as pain. Pentecostalism, as Baldwin has it, substitutes a collective and intersubjective understanding of racial oppression, a framework within which solidarity and mass struggle are possible, for an individualized framework founded on notions of sin and bodily impurity. As the religious scholar and Pentecostal theologian Wolfgang Vondey describes, “for Pentecostals, the Christian life in a world occupied by satanic and demonic principalities and powers exhibits in sharp contrast the character of a life redeemed by Christ.”³⁷ In a similar vein, Michael L. Cobb, discussing *Go Tell It* and the role of the repeated cries of “amen” during church service, argues that “each churchgoer expressly confirms that her or his flesh is sinful and in need of religious faith, and more exactly, in need of religious words that will make

35. Aaron Oforlea notes that in Baldwin's estimation Pentecostalism had failed “to create emancipatory potential” in its worshipers (Aaron Ngozi Oforlea, *James Baldwin, Toni Morrison, and the Rhetorics of Black Male Subjectivity* [Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2017], 76) and participated in the “repressive function of Christianity as a means to distract African Americans . . . and to direct them from attempting to transform their material conditions” (74). Likewise, Christopher Hobson writes that *Go Tell It* “shows the congregation's spiritual life as inward looking, shunning involvement with or challenge to the larger society” (Christopher Z. Hobson, *James Baldwin and the Heavenly City: Prophecy, Apocalypse, and Doubt* [East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2018], 22).

36. How accurate Baldwin's characterization is of the Black American Pentecostal church as well as the “church racket” (F, 303) in general is a complex question, and one I do not have the space to dwell on. Arlene M. Sanchez Walsh characterizes the church's focus during the civil rights movement as being on “moral uplift and racial uplift” (*Pentecostals in America* [New York: Columbia University Press, 2018], 70), which suggests an embrace of respectability politics in defiance of the more radical approaches that ultimately secured reforms. Jonathan Chism, on the other hand, argues that the perception of the Pentecostal church as apolitical is exaggerated (see *Saints in the Struggle: Church of God in Christ Activists in the Memphis Civil Rights Movement, 1954–1968* [Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2019]).

37. Wolfgang Vondey, *Pentecostalism: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: Bloomsbury, 2012), 34.

sense of the potential corporeal dangers each black body might generate.”³⁸ The isolation that both the young Baldwin and his fictional analogue suffered is not, then, merely symptomatic of a particular kind of religious outlook, but rather is constitutive of that outlook, in very much the same way described in the section above. It is for this reason that pain, with its epistemic privacy, is such a fitting metaphor, and thus the manner in which these contradictions are somatized. Baldwin’s various works that prefigure developments in standpoint epistemology, epistemic justice philosophy, critical race theory, and critical phenomenology draw deeply from his formative experience in the Harlem Pentecostal church where he once preached.

Part of what makes Baldwin’s church’s failure as a site of political organization so frustrating was that it need not have been that way. Black religious institutions were major sites of political organizing before, during, and after Baldwin’s lifetime, Martin Luther King’s Jr.’s Baptist church being but the most well-known example. Baldwin himself offers examples of what a politically effective church might look like. Analyzing *Blues for Mister Charlie*, Soyica Colbert describes how in the play’s ending “the judicial practice of testifying gives way to the sermonic function of bearing witness to the conditions of the politically disenfranchised,” showing how “the black sermonic tradition . . . counteracts the erasure of black suffering through the practice of witnessing.”³⁹ This tradition contrasts the alienation of the local priest, Meridian Henry, whose son Richard was murdered prior to the start of the play and who lambastes the ideological framework imposed by a Christianity made by and for white people:

Of course, if you go back far enough, you get to a point *before* Christ, if you see what I mean, B.C.—and at that point, I’ve been thinking, black people weren’t raised to turn the other cheek, and in the hope of heaven. No, then they didn’t have to take low. Before Christ. They walked around just as good as anybody else, and when they died, they didn’t go to heaven, they went to join their ancestors. My son’s dead, but he’s not gone to join his ancestors. He was a sinner, so he must have gone to Hell. . . . Is that such an improvement, such a mighty advance over B.C.?⁴⁰

38. Michael L. Cobb, *Racial Blasphemies: Religious Irreverence and Race in American Literature* (London: Routledge, 2013), 13.

39. Soyica Diggs Colbert, “Go Tell it on the Mountain: Baldwin’s Sermonic,” in *The Cambridge Companion to James Baldwin*, ed. Michele Elam (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 62.

40. Baldwin, *Blues for Mister Charlie*, 38.

What Christianity and its notion of sin take away from Meridian is the belief that he will be able to see his son again when he dies; that is, it separates him from his son, a victim of the same racist violence that Meridian himself must fear, ideologically and metaphysically, rending ties of kinship and racial solidarity in service of a faith imposed by the very agents of that oppression.

Gabriel Grimes, the preacher father of John Grimes in *Go Tell It*, has a similar fear, but he faces it without the benefit of Meridian's historical perspective. As we learn in the novel, one of his other sons was killed years earlier "in a Chicago tavern, [with] a knife sticking in his throat" (GM, 108), while the oldest living son, Roy, is in Gabriel's opinion headed for a similar fate. During a church service, Gabriel hears in his mind "the cry of his dead son and his living son; one who cried in the pit forever, beyond the hope of mercy; and one who would cry one day when mercy would be finished" (GM, 109). While I agree with Douglas Field in his reading that Baldwin "lambasted the black church's inability or unwillingness to counter a deeply embedded black self-loathing"⁴¹—as we see in Baldwin's criticism of his father—we also need to recognize the role of the church in promoting not just the hatred of the self, but also the hatred of others. As Frantz Fanon writes in his description of the psychological dependency fostered by colonialism, "every self-positioning or self-fixation maintains a relationship of dependency on the collapse of the other. It's on the ruins of my entourage that I build my virility."⁴² Gabriel mourns his sons, but he also feels superior to them, despite his own history of sinfulness. Within the small world of his church community, Gabriel Grimes is a powerful figure, and that stature comes in part due to the contrast of his supposed holiness with the alleged sinfulness of outsiders. The fear of sinfulness, then, supports his hierarchized and individualizing worldview, as well as his prestige as a preacher.

Pain has a double function in this process, and this doubleness is in part what makes Baldwin's work important as a precursor and contributor to critical phenomenology. One effect—and indeed a primary goal—of the church isolating John and its other young members is to instill a certain kind of consciousness and a particular way of looking at the world, one that will be congenial to continued church membership. In both *Go Tell It* and his autobiographical writing, Baldwin describes the result of this process: everyone not in the church becomes a sinner, one who cannot be engaged with except on those terms. In

41. Douglas Field, *James Baldwin* (Tavistock: Northcote House, 2011), 82.

42. Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove, 2008), 186.

Fire for instance, Baldwin recounts the story of when he brought a Jewish friend of his from school to visit his home. As he describes, the young Baldwin “was in a high school that was predominantly Jewish. This means that I was surrounded by people who were, by definition, beyond any hope of salvation, who laughed at the tracts and leaflets I brought to school” (F, 307). After the Jewish friend visits his home, Baldwin’s father asks “‘is he a Christian?’—by which he meant ‘Is he saved?’ . . . I said coldly, ‘No. He’s Jewish.’ My father slammed me across the face with his great palm. . . . I wondered if I was expected to be glad that a friend of mine, or anyone, was to be tormented forever in Hell” (F, 308). As the anecdote demonstrates, the restriction of outside influence is directly connected to the support of parental and religious authority and is reinforced by the infliction of physical pain. The father attempts to dictate what the son believes *by* cutting him off from outside influence, not only in the sense of removing alternative arguments or evidence, but also intersubjectively, by removing the smaller and more mundane acts of subjective calibration that orient the subject toward their social world and form the basis for their sense of normalcy. The answer to Baldwin’s unspoken question is likely yes, for the notion of sin not only implies that the nonbeliever is damned, but that this damnation is both just and correct.

The coincidence of pain and religious experience is highly disruptive to this process because of its privacy, and it is the potential for this disruption that prompts the church to begin interpreting John’s experience *in advance*, so as to precalibrate him to interpret the encounter the way they want him to. These experiences are the ground upon which the Pentecostal church builds its theology and so must be carefully managed. As the religion scholar Jonathan Baer writes, “Pentecostalism originated in the body as much as the spirit. . . . Glossolalia and other ecstatic manifestations authenticated God’s presence and power, reflecting the reality of the Holy Spirit within believers.”⁴³ We might note with Sara Ahmed pain’s tendency to draw one back into the body, its demand “that I *attend* to my embodied existence.”⁴⁴ Yet the very privacy of pain, the difficulty in communicating, in expressing its qualia, means that any knowledge gained through it is always already *self*-knowledge, and includes the ways the self is embedded in broader structures of relation (thus the somatization). John Grimes, having felt the pain of his encounter with the divine and

43. Jonathan R. Baer, “Redeemed Bodies: The Functions of Divine Healing in Incipient Pentecostalism,” *Church History* 70, no. 4 (2001): 735.

44. Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2015), 27.

having had the experience for himself, no longer needs to take his father's word for what it is like, and that fundamentally alters their relationship as both father and son and as preacher and preached. In somatizing his experiences, the pain thus allows John to understand them differently, thereby permitting him greater psychological independence from his parents and his church.

Notably in *Go Tell It*, none of the people who have gone through this experience already at the start of the novel (like Gabriel or the teenage preacher Elisha) mention the pain to John explicitly. Indeed, their conversion experiences seem to have alienated them from their bodies more than the reverse. As Elisha says to John early in the novel, "I know it looks hard . . . from the outside, especially when you young. But believe me, boy, you can't find no greater joy than you find in the service of the Lord" (GM, 51). He then goes on to tell John that "when the Lord saves you He burns out all that old Adam, He gives you a new mind and a new heart, and then you don't find no pleasure in the world, you get all your joy in walking and talking with Jesus every day" (GM, 52). The novel goes out of its way to show that this statement is ridiculous: Elisha just a few pages earlier had been caught with a girl and publicly chastised by the church, Gabriel never really gave up his drinking and womanizing, and anyway neither of them seem especially joyful. This rejection then is ideological, a post hoc rationalization of the experience rather than a true phenomenological account, and a rejection, perhaps, of what they stood to learn in favor of what they were told they *should* learn. It obliquely refers to pain—God "burns out" the remnants of original sin—but does so in the service of denying John his agency as the interpreter of his own experience. He is told that this experience manifests "an aggressive god who ruthlessly seizes the body,"⁴⁵ and is told this prior to any firsthand encounter that could disagree with this interpretation. The point here, as with the isolation, is to determine his responses to new information in advance by providing a framework for that experience in advance.

For Baldwin, as narrated in *Fire*, the feeling of pain coincides with a disruption of his faith: he calls up to God and receives no answer. For John the experience is similar to being thrust into Hell. For when he wakes up and sees everyone looking down on him, it is as though they were "watching his torment in the pit" (GM, 189). Though the novel ends with John seemingly embracing the church, there are already signs of his isolation from it, an incompleteness to his

45. Clarence E. Hardy III, *James Baldwin's God: Sex, Hope, and Crisis in Black Holiness Culture* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2009), 42.

embrace. Repeatedly throughout the third part of the novel, which narrates his experience and immediately after, John is described as having difficulty reading other people's expressions or interpreting their motives. His mother's smile, for example, is described as "unreadable," such that John wishes to "escape her eyes" (GM, 214). What John encountered on the floor was likewise not what the people around him think he did. It is a private knowledge that diverges from the idea of God that was imparted to him. Indeed, the description of his experience disagrees considerably with the reports he is given by Elisha, and he has trouble putting the event into words himself. In short, the pain both represents and enacts John's removal from the intersubjective community of the Church of the Fire Baptized, just as it did for Baldwin and his church. Though we cannot know what happens after the end of the novel, John's trajectory is clearly toward a growing independence of mind that cannot but put him in conflict with his father and the faith he represents.

Knowledge of the Body

Achille Mbembe, writing on the way colonialist powers exteriorize and hide their constituent violence, notes that "the great fear of democracies" is that the pain and suffering at their origin that has been so carefully occluded "suddenly resurfaces, and then threatens the idea that the political order was created out of itself (instituted all at once and once and for all) and had more or less managed to pass itself off as common sense."⁴⁶ The sudden experience of racism as physical pain fits this description. Obviously, this statement applies to the United States, and more specifically to the system of racial apartheid in which Baldwin grew up. Less obvious is the extent to which, in attempting to create for itself a world within a world, the Pentecostal church of *Go Tell It* repeated these very processes, both on the macroscopic and the individual scales. At the broad historical level, the depoliticization fostered by the church (as well as its nonfictional analogue in *Fire*) contrasts with the origin of the Pentecostal movement, as well as its popularity in the formerly colonized nations of the Global South.⁴⁷ As Lincoln and Mamiya write, "unlike black Methodists and Baptists . . . black Pentecostals began not as a separatist movement, but as part of a distinctively

46. Achille Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, trans. Steven Corcoran (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019), 27.

47. For the international scope of the Pentecostal church, see Miller and Yamamori, *Global Pentecostalism*.

interracial movement from which whites subsequently withdrew.”⁴⁸ In this matter they refer to William J. Seymour, a preacher and the son of former slaves whose work at the Azuza Street Revival, beginning in 1906, is widely considered the catalyst for Pentecostalism’s emergence as a distinct religious identity. Such historical context would be useful to a Black Pentecostal preacher who wished to raise the sort of collective consciousness one would need in order to organize, for example, a rent strike, and the fact that the church in *Go Tell It* never seems to bring it up is itself an indictment of them.

Relatedly, and more relevantly to the argument pursued here, is that in all of *Go Tell It* none of the various authority figures in John Grimes’s life ever think to take him aside and provide the sort of clarifying instruction that Baldwin gives his nephew in the opening section of *Fire*. For while John, like Baldwin’s nephew, has had all sorts of personal experience with racism, as a child he would not be equipped to understand those experiences systematically or historically. Indeed, the people in his life would not even require a detailed historical education: they could simply recount their life experiences, as described in the novel’s second part, “The Prayers of the Saints.” That information would do a lot to help him contextualize (for example) Gabriel’s reaction to Roy getting into a fight with a group of white racists, a near-fatal encounter that threatened to repeat Gabriel’s many experiences with white supremacist violence. Part of the import of “The Prayers of the Saints,” however, is that John has no idea any of it happened. The novel’s dramatic irony lies in the fact that the reader has access to historical context which the protagonist lacks.

John’s understandings of the racism he is subjected to thus generally take two forms. The first is an individualized understanding, where the racist encounter is read as a particular bad thing that is happening to him. We can see this framework reinforced in how John, as the “good” son, is elevated in his parents’ mind over Roy. As John’s mother Elizabeth says after Roy comes home after the fight, “Johnny don’t travel with the same class of boys as Roy goes with. . . . Roy got hisself hurt this afternoon because he was out doing something he didn’t have no business doing” (GM, 44). The implication that John can protect himself from racism by being good and holy and not mixing with the wrong people does not stand up to historical scrutiny, but it neatly aligns with the religious morality of the family’s church and, due to the family’s isolation, is likely to go undisputed. The second approach to understanding racism

48. Lincoln and Mamiya, *The Black Church and the African American Experience*, 76.

we see John exposed to is one that casts white people and a sort of racial Big Other, a vague omnipresent satanic power from which all sorts of bad things emanate for apparently no reason. John recalls his father saying once that “all white people were wicked, and that God was going to bring them low . . . that white people were never to be trusted, and that they told nothing but lies” (GM, 34). We can compare this description to Baldwin’s account of his meeting with Elijah Muhammad, leader of the Nation of Islam. As Baldwin writes:

The real reason, according to Elijah, that I failed to realize that the white man was a devil was that I had been too long exposed to white teaching and had never received true instruction. “The so-called American Negro” is the only reason Allah has permitted the United States to endure so long; the white man’s time was up in 1913, but it was the will of Allah that the lost black nation . . . be redeemed from their white masters and returned to the true faith, which is Islam. (F, 324)

This understanding of the origin and structure of white supremacy, though appropriately gauging its brutality, shears it of its historical causality and so limits the horizons of resistance to it. If some divine entity is responsible for the United States persisting in the way it has, and will be responsible for its eventual dissolution, then activism and resistance, and the networks of solidarity that make such acts possible, are of at best marginal importance. The result is a population that will be righteously angry about the genuine injustices they suffer while at the same time totally demobilized from any sort of productive struggle. Baldwin’s parallelism of Elijah Muhammed with his early Pentecostalism is clearly making that argument. Similarly, throughout *Go Tell It*, John demonstrates a growing consciousness that matters are more complex than he has been led to believe, though he is still unable to explain how. The pain he feels springs from this vague awareness. It is a somatic resistance to the inadequacy of the models and explanations he has been given, informing him not so much of what the right answer is but that the answers he has been given so far are all wrong.

The result of this combined isolation and depoliticization with an ahistorical understanding of racism is the debilitating form of hermeneutical injustice that John spends the entirety of *Go Tell It on the Mountain* grappling with. As Baldwin writes in *Fire*, just after describing the meeting with Elijah Muhammad:

In the beginning—and neither can this be overstated—a Negro just cannot *believe* that white people are treating him as they do; he does not know what he has done to merit it. . . . And, in fact, the truth about the black man, as a historical entity and as a human being, *has* been hidden from him, deliberately and cruelly; the power of the white world is threatened whenever a black man refuses to accept the white world's definitions. So every attempt is made to cut that black man down—not only was made yesterday but is made today. (F, 326)

This violence, which is both physical and epistemological, circles us back to the earlier passage from Mbembe and shows that Baldwin was distinctly aware of the phenomenology that underlies depoliticization. The Black person “in the beginning” who “cannot *believe*” that they are being mistreated for no good reason whatsoever is suffering an epistemic injustice ancillary to the broader currents of disaggregation that discourage the sorts of mass collective movements that might pose a material threat to white supremacist capitalism. It also shows why the feeling of pain, specifically pain, is significant in the context of religious experience.

Returning to the earlier discussion of Guenther and Scarry, we encounter two models of pain phenomenology that both oppose and complement each other. The first, which Scarry champions, holds that pain is not only incommunicable but language-destroying and thought-destroying, undermining not only communication but those faculties that make communication possible. Critical phenomenology, however, treats subjectivity as interpersonal. As Joshua St. Pierre writes, “my grasp on the world as a me and a human requires an ongoing and coordinated effort that pain disrupts. Pain does not mask my true, authentic, self any more than it exposes a primal self buried under layers of habituated social codes. Rather, pain reopens what we think sealed—the ontogeny (beginnings and development) of our subjectivity.”⁴⁹ The experience of pain is not confined only to its isolated immediacy but contains also its interpretation: the subject's conception of where the pain came from and how it is significant, before, after, and sometimes during the experience itself. And that interpretation is intersubjective, arising from the innumerable moments of calibration wherein the subject encountered someone else's pain expression and later applied that experience to themselves. In this manner, pain resembles

49. Joshua St. Pierre, “Living with Chronic Pain,” *Puncta: Journal of Critical Phenomenology* 3, no. 2 (2020): 30–31.

Baldwin's description of racism as both individualizing and collectivizing, and rife with epistemic injustice. What is more, when pain is so consuming as to disrupt even the processes by which the self arises as a psychological phenomenon, the result is not the end of the self but the revelation of its foundations. Just as in Ellison's *Invisible Man*, where the narrator's retreat to invisibility at the novel's conclusion shows how white America's inability to truly see him was foundational to the system of white supremacy (which depends on him even as it rejects him), so too does the loss of the self in the isolating crucible of pain reveal how that self was always already intersubjective.

This homology between the private-public experience of pain and the private-public experience of racism is central to the role of pain in the religious experience depicted in *Go Tell It on the Mountain*. Up to this point, John's knowledge of religious ecstasy and the pain that came with it was very much like his knowledge of God: secondhand and mediated through authority figures. Now, however, he had firsthand experience of the first two items (and, one might be tempted to argue, the third). But what does this experience give him knowledge of? His own body: "It was at this moment, precisely, that he found he could not rise; something had happened to his arms, his legs, his feet. . . . And he began to scream again in his great bewildered terror, and he felt himself, indeed, begin to move—not upward, toward the light, but down again, a tightness in his bowels, a tightening in his loin-strings . . . as though God's toe had touched him lightly" (GM, 187–88). What follows is a long dreamlike sequence in which John experiences increasing falls into a Hellish darkness, one marked by an embrace of those things he finds shameful in himself: his body, his desire to supplant Elisha, and his hatred of his father, all culminating in "a bitter, unbelieving despair: all prophecies were true, salvation was finished, damnation was real!" (GM, 189). This despair becomes subsumed in the image of his father, who appears threatening "to beat sin out of him" (GM, 190). What the image reveals is that John's father lies at the base of his intersected complex of bodily, religious, and familial guilt, for John has identified himself with Ham, the son of Noah who was cursed after seeing his father's nakedness: "leaning over the cracked, 'tattle-tale gray' bathtub, he scrubbed his father's back; and looked, as the accursed son of Noah had looked, on his father's hideous nakedness. . . . Then he hated his father, and longed for the power to cut his father down" (GM, 191).

As the novel goes on to describe, the curse of Ham had long been used as a biblical justification for the oppression of Black people, the argument being that

Ham's children had gone on to populate Africa and that dark skin was the mark of the curse. Baldwin is insistent in how he parallels this scene with the repetition of his father threatening to beat the sin out of him. The threat, it is clear, is not to beat out some abstract concept of sinfulness, or of original sin, but specifically the sin of Ham, the alleged biblical origin of Blackness. Whereas Baldwin, on the floor of the church, arose fearing that God was white, John instead rises with the fear that his father will beat him white. This juxtaposition is thus the crux of the problem that the novel has been dealing with from the beginning: that the church's understanding of racism harbors anti-Blackness within it and so is incapable of contributing to the struggle against white supremacy. The encounter with God is painful, then, because it is a God who demands that he hate himself, just as Meridian describes in his speech about "B.C." This contradiction, this structural rejection of the self, propagates throughout the rest of its practice: the hierarchical church and family structures (top-down forms of organization precluding horizontal ones), the abandonment of solidarity with those not part of the religion, and the refusal to contextualize individual experiences of racism with the history and structures they arise from. John asks himself how he could "be cursed for having seen in a bathtub what another man—if that other man had ever lived—had seen ten thousand years ago, lying in an open tent? Could a curse come down so many ages?" (GM, 191). The vision answers the question with an image of his father as God chasing Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden, at which point "John knew that a curse was renewed from moment to moment; from father to son . . . the heart, crazed wanderer in the driving waste, carried the curse forever" (GM, 191). Out of this experience, which culminates in an image of immense suffering where pilgrims trample each other marching toward a river, John beholds an image of Christ, and "for a moment only, was filled with a light he could not bear" (GM, 197) and he wakes up, at last a true believer.

Yet there is reason to see this conversion as temporary, as Baldwin's ultimately was. When John awakes, immediately Elisha asks him "are you saved, boy?" and when John answers "yes" he feels as though "the words came upward, it seemed, of themselves, in the new voice God had given him" (GM, 199). The precalibration has worked, for a time at least, obscuring the truth of his experience. His understanding of what happened to him is at variance with that of the people in the church, for they have no idea what he witnessed, their experience of his vision being like the experience of another person's pain: external and with few details. Yet it is *their* interpretation John adopts, one where he has had

a direct encounter with the Holy Spirit, which, despite its import, has little to say about him specifically or of his relationship to white supremacy and its animating myths. As they sing when John rises from the floor,

Lord, I been introduced
 To the Father and the Son,
 And I ain't
 No stranger now! (GM, 200)

But of course, they have no inkling of the irony of their choice of song. Yet it is no surprise that John adopts their attitude. After all, he did have a religious experience and had been primed by a lifetime of church service to interpret it the way he was expected to. Furthermore, as he soon finds, though he recalls the experience, he finds that it is indescribable: when he feels the urge to testify what comes to his mind are not his own words but “the text of a sermon he had once heard his father preach” (GM, 201). John literally describes his own experience in his father’s words. Though the encounter was harrowing, it has for a time at least been contained and domesticated by the church’s intersubjectivity. Lacking words for his pain, he finds words already provided and uses them, engaging in the dialogic process by which the church shapes, and is shaped by, these ineffable experiences.

However literally we read the scene—whether we understand John’s vision as a genuine encounter with the divine or not—the manner of its framing is clearly a major hermeneutical injustice. The scene where John understands himself as Ham reveals, in a Freudian way, the foundational contradiction of his relationship to his father, his religion, his body, and his understanding of race and racism. But John emerges from that encounter into a swaddle of expectation, a narrative promulgated by a religious community that wanted him to have an experience like this and tried to make sure that he had it the way they expected him to, that likely would have experienced it *for* him if that were possible. The attempt works, for the most part, and John finds that the experience is literally unspeakable: later, when John is walking home accompanied by Elisha, he is gripped with a sudden anxiety that he must dwell in that house “alone with his mother and his father”—a clear echo of his earlier religious experience, which he can neither articulate nor explain—a fear of “something for which he had no words” (GM, 213). Whether or not John’s embrace of the church will prove durable, it is clearly

bad for him, psychologically and epistemologically. For it deeply constrains his ability to understand both himself and the world in which he lives. It is an experience that portends more pain to come.

The conflation of pain and religious experience in *Go Tell It on the Mountain* thus expresses and somatizes Baldwin's criticism of his early Pentecostalism and of the pernicious self-hatred white supremacy always threatens to foster in its victims. Pain locates and expresses in the body what could not be said or thought and directs attention to the inadequacy of what has been said and thought before. Reading Baldwin as a forerunner of critical phenomenology, critical race theory, and epistemic justice philosophy allows us to see how extensively problems of intersubjective knowledge formation animated both his fiction, essays, and autobiographical writing. John Grimes then becomes a hypothetical image of what Baldwin's letter to his nephew was meant to prevent, a racialized subject denied any means of understanding how racialization and subjectivity affect each other. Pain's dual character as that which is unspeakable and that which is only understood through others, its enmeshment in processes of intersubjective calibration that allow the one experiencing it to understand what it is and who it is happening to, makes it a powerful nexus point in this lattice of metaphor and enactment wherein Baldwin performs the very subject position that he warns against.

FOUR

The Text Against the Camp

Narrative Biopolitics and Elie Wiesel's *Night*

But the sadist does not care about the continued existence of the world. On the contrary: he wants to nullify this world, and by negating his fellow man, who also in an entirely specific sense is “Hell” for him, he wants to realize his own total sovereignty. The fellow man is transformed into flesh, and in this transformation he is already brought to the edge of death; if worst comes to worst, he is driven beyond the border of death into Nothingness.

—Jean Améry, *At the Mind's Limits*¹

Again

Nothing could more undermine the post-Holocaust project of “never again” than allowing a genocide to happen again, yet this is precisely what the world did in 1994 when faced with the massacres of Tutsis in Rwanda. The failure to intervene was borne out linguistically. To take the American response as an example, the record shows how government officials downplayed the events by refusing to call the killings what they were, instead calling the massacres tribal conflicts, ethnic struggles, or acts that merely resemble genocide. One effect of this language was to normalize the suffering, to take advantage of stereotypes regarding so-called third world countries to make the violence seem like “just

1. Jean Améry, *At the Mind's Limits: Contemplations by a Survivor on Auschwitz and its Realities*, trans. Sidney Rosenfeld and Stella P. Rosenfeld (New York: Schocken, 1990), 35.

something that happens over there.” It is a repetition, at the level of international politics, of the process by which, as Jean Améry puts it, “the fellow man is transformed into flesh,” a process by which a population becomes vulnerable to genocide and which the enactment of genocide reinforces and repeats. The other major effect of this dissimulation was to disclaim responsibility, since acknowledging that what was then happening in Rwanda constituted a genocide would have obliged intervention. As *The Guardian* reported in 2004, based on then recently declassified documents, the Clinton administration knew full well that what was happening constituted a genocide, such that “senior officials privately used the word genocide within 16 days of the start of the killings, but chose not to do so publicly because the president had already decided not to intervene.”² Similarly, as Philip Gourevitch reports, the Clinton administration also attempted to argue that the 1948 UN Convention Against Genocide (to which the United States is a signatory) did not *oblige* states to intervene, but “merely ‘enables’ such preventative action,”³ a spurious and self-serving argument. As genocide scholar Elizabeth More writes, “the evidence is that the global community . . . failed to react adequately to the genocide.”⁴

Clinton’s failure, and indeed the world’s failure, to acknowledge the truth of the Rwandan genocide was both abhorrent and cowardly and shows how refusing to acknowledge the fact of an ongoing genocide can make one a material accomplice by limiting or impeding the discursive acts necessary to mobilize aid and intervention, or by giving perceived legitimacy to bad-faith excuses. That the US Congress has attempted to impose economic sanctions against the nation of South Africa in retaliation for its attempts to hold the state of Israel accountable in the International Criminal Court (ICC) for genocidal acts taken

-
2. Roy Carroll, “US Chose to Ignore Rwandan Genocide,” *The Guardian*, March 31, 2004, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2004/mar/31/usa.rwanda>. See also Brent Beardsley, “The Endless Debate Over the ‘G Word,’” *Genocide Studies and Prevention* 1, no. 1 (2006): 79–82.
 3. Philip Gourevitch, *We Wish to Inform You That Tomorrow We Will Be Killed with Our Families: Stories from Rwanda* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1999), 153.
 4. Elizabeth More, “International Humanitarian Law and Interventions—Rwanda, 1994,” *Genocide Studies and Prevention* 2, no. 2 (2007): 158. William A. Schabas, responding to the International Criminal Court of Justice’s 2007 ruling on the case of *Bosnia and Herzegovina v. Serbia and Montenegro*, writes that “The court has made a major pronouncement on the duty to prevent genocide, declaring that this obligation, set out in exceedingly laconic terms both in the title and in art. 1 of the 1948 UNGC [Convention for the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide], *requires states to take action* when genocide is threatened outside their own territory, to the extent that they may be able to exercise some influence” (“Genocide and the International Court of Justice: Finally, a Duty to Prevent the Crime of Crimes,” *Genocide Studies and Prevention* 2, no. 2 [2007]: 102. My emphasis).

against the Palestinians of Gaza since 2023⁵ indicates that the American empire has learned nothing from this history (or, perhaps, has learned too well what it can get away with). I refer here to House bill H.R. 7256, the “U.S.-South Africa Bilateral Relations Review Act,” introduced to the 118th Congress on February 6, 2024, with both Republican and Democratic cosponsors. In Section 2, “Findings,” it accuses South Africa of “siding” with Hamas and calls its ICC suit “politically motivated.” That genocide is never acceptable anywhere or for any reason, and that all of humanity collectively shares the responsibility to prevent or stop it, seems never to have occurred to the democratically elected representatives of the American people. All people, whether Jewish, Palestinian, Tutsi, or any other targeted group, share the same right to be free from deliberate annihilation, and indeed it is the very universality of that right which gives it force. The American government’s enabling dissimulation in response to genocide, as seen both in Gaza and Rwanda, also demonstrates the political and rhetorical significance of the suffering of others, and the problems created by the refusal of that suffering’s recognition.

Ideally, the declaration “this is a genocide” would be a speech act that, much like “I now pronounce you wed” or “I christen this boat,” creates a new social reality, in this case one that compels particular actions aimed at preventing or ending the genocide so named. Again ideally, the primary limit on the felicity of that speech act should be the truth of the claim, that is, such that the only valid reason not to respond to “this is a genocide” is if the claim were actually untrue. Yet as J. L. Austin shows repeatedly, the felicity of a speech act does not rest on the volition of the person making it but on the broader context in which it is made and its success in fulfilling its function. If my statement “you’re under arrest” fails because I am not a police officer, I cannot simply *will* a more suitable reality into existence, but would have to alter the social and material context in some way. But what could the victim of an ongoing genocide do in the face of global selfishness? How could they possibly make felicitous a speech act that the most powerful governments in the world have committed themselves to ignoring? Overtly recognizing and acknowledging the suffering of the other creates certain responsibilities, implies certain courses of

5. As the South African application to the ICC claims, Israel’s activities in Gaza are “genocidal in character, as they are committed with the requisite specific intent (*dolus specialis*) to destroy Palestinians in Gaza as a part of the broader Palestinian national, racial and ethnical group.” See “Application instituting proceedings and request for the indication of provisional measures,” International Court of Justice, <https://www.icj-cij.org/node/203394>. The full application lays out the case for the genocidal character of these acts in detail.

action, and directs attention to certain truths, which there are often strong incentives to ignore. Such matters apply to more modest forms of suffering as well (if I hear a cry for help from a burning house, for instance, I may feel compelled to try and save that person even if I would prefer not to put myself in danger), but the gravity of genocide adds clarity and urgency to these questions. And it is precisely these questions that the Holocaust memoir, as a literary genre, must contend with.

Reading the declaration “this is a genocide” as, in part, an attempted speech act meant to trigger certain material obligations on the part of powerful bystanders clarifies the stakes of the Holocaust memoir (and the genocide memoir more broadly) as a genre of political writing. In a sense, the purpose of treaties like the *UN Convention Against Genocide* are to create a social reality in which such speech acts may be reliably felicitous, wherein the statement “this is a genocide” may actually succeed in prompting remedial action. If a nation wishes to prevent that remedial action, it has great incentive to render the speech act nonfelicitous: thus the enormous oppression and censorship that advocates for Palestinian freedom face in the West, and America especially. The term is thus inescapably rhetorical, in that it attempts to use language to bring about some action.⁶ Yet if a genocide has happened, or is happening, then the victims, almost by definition, have been stripped of the capacity to compel others to act on their own behalf. To be a universal outlaw, to be *homo sacer* in Giorgio Agamben’s sense of the term, is a frequent prerequisite to becoming a genocide victim, since removing a person’s social and legal safety allows their physical safety to be stripped with impunity.

The main focus of this chapter will be Elie Wiesel’s memoir *Night*,⁷ which narrates his deportation from the small Transylvanian village of Sighet to the Auschwitz concentration camp and the many injustices he endured as he awaited rescue by the Allies.⁸ Due to its influence and popularity, *Night* works

6. For an exploration of the literary-rhetorical functions of genocide writing, here in the context of human rights in the Democratic Republic of Congo, see Subha Xavier, “When Rhetoric Responds to Violence: Literature and Human Rights in the DRC,” *Research in African Literatures* 32, no. 3 (2021): 1–19.

7. Elie Wiesel, *Night*, in *The Night Trilogy: Night, Dawn, Day*, trans. Marion Wiesel (New York: Hill and Wang, 2008). Hereafter cited parenthetically as N.

8. *Night* is actually the abridged version of a much longer work Wiesel originally published in Yiddish. For details on the work’s textual history, see Alan Astro, “Revisiting Wiesel’s *Night* in Yiddish, French, and English,” *Partial Answers: Journal of Literature and the History of Ideas* 12, no. 1 (2014): 127–53. I have decided to focus on the shorter version of *Night* specifically because it is by far the most well-known edition of the text and is therefore the version that had the largest impact on the discourse and representation of the Holocaust.

effectively as a case study in the ethical and formal difficulties of the Holocaust memoir as a literary-political project. Genocide narratives, and Holocaust narratives especially, are often understood to relate to or connect with some notion of unspeakability. As Alon Segev writes, it was the opinion of the Holocaust memoirist Jean Améry that “only one who went through the Nazi inferno can understand and convey its meaning to the people who were not there.”⁹ Likewise, as Lea Hamoui puts it, “to render historical horror is to render, by definition, that which exceeds rendering.”¹⁰ In this manner, such memoirs resemble several other textual representations of pain analyzed in this book not only because they contain a great deal of it, but also because of their form, as well as their genesis in an experience that the reader cannot even imagine. We can thus understand the general goals of these texts as being equal parts informative and rhetorical, conveying information about an experience that could only ever be described by the person who went through it while also convincing the audience to take steps to ensure that nobody will ever have that experience again.

The genocide memoir is a genre of writing, in short, that would like to become impossible, to eliminate the very experience on which its texts rely. Thus the tendency in Holocaust art where “the more the artwork tends toward the historical, the more attenuated its aesthetic properties become, and the more it tends toward aesthetic autonomy, the more attenuated its historical reference becomes.”¹¹ The aesthetic elements of a work of Holocaust art should not be understood as mere decoration, but rather an essential element of the work’s rhetorical goals, as *Night*’s artistry helps demonstrate. As I argue below, one of the major things that a work like *Night* achieves is the reversal of the process of social disintegration that makes genocide possible. It does not merely do this by way of sympathy or empathy, that is, by making the reader feel bad for the author (though they no doubt achieve that), but also by taking what was at one point an experience of being reduced to “bare life,” cut off as best as the Nazis could manage from all forms of living that were not basic sustenance, and

9. Alon Segev, *Thinking and Killing: Philosophical Discourse in the Shadow of the Third Reich* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013), 79. For a discussion of the difficulties arising from attempts to compare different historical atrocities (including with respect to people whose intersectional identities link them to multiple such events), see Wendy Zierler, “My Holocaust Is Not Your Holocaust’: ‘Facing’ Black and Jewish Experience in *The Pawnbroker*, *Higher Ground*, and *The Nature of Blood*,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 18, no. 1 (2004): 46–67.

10. Lea Hamoui, “Historical Horror and the Shape of *Night*,” in *Elie Wiesel: Between Memory and Hope*, ed. Carol Rittner (New York: New York University Press, 1991), 120.

11. Henry W. Pickford, *The Sense of Semblance: Philosophical Analyses of Holocaust Art* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), 4.

transforming it into the basis for a political life, for a life among people as part of a society. It is in this sense that we can answer the question “why write a book that you think nobody will be convinced by?” The goal is not to persuade the reader that the Holocaust was wrong in the way you might persuade someone to buy a used car, but rather to create, within the text, a reality in which the wrongness of the genocide is immanent and inescapable.

Thus, in addition to Elaine Scarry, this chapter is, in terms of its theory, oriented around Giorgio Agamben’s book *Homo Sacer*. It understands the aesthetic elements of a Holocaust memoir as being essential to the extraction of the experience from the concentration camp—or, more accurately, from the process of sequestration and murder that the camp metonymizes—into society at large. It is a tool for making the Holocaust a part of everyday life, a part of society, and thereby reasserting that its victims had a right to the protections of society, to social capital, which might have prevented the genocide from happening. These memoirs must then balance not only the demands of history, of the author’s personal experience, and of the aesthetic requirements of the form, but also the lingering effects of the genocide and the fact of having to go on living in a world that was until recently designed to ensure one’s destruction.

A Politics of Life and Others

In his essay “Autobiography as De-Facement,” Paul de Man writes that autobiography

[I]s not a genre or a mode, but a figure of reading or of understanding that occurs, to some degree, in all texts. The autobiographical moment happens as an alignment between the two subjects involved in the process of reading in which they determine each other by mutual reflexive substitution. . . . This specular structure is interiorized in a text in which the author declares himself the subject of his own understanding, but this merely makes explicit the wider claim to authorship that takes place whenever a text is stated to be by someone and assumed to be understandable to the extent that this is the case.¹²

In short, the genre of autobiography, which would seem to be based on and to reinforce the idea of a singular and self-reliant subject, actually “de-faces” that

12. Paul de Man, “Autobiography as De-Facement,” *MLN* 94, no. 5 (1979): 921.

subject, revealing its instability and its dependence on others. Autobiography, then, functions very much like fiction. Through an act of “mutual reflexive substitution,” the author makes their own alleged self-knowledge the plaything of their reader, imbricating the two of them as figure and ground. I take this point as a departure from arguments like David T. Mitchell’s, who in an essay on disability autobiography writes that “in literature disability functions largely as a metaphor of social collapse, while in autobiography disability represents the coordinates of a singular subjectivity.”¹³ Before continuing with this argument, I want to state explicitly that I am not simply conflating *Night* with disability writing, though there are many instances of physical disability and debility within it. Rather I bring in Mitchell because his argument, though it does not cite de Man’s essay, benefits from being placed in dialogue within it, and because the difficulties of disability writing are relevant to writing by normate authors as well. In this case, Mitchell correctly identifies an unstable relation between singularity and strangeness, seemingly opposing terms that (*pace* Jacques Derrida) are actually dependent on one another. A person can choose to be different or have difference thrust upon them, but in either case how that difference is understood depends far more on the observer than the observed. We can see in the work of Judith Butler how identities are constructed and understood through performativity, and one who wishes to perform their independence is always at risk of performing strangeness instead. In the case of disabled people, who are rarely afforded the grandiose mythologization of the self-reliant individual, they write for an audience that is already primed to see them as dependent, and so attempts to stand out are simply taken as idiosyncrasies. It is the audience that needs to change, not the authors, who in any case are individuals already.

Wiesel’s prefatory remarks to *Night* participate in this complex dance of individual and dependent identities, of singularity and strangeness, to the effect of undermining his social exclusion by drawing attention to how the reader is implicated in the meaning making of the text. This process is repeated at

13. David T. Mitchell, “Body Solitaire: The Singular Subject of Disability Autobiography,” *American Quarterly* 52, no. 2 (2000): 311. The field of disability life writing has had several other recent major developments that are worth acknowledging due to their influence on this chapter, namely Elizabeth Grubgeld, *Disability and Life Writing in Post-Independence Ireland* (London: Palgrave, 2020) and Valerie O’Brien, “Autobiographical Subjects: Disability and Social Identity in Life Writing” (PhD diss., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2020). See also Gabriele Rippl, Philipp Schweighauser, Tiina Kirss, Margit Sutrop, and Therese Steffen, eds., *Haunted Narratives: Life Writing in an Age of Trauma* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013).

instances throughout the work where what would in other contexts appear to be formative ideas and experiences in Wiesel's life (beginning to study the Kabbalah, his relationship with his father, his personal sense of rightness and wrongness) instead undermine his singularity. That which was supposed to bind him more closely to a community or a history from which he could draw meaning and identity becomes instead, due to the Holocaust, cleavages that harm his sense of himself. One simply needs to read *Night* and pay attention to how often his attempts to hold on to keepsakes or valuables fails: money, watches, even the gold fillings in his teeth are all eventually taken from him in exchange for nothing. Wiesel begins the memoir as a bright and studious young man who will no doubt grow up to be a pillar of his tightly knit community, much like his father. That world is progressively shrunk to just his family, then just him and his father, until at last Wiesel leaves the concentration camp alone.

Consider, then, how he describes the impetus for his memoir in the preface to the revised translation: "convinced that this period in history would be judged one day, I knew that I must bear witness" (N, 6). Despite the religious aura of the phrasing "would be judged one day," I think that we are to understand the judging to arrive from a human source, at least in part. Similarly, if we are attempting to reconstruct the implied audience for this text, we should not simply pass over the fact that the people doing the judging in the future could not only include the Holocaust's direct victims. The Jewish people of Sighet knew perfectly well that what was happening to them was amoral and that they were entitled to the protection of the law and society; it was the bystanders and perpetrators who were wrong. To imagine the bystanders and their descendants in the future condemning the Holocaust is to assert that the events that culturally and ideologically enabled that tragedy can be undone, which is also to assert that the Nazi project of separating Jews from the rest of humanity, excluding them from the protections of the law and the benefits of human fellowship, has been and would remain a failure. Not only would there still be Jewish people in the future but those people would be understood to occupy a moral universe in which harm done to them would be treated with the same seriousness as harm done to anyone else, not merely in the abstract sense, but practically instantiated in everyday life. It is a gesture that presumes a future in which the pleas will be listened to. *Night* is, as little as it may otherwise seem, founded on hope.

Yet, as Wiesel goes on to say, "deep down, the witness knew then, as he does now, *that his testimony would not be received*. . . . Only those who experienced

Auschwitz know what it was. Others will never know" (N, 7, my emphasis). Wiesel here holds that the truth of Auschwitz is the experience of it, and that experience cannot be transmitted directly, only "understood" (N, 7) in a more distant fashion. As a person who has had the experience, he could well have held himself up as the marker of this truth, but, as Wiesel seems to have recognized, such an endeavor could only ever fail. Instead, as he says in that same preface, "did I write it [*Night*] so as *not* to go mad or, on the contrary, to *go* mad in order to understand the nature of madness" (N, 5). Note again his use of "understand" here, which seems once more to denote a more attenuated form of knowing, knowing that comes secondhand or at a distance. He writes both to understand (but not "know") the "madness" and also to escape it, that "madness" being seemingly the *idios* of the experience, a private meaning internal to the event itself.¹⁴ Wiesel thus situates himself very much like the disabled memoirist of Mitchell's essay, on a knife's edge between the stranger and the individual. It is that troubled place that seems to pain Wiesel, but that also makes him capable of writing his book, since only someone who had "understood" the "madness" could ever represent it. Cut off from the mental life he had before, from the psychology of a person who had not been a victim of genocide, he rejects the singularity of the experience not by abandoning or forgetting it, but by instead drawing the rest of the world closer to him. The goal of *Night* is thus not to trigger an outpouring of sympathy, or to merely make the reader feel sad, but rather to affirm an ethical and intersubjective world in which the Holocaust would have been impossible, to ensure that its injustice is not just recognized emotionally or affectively, but materially, by fostering a continuous practical awareness of the humanity of its victims. What *Night* seems meant to do is foster a phenomenological and ethical environment that, if occupied, would prevent that occupant from becoming or enabling a Nazi. The social and political personhood of the author is thus tied to his narrative and formal personhood within the text, and the complexity of the latter, by implicating the reader in its construction, does not diminish but rather strengthens the former.

One of the major limitations of Scarry's approach to understanding pain is that it makes understanding and articulating the problem of overlooking or denying pain much more difficult. How, in an outlook that understands pain to be incommunicable, is the refusal to hear or see that which cannot be seen or

14. One might compare his use of the word here to Hans-Georg Gadamer's usage, as I discuss for instance in the chapter on Margaret Edson's *Wit*, but we should also be wary of overgeneralizing based on mere similarity.

heard an important issue? Why, indeed, would it even be a matter for discussion? But one of the ethical and critical imperatives that Holocaust literature imposes is that this *must* be a problem. For a genocide is a tragedy at both the macro and the micro scales, both at the level of societies and populations and at the level of the most minute individual experience. That tragedy assaults the ethical and phenomenological processes that make a free society possible. The merciless Nazi goons Wiesel describes—throwing bread into a train car so they can watch starving people kill each other over it—pose a problem for ethics precisely because they are not unusual.

The size of the Holocaust, the sheer quantity of people that needed to be mobilized in order to make it happen, means that we are denied, categorically, the easy solution of considering such cruelty to be the one-off acts of moral outliers. If this brutality is to be repeated in so many millions of instances across so many countries in so many contexts for the years that it took for the Holocaust to happen, then it simply must be the case that the range of human psychology is capacious enough to include people who can undertake such acts, or at the very least can be made into people who can undertake such acts. It also means that such people cannot be dismissed as unusual deviations from a normative goodness. As John Roth soberly puts it, “the Holocaust, genocide, and other mass atrocities confirm the singular failure of ethics, which is that ethics has not made us human beings better than we are.”¹⁵ If one is a political thinker who wishes to create a society wherein such acts do not occur, then one must therefore ask how they are possible. For example, do these fascists not experience pity? Pity, after all, can have a powerful arresting effect, holding one back from carrying out an intended cruelty. Can pitiless individuals be found in such quantity among the so-called general population that they would be sufficient to staff such a huge operation, or are these people caused to be that way by some external material process? The former seems empirically unlikely, as the experience of pity and other reactions to pain expression that create internal resistance to undertaking acts of further cruelty seems too common. Furthermore, simply lacking a capacity for pity or empathy does not compel one, by itself, to act with extreme cruelty: there would have to be some sort of reason or compulsion. Plenty of people have no or diminished empathy who nonetheless refrain from committing atrocities. But the latter answer is

15. John K. Roth, *The Failure of Ethics: Confronting the Holocaust, Genocide, and Other Mass Atrocities* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 23.

likewise troubling, for it would seem to prove the negative of the social constructivist thesis that a better world (however defined) is possible because people change in response to their social and material environments, which are themselves changeable. Are we to say then that a better world might be possible because a worse one clearly is? Perhaps, but if we are to derive this dubious silver lining then we must confront the question of how such indifference and cruelty may come to exist. Scarry's approach offers little guidance as to how we should pursue that question.

Agamben proves to be much more useful. In *Homo Sacer*, he describes the process by which a population can be herded, politically and physically, toward the place of their destruction through the stripping of legal personhood.¹⁶ He begins with a distinction that the ancient Greeks made between two different kinds of life: on the one hand was *zoē*, or "bare" life, life as such, and *bios*, or political and social life, the sense of "life" one uses when one says "the school of life" or "the life of the mind." In ancient Athens, *zoē* had its domain in the home, in the private labors sustenance, while *bios* was life as it was lived in public, in the city (or polis), and among all of its people. As Agamben argues, "the entry of *zoē* into the sphere of the polis—the politicization of bare life as such—constitutes the decisive event of modernity."¹⁷ To be modern is to see life *as such* as political, to participate in or be subject to biopolitics, and so it makes sense that so much of *Homo Sacer* focuses on concentration camps, the biopolitical institutions par excellence. As Agamben writes in his later work, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, "Auschwitz marks the end and the ruin of every ethics of dignity and conformity to a norm. The bare life to which human beings were reduced neither demands nor conforms to anything. It itself is the only norm; it is absolutely immanent. And 'the ultimate sentiment of belonging to the species' cannot in any sense be a kind of dignity."¹⁸

One cannot be "singular" in Auschwitz. As we see repeatedly throughout *Night*, every effort to hold on to those things that mark one as separate or distinct from others is eventually stripped away: clothes, jewelry, family, even less

16. For an analysis of how genocides emerge from generalized social and political oppression, see Uğur Ü. Üngör, "When Persecution Bleeds into Mass Murder: The Processive Nature of Genocide," *Genocide Studies and Prevention* 1, no. 2 (2006): 173–96. See also Sheri P. Rosenberg, "Genocide Is a Process, Not an Event," *Genocide Studies and Prevention* 7, no. 1 (2012): 16–23.

17. Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 5.

18. Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (New York: Zone Books, 1999), 69.

tangible things like hobbies, skills, and ambitions. Think, for example, of the early section of the book, where Wiesel describes his burning desire to meet a scholar of the Kabbalah so that he may study Jewish mysticism. Once in Auschwitz, he meets one such person (N, 63) and the possibility of studying under him, or even of asking him questions, never arises. How could it? Not only would serious study have been impossible as a practical matter, by that point also his capacity to want such things, to have goals and desires beyond an extra ration of soup, had been systematically undermined. Small wonder then that Wiesel frequently expresses a sense of disconnection and a lack of community, even amid the shared suffering of the camp: “the absent [people],” he muses at one point, “no longer entered our thoughts. . . . We were incapable of thinking. Our senses were numbed, everything was fading into fog” (N, 54).¹⁹

This disconnection links *Night* to the titular concept of Agamben’s book, that of *homo sacer*. The term comes from an ancient Roman judicial sentence similar to declaring someone an outlaw and describes a state “in which human life is included in the judicial order solely in the form of its exclusion (that is, of its capacity to be killed).”²⁰ One is excluded from the benefits of political life and the protection of the law. A citizen can do anything they want to a person declared *homo sacer*, including killing them, without facing any penalty; it is a punishment that takes the form not of violence (as in a death sentence) but of vulnerability.²¹ It is, in fact, a far worse fate than a return to the “war of all against all” of Thomas Hobbes’s state of nature, for the people one encounters still have legal protection from any reprisals. It is instead a war of all against *you*, a state of omnipresent danger without even the right of self-defense. As Agamben writes, “the Jew living under Nazism is the privileged negative referent of the new biopolitical sovereignty and is, as such, a flagrant case of *homo sacer*. . . . His killing, therefore, constitutes . . . neither capital punishment nor sacrifice, but simply the actualization of a mere ‘capacity to be killed.’”²² In *Necropolitics*, Achille Mbembe describes this sort of situation in more general terms as amounting to the replacement of a notion of universal rights with

19. Relevant here is Christina Morina’s remark in her analysis of the diaries of Holocaust victims, which reveal a “mutual albeit often ephemeral, even ‘cheap’ solidarity that rendered much hope on the part of the victims and very little actual assistance on the part of the bystanders” (“The Imperative to Act: Jews, Neighbors, and the Dynamics of Persecution in Nazi Germany, 1933–1945,” in *Probing the Limits of Categorization: The Bystander in Holocaust History*, ed. Christina Morina and Krijn Thijs [New York: Berghahn Books, 2019], 161).

20. Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 8.

21. Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 82–83.

22. Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 114.

what he calls the view of a “world without.” As he writes, “universal equality . . . made it possible to contest substantial injustices” but the “world without” imagines its society in terms of the exclusion of some group understood to be undesirable, the destruction of which constitutes the in-group: “each time we say ‘we,’ we must exclude someone at any price, strip him of something, undertake some sort of confiscation.”²³

The inauguration of modernity by way of the insertion of bare life into the discourse of the polis created a situation where the designation of a person or group as *homo sacer* transformed from a punishment meted out in response to a specific transgression into a tool of group and identity formation. This process works in both directions: while the so-called “good” Nazi is defined by the exclusion of all things thought to be Jewish, Jewish people are defined in this system by a collective shared guilt (whether for blood libel, the “new world order,” degeneracy, the “stabbed-in-the-back” conspiracy, or some other fabricated nonsense) that allows the punishment of *homo sacer* to be generalized. One might be tempted to declare with a certain irony that “if Jewish people had not existed the Nazis would have had to invent them,” but that conclusion does not quite arrive at the correct point. One need only glance at some examples of Nazi propaganda, or read a few Nazi speeches or books, to realize that what they were imagining was never connected to actual Jewish people anywhere. Indeed, their fondness for citing outright hoaxes—whether the fake *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* or the equally ridiculous conspiracy theories of today’s fascism—indicates the truth of Jean-Paul Sartre’s observation that the ideology of antisemitism is founded on an embrace of bad faith and unreason.²⁴ In this respect one can certainly understand the “intensity,” to use Leona Toker’s term, of the Holocaust writings written in the immediate aftermath of the event, which was “a response to the downplaying of the specificity of the Jewish catastrophe among Nazi crimes.”²⁵ The exclusion of the Jewish people from political humanity and from the protections that human status provides is not only the practical basis for the genocide to occur, but also the conceptual ground of Nazism itself.

23. Achille Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, trans. Steven Corcoran (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019), 38–39.

24. See Jean-Paul Sartre, *Antisemitism and Jew: An Exploration of the Etiology of Hate*, trans. George J. Becker (New York: Schocken, 1995).

25. Leona Toker, *Gulag Literature and the Literature of Nazi Camps: An Intercontextual Reading* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2019), 67.

Madness, Emptiness, and Others

What *Night* seeks to do is not merely to represent the Holocaust and to twinge on the sympathies of its readers, for a relation of sympathy is still a relation of distance, of a charitable person acknowledging the pain of a lesser unfortunate. The aims of such a work as *Night* are not only conciliatory, but *rehabilitative*, in that they seek to undo or erase some of the ideological scripts and preconceptions that allowed the Holocaust to happen. In short, the goal of *Night* is to re-establish its author as a person whose suffering matters, that is, whose well-being ought to be protected. It is a response, not to the Benthamite question “can they suffer?” but to the sneering rejoinder, “should we care?” Answering “yes” to that question is the central task of *Night*.

The book accomplishes that task in part by way of the ambiguities of its genre, of how the memoir implicates its reader in the construction of the identity it represents. We could even locate the task at a far more fundamental level, that of the act of reading itself, which presumes a certain mutuality: if I have picked up a book, any book, in order to read it, I must presume as a matter of course that the text contains some sort of meaning I would be able to deduce, that the signifiers I encounter will have some signifieds attached to them that I can discern. This presumption of sense is what motivates the decision to read a book in the first place: one begins a new book in order to know what it says. Thus, to begin to read, to decide to begin to read, assumes a predisposition of the reader's part to find and interpret meaning. Of course, this model is a tad simplistic and ignores the manner in which the meaning of a text is constructed by its reader, but it nevertheless conforms to the fact that an idea of the author, what Michel Foucault calls the author function, is an essential part of the process of interpretation.²⁶ To read a work of literature is to, in some sense, enter into an imaginative relation with (one's mental idealization of) some other person, and so presumes that this other and I may have something to say to each other. Thus, the act of putting one's own life into print and distributing it around the world to be read by strangers is in itself an assertion of one's membership in society, that one has a life worth reading about.

Night brings this process to bear within its narrative. It does so right from the beginning, with the complex and liminal character of Moishe the Beadle. As

26. Michel Foucault, “What Is an Author?” in *The Foucault Reader*, trans. Josué V. Harari, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Vintage, 2010), 101–20.

Wiesel describes, Moishe existed on the outskirts of Sighet social world. He writes in the very first paragraph of *Night* that it was “as if his entire life he had never had a surname,” and while the townspeople “were fond of him” he “was poor and lived in utter penury. As a rule, our townspeople, while they did help the needy, did not particularly like them. Moishe the Beadle was the exception. He stayed out of people’s way. His presence bothered no one. He had mastered the art of rendering himself insignificant, invisible” (N, 21). There is a parallel here with this semioutsider status and Moishe’s role in the broader text. He essentially occupies in relation to Sighet the place that Jewish people occupied in relation to Europe: conditional membership and a few table scraps in exchange for not being too insistent or too obvious, a state removed from *homo sacer*, but only barely. This description gives too little credit to the people of Sighet, who never treat Moishe with the sort of murderous contempt that Europe has historically reserved for anyone excluded from its precarious social contract; yet it is clear, especially given Moishe’s prominence in the early part of the book, that a parallel is being drawn here, if not for the sake of a one-to-one correspondence then for that of an instructive comparison. Adding to this comparison is that it is Moishe who gives the young Wiesel his first instructions in the Kabbalah and inducts him in a tradition of mysticism from which he would draw for the rest of his life.

Moishe the Beadle is also an example of what Wiesel fears could happen to him and to his memoir. In *Night*, the Holocaust begins with Moishe’s survival: deported by the Hungarian police as a foreigner, he is brought to the site of a massacre, as thousands of Jewish people were shot by the Gestapo (N, 24). Miraculously, he manages to escape in the confusion and make his way back to Sighet, where he desperately tries to warn everyone to flee while they have the chance. He is ignored, considered mad by some, and ultimately vanishes from the story. Wiesel’s fear that he may be ignored thus has a basis in experience. Moishe’s insecure position in the community eventually becomes a reason to dismiss him, and if he mirrors the insecure position of the European Jewish population generally, then one must ask the question of whether a text like *Night* could ever accomplish its goals. Indeed, the repeated discourse of “madness” both in Wiesel’s preface and in the text itself would reinforce this reading. Moishe is called mad (N, 25), and later, as the people are about to be expelled from a ghetto, Wiesel’s own warnings are ignored in similar fashion (N, 33). As the text progresses, “madness” seems to follow whoever encounters the truth of what they are experiencing. The woman in the train car who cries

out in fear of some sort of fire is considered by all to be mad, until the group reaches Auschwitz and the grim smoke of its truth (recall what Wiesel's father says as he is dying: "I am burning up" [N, 129]). In the camp, Wiesel is also warned to avoid a kapo who "occasionally has fits of madness" (N, 68). Behaviorally, what Wiesel calls "madness" seems associated with acts that draw attention to you: calling out, screaming, crying, attacking someone, etc. And near the end of the text, during the horrific march through the snow, it is contrasted with emptiness, which instead takes the form of acquiescence: "Not a sound of distress, not a plaintive cry, nothing but mass agony and silence. *Nobody asked anyone for help*. One died because one had to. No point in making trouble" (N, 107, my emphasis).

Broadly speaking, then, we can identify two poles on a spectrum of reactions to the Holocaust as represented in *Night*. The first pole, which Wiesel calls madness, reaches out, often aggressively, and attempts to force some kind of relation with others. Madness fails because it transgresses one's social role and violates the identity one was expected to perform. In Sighet, Moishe was either invisible or a handyman, not the savior of its people (as he would have been). In the camps, one does not cry for help or reach out for comfort. As one other prisoner says to Wiesel as his father is dying, "don't forget that you are in a concentration camp. . . . You cannot think of others. Not even your father. . . . Each of us lives and dies alone" (N, 128). The call for help is nonfelicitous—fails to trigger an obligation to assist—because to be a victim of genocide is to be rendered a person for whom help does not arrive. The other pole, emptiness, takes the form of an acquiescence to the identity of *homo sacer*. One merely lies quietly down and perishes without making too much trouble for anybody else.

This second pole is, I think, part of what the French novelist François Mauriac misunderstands in his foreword to *Night*, where he expresses amazement at "the inconceivable passivity with which they [the people of Sighet] surrendered" (N, 16). But the appearance of passivity is, when an active genocide is not occurring, simply a survival strategy for living in a world that one is never considered fully a part of: Sighet lasted so long (the deportations only reached it in 1944) in part because it was far away and out of sight, and Moishe was able to survive for as long as he did because he never bothered anybody. But the transition from being a second-class citizen to being *homo sacer* radically and immediately alters the requirements for survival. On the other hand, what Wiesel calls madness also cannot work once one has been removed from society; the poor dying woman in the train car crying for help does not get it, for at that

point nothing anyone in the car can do would be of use to her. The only “madness” that could possibly work is organized, disciplined mass resistance. Indeed, one of the few instances in *Night* where the situation actually improves is near the end when the Jewish resistance within the camp, after biding its time for an opportunity, successfully takes over and liberates it before the allied soldiers arrive. They act at ten o’clock in the morning on the tenth of April, and at about six in the afternoon on that same day the American army shows up (N, 133). What allows this takeover to succeed where, for example, the Warsaw Uprising failed is that it was conducted with the knowledge that rescue was on the way. All the resistance had to do was hold out long enough for help to arrive, so as to prevent the Nazis from killing everyone in the camp and destroying the evidence of their misdeeds. The uprising is, in a sense, an especially successful incident of madness, and was so only because the call for help was listened to.

To return for a moment to Mauriac’s comment, and to the broader current of Holocaust discourse which I take it to metonymize, I want to bring up Beryl Lang’s argument that genocide “is possible because it has been actual. Any claim for historical distinctiveness made in reference to a particular act of genocide has also to take into account this sobering feature of history itself.”²⁷ Treating the Holocaust as exceptional—that is, treating it as a historical one-off—ignores the fact that genocides and massacres are present all throughout history, which is part of why this chapter begins with the genocide in Rwanda. The partner of this historical exceptionalism is a sort of personal exceptionalism of the kind Mauriac indulges in. I am sure many have had the self-aggrandizing thought that “if I had been there, I would have fought tooth and nail to survive,” but if Wiesel had tried to do that, the Nazis would have just shot him, and he would never have lived long enough to pen *Night*. Recognizing that acquiescing can in some circumstances be a rational survival strategy is to recognize the limits of one’s agency, but more to the point refusing that recognition serves as a way to exceptionalize, and indeed dehumanize, the victim, and so separate the victim from oneself. Non-Jewish people reading a work like *Night* absolutely must make an active effort to resist the urge to see the victims of the Holocaust as essentially different from themselves, to recognize that none of these people could see the future and that for the most part a lot of this so-called passivity is merely a desire to hold out long enough to be rescued or to find an opportunity to escape. Nobody was going to stop the

27. Beryl Lang, *Act and Idea in the Nazi Genocide* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2003), 9.

Holocaust single-handedly. There is a reason why the Jewish resistance only appears at the end: striking any earlier would have gotten them killed while accomplishing nothing.

To Ask and To Answer

If the Holocaust's attempted reduction of its victims to the status of nonspecific bare life begins with the severance of social and legal ties that would have protected the victim, as we see in *Night* it proceeds by way of the evisceration of the victim's personality and idiosyncratic specificity. There is a parallel here with the chapter on Sarah Kane in this book, which examines the way that torture, in her work, functions as a sort of intersubjective warfare in which the torturer tries to erase or colonize the mind of the victim. In this, I follow an observation of Theodor Adorno's, in *Negative Dialectics*, on the relation of the individual identity to the broader society in which it is embedded. As he writes in a section on individualism, to see oneself as self-sufficient and to see the individual as the underlying "substance" of a social order is to adopt, at the level of ideology, a certain illusion, which he refers to as "isolation." "To the isolated," he writes, "isolation seems an indubitable certainty; they are bewitched, on pain of losing their existence, not to perceive how mediated their isolation is. . . . Stubbornly the monads balk at their real dependence as a species as well as at the collective aspect of all forms and contents of their consciousness."²⁸ In short, one is whoever one is by way of relations to others: individuality arises from, and is not opposed to, relation and dependency. While Adorno here is criticizing the individualistic consciousness promoted by capitalism, we can see a similar process unfold throughout *Night*, in this case, a process actively fostered and taken advantage of by the Nazis, by way of severing all social connections.

Consider, for example, Lisa Guenther's discussion in *Solitary Confinement* on the mechanisms of social death. As she writes, "to be socially dead is to be deprived of the network of social relations, particularly kinship relations, that would otherwise support, protect, and give meaning to one's precarious life as an individual."²⁹ She then quotes the definition of slavery that the philosopher Callicles gives in Plato's *Gorgias*, that to be a slave is to be one who is "unable to

28. Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans E. B. Ashton (New York: Continuum, 2007), 312.

29. Lisa Guenther, *Solitary Confinement: Social Death and Its Afterlives* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), xxi.

help himself, or any other about whom he cares.”³⁰ One of the reasons why prisons are so dehumanizing is that they sever all horizontal social relations—that is, relations between equals—and replace them with a single abusive hierarchy that actively corrodes one’s status as a person. Consider, for example, that Wiesel seems to develop no new social bonds of any weight or significance once he enters the camps: he only has his father, and when his father is dying every part of this world militates against him taking any action based on that bond to comfort or assist his dying parent. Prisoners are expected to only relate to their guards, and only by way of following the orders they are given. The psychological role of the kapos—prisoners given better treatment in exchange for doing the bidding of the guards—is significant here, for as Guenther writes “power implies a relation, and even the absolute power of the master of the slave exposes the master to a certain dependence.”³¹ She describes how, instead, torturers will often use the prisoner’s own humanity against them to deprive the victim of a concrete object against which to resist.

Whether intentionally or not, the decision to create a rank of Jewish go-betweens who would do most of the guards’ dirty work seems to have had a similar effect, at least until the encroaching Allied invasion degraded the system to the point where it could be overthrown from within. In *Night*, some of the kapos have personalities, names, identifiable characteristics, but none of the Nazis, with the exception of Josef Mengele, have any such specificity. Wiesel is unable to inflict upon them what was inflicted upon him: separation from all social connections. Those guards, unlike Wiesel, could leave the camp and satisfy their need for human interaction there. Instead, their namelessness indicates their untouchability. Unlike in a Hegelian master-slave dialectic, where the master’s dependence on the slave can serve as their undoing, the guards do not need the prisoners to do anything except exist; the Nazi war machine may have used the concentration camp prisoners as free labor, but the guards, on an individual basis, benefited from the prisoners only to the extent that their status as prisoners meant that someone could be employed in guarding them, unlike a slaveowner who lives directly off the fruits of the slave’s hard work. One could harm them in a uprising, but an uprising requires organization and collaboration, which requires horizontal, mutual relationships that are not mediated through the guards. As discussed in more detail in my chapter on Kane in this

30. Qtd. in Guenther, *Solitary Confinement*, xxii.

31. Guenther, *Solitary Confinement*, 78.

book, privacy is also a kind of social relation, one that is threatening, by its very nature, to any system of domination.

The social nature of privacy and its capacity to, among other things, establish and mark one as a specific individual, is significant in *Night* in part due to Wiesel's complex relationship to Jewish mysticism. When Wiesel begins his discussions with Moishe the Beadle, he receives an important bit of wisdom: Moishe comes across the young Wiesel as he is praying and weeping over the destruction of the Second Temple of Jerusalem. He asks why Wiesel is crying, and Wiesel says that he does not know. So,

He explained to me, with great emphasis, that every question possessed a power that was lost in the answer . . .

Man comes closer to God through the questions he asks Him, he liked to say. Therein lies true dialogue. Man asks and God replies. But we don't understand His replies. We cannot understand them. Because they dwell in the depths of our soul and remain there until we die. The real answers, Eliezer, you will find only within yourself.

"And why do you pray, Moishe?" I asked him.

"I pray to God within me for the strength to ask Him the real questions."

(N, 22–23)

The relationship above reads, among other ways, as a critique of the prisoner/guard relationship, and it should I think be read not only in terms of its theological import but also for the role it plays in the text of *Night*. Consider, how could the person asking the question obey if they can never understand the reply God gives them? And how might they fear an order—or an answer—if the answer to a question diminishes its power? A guard's order to a prisoner is typically delivered with the minimum possible ambiguity: go there, do this, stop that. One need not even think beyond processing the most obvious meaning of the words. To ask a question of God, Moishe says, is really to look within oneself and to find the ambiguity that lives there. It is for this reason, I think, that what Moishe prays for is not that he may better obey God's commands but instead that he may have the strength to ask the questions he needs to, not so that they may be answered, but so that one may learn what one can from the act of asking. What this passage provides, then, is a way to understand Wiesel's relationship with God (as depicted in the narrative) as a sublation of the anti-monies of his later status as a prisoner, one that lets him retain some sense of a

relation to something outside, such that he is not completely *homo sacer*.³² Whereas the prisoner/guard relationship degrades one's specificity, the relationship Moishe describes enhances it.

Given this passage, one ought to pay far closer attention, when reading *Night*, to instances where Wiesel asks questions, including instances when he asks whether he ought to (or can) even write the text at all. Wiesel writes early on that "I became convinced that Moishe the Beadle would help me enter eternity, into that time when question and answer would become ONE" (N, 23). I do not think these are questions we are meant to answer, or even questions that are rhetorical. Rather, when we see Wiesel ask, for instance, "how was it possible that men, women, and children were being burned and that the world kept silent?" (N, 50), we are to take the question as its own answer: these people were burned *because* the world did nothing, for if they had done something the burning would not have happened. Conversely, it was only in the context of the crime that "doing nothing" made sense as an accusation, only in this context that simply going about one's life became an act of complicity. The two halves of the question are linked, as two parties in a conversation. But to even provide that answer seems to cheapen the question, for surely no explanation or philosophical discourse could have been comfort to anyone witnessing this atrocity. What is significant here is that Wiesel had the strength to ask the question, and to keep asking this and other difficult questions, all throughout the book. Though Moishe vanishes from the text, he remains Wiesel's teacher, and through that relationship there remains a connection to Sighet and the way of life, the *bios*, it represents.

That Wiesel can even ask this question is proof that at some level his specificity as a human, his life that was not simply bare, persisted and survived. Indeed, the tradition of mysticism, *as a tradition*, makes it well suited to this purpose. As Philip S. Alexander writes, drawing on the work of Gershom Scholem, mysticism relies on "the existence of an evolving *tradition*, unified by the constant reinterpretation of 'canonic' texts (such as the *Heikhalot* literature and *Sefer Yetzirah*), and the reiteration of key theosophical concepts, myths, and symbols."³³ One of the purposes of the Holocaust was to eradicate Judaism as a

32. For an analysis of mysticism's larger role in post-Holocaust Jewish thought, and specifically its use as a tool to make sense of what happened, see chapter 2 of Daniel Osborn Garner, *Antitheodicy, Atheodicy and Jewish Mysticism in Holocaust Theology: Atheodic Theologies After Auschwitz* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2014). Especially useful are his remarks on the role of the concept of Ayn Sof, which "relates to God's existence in relation to God's self, rather than God's relation to the world" (67), and which seems to be what Moishe is drawing on in his lesson to Wiesel.

33. Philip S. Alexander, "Mysticism," in *The Oxford Handbook of Jewish Studies*, ed. Martin Goodman

culture, to break the chain of transmission and render it unrecoverable, cut its history and its people off from any relation with others, down through the depths of historical time. Putting a description of this mystic tradition in the opening pages of *Night* actively opposes and undermines this process: what Moishe did for the young Wiesel, the older Wiesel now does for his readers.³⁴

This reading does not imply, however, that an unshaken faith is somehow what kept Wiesel together throughout his ordeal. The arduous life of the concentration camp eliminates the uncomplicated religious devotion he shows as a child, and at one point he even refers to himself as a “former mystic” (N, 85, my emphasis). What I am discussing here is the way that his complex personal relationship to his religion indexes and articulates his relation to a kind of fugitive *bios*, which somehow manages to survive the ordeal and which he then deploys in *Night* as a marker of his singularity and continued membership in society. The book’s representation of its narrator’s mysticism both connects him to a tradition (both drawing from *and* contributing to it) while also preserving his self-understanding as a singular person with specific traits and an interior privacy not accessible to outside authority. The Judaism that the Nazis tried to turn into a target instead serves as a shield: perhaps not protecting Wiesel physically when he was in the camps, but certainly by protecting against the reinfliction of his severance from the polis when that experience was represented. We see Wiesel’s connection to Moishe, and to the tradition he represents, every time *Night* asks a question. So while the text’s narrator may see himself as alone and abandoned, with none who would help him and nobody he can help, the book itself shows him being helped and allows him to help others. It thus literally and directly undoes some of the violence that made the Holocaust possible.

Moishe the Memoirist

Pain and suffering, as Joel Michael Reynolds writes, exist “at the overlap of dynamic sociocultural, politico-historical, and ethico-juridical systems, on the one hand, and their singularization through the life of the individual, on the

(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), np, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199280322.013.0028>

34. The problem of documents and histories being lost and then recomposed through the scholarly assemblage of what remains is itself an old tradition that Wiesel participates in. For a discussion of this problem, see the first chapter of Gershom Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987).

other.”³⁵ This chapter has, in a sense, been an examination of that relationship by way of an analysis of the intersection of a particular life (or anyway its textual representation) with the Holocaust. As we see with Agamben, the cutting-off from society and the world that Scarry sees as identical with pain in genocide is actually its prerequisite: by the time one gets to the concentration camp, one has already been so thoroughly extracted from the rest of the world that pain, in one respect at least, has nothing left to take. What Wiesel shows, however, is that the representation of that suffering can have precisely the opposite effect, drawing one back into the world and into a life that is not merely bare.

The form of the autobiography is useful for this purpose because of the instability of the autobiographical subject, which requires that the reader implicate themselves in the construction of that subject in order for the book to be understandable at all. Beyond that, Wiesel’s representation of the Holocaust at every step either demonstrates that the severing of its victims from the broader world was incomplete or actively repairs some of the damage. Wiesel’s use of Moishe the Beadle as a thematic double of his own role as the text’s author allows him to link that text both to past traditions that were almost (but not entirely) destroyed while also situating his work as a text that will be read and understood in the future. His depiction of an outsider who becomes the source of secret or ineffable knowledge likewise replicates the text of *Night*: a work by someone who was recently a concentration camp prisoner becomes the portal into both the terrors of the Holocaust as well as to the people and society it attempted to destroy.

Night’s literary elements—those parts of the text that, through their aesthetic qualities, draw attention to its status as a work of art and away from its status as a record of historical events—are therefore essential to its broader goals, which are not limited to transmitting facts and data. It is not a chronicle meant to be used instrumentally by historians, but rather a singular, individual text that must be understood on its own terms, which includes its status as literature. Its record of suffering does not just articulate the belief that genocides should never be allowed to happen, but actively tries to make a world in which they cannot happen. It affirms that never again means *never again*: not by anyone, not to anyone, not anywhere, not ever. Unlike the treaties which this chapter begins with, which ultimately leave the choice to intervene up to a bystander

35. Joel Michael Reynolds, *The Life Worth Living: Disability, Pain, and Mortality* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2022), 45.

who may not want to get involved, a work of literature requires active participation on the part of the reader in order for its meaning to unfold, and so one is already implicated, so to speak, from the first word. *Night* demonstrates how the representation of suffering can actually reduce and, perhaps, prevent suffering, and how it can do so without relying on ideas of sympathy, an emotion which seems to rarely affect the powerful.

FIVE

A Private Honesty

Torture and Interiority in Sarah Kane

The Subjectivity of a subject is vulnerability, exposure to affection, sensibility, a passivity more passive still than any passivity, an irrecoverable time, an unassimilable diachrony of patience, an exposedness always to be exposed the more, an exposure to expressing and thus to saying, thus to giving.

—Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being*¹

A Room of One's Own

This chapter investigates the role of interiority and its relationship to pain in the theater of Sarah Kane. Using as its theoretical basis the description of torture in Elaine Scarry's *The Body in Pain*, it shows how Kane demonstrates the breakdown of Scarry's framework in the process of developing a sequence of tragedies of competing subjectivity.² Kane was at one point the *bête noire* of British theater.³ The academic response to those plays—even now, decades after her suicide—has largely stayed attached to the terms of that controversy and has

-
1. Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being, or, Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1998), 50.
 2. Citations of Kane's theater are from Sarah Kane, *Complete Plays* (London: Bloomsbury, 2001). All citations are parenthetical and by page number.
 3. It has long been a critical commonplace for essays on Kane to start with a summary of the early response to *Blasted*, which is of little relevance to my argument. Curious readers are encouraged to study Graham Saunders, *Love Me or Kill Me: Sarah Kane and the Theatre of Extremes* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), for its detailed summaries of the varied responses to each of Kane's plays.

thereby limited its critical horizons.⁴ This chapter attempts to open up a new avenue to reading Kane, one that sees her work as philosophically and psychologically resonant and expressive of a complex and nuanced understanding of the relationship between theater, performance, and interiority, a process in which her depiction of torture is a key component. For Kane pain is distinctly expressive, due in part to pain's bidirectional character, its capacity to signify both the presence and the absence of interiority at the same time. It expresses and represents that vulnerability that Emmanuel Levinas says is essential to the nature of the subject, that "exposedness always to be exposed the more." *The Body in Pain* says that torture—which is abundant in Kane's work—"bestows visibility on the structure and enormity of what is usually private and incommunicable, contained within the boundaries of the sufferer's body."⁵ Scarry's argument is not necessarily incorrect here, but rather incomplete, for it relies not only on the assumption that pain is always a private experience that cannot be communicated. It also assumes that the strategy employed by the torturer (externalizing the experience of pain through the correlative of the prison cell) functions the way they expect it to, and functions nonreciprocally. This chapter's conclusions are thus both critical and theoretical: critical in the sense of developing a novel reading of Kane's drama that explores several major philosophical resonances in her work, and theoretical in that it uses Kane to critique and build upon Scarry's highly influential text to show how the presumption of pain's incommunicability (upon which Scarry's argument relies) leads to contradictory and paradoxical results.

I will begin by comparing two statements on the relationship between theater and space. The first is from Antonin Artaud, who in his first manifesto on the "theatre of cruelty" emphasizes the "spatial expression"⁶ required by performance, and goes on to write that in his ideal performance environment

-
4. One effect has been that the treatment of pain and suffering *as such* in Kane's work has been relatively rare, which is unusual given how commonplace those elements are in her work. For a recent exception to this trend, see Serena Guarracino, "The Scene and The Stage: A Queer Reading of Pain and Catharsis in Sarah Kane," *Whatever: A Transdisciplinary Journal of Queer Theories and Studies* 3 (2020): 333–50. See also Maria Kotampitsi, "The Representation of Pain in Selected Works by Samuel Beckett, Sarah Kane, and Howard Barker" (PhD diss., Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, 2020).
 5. Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 27. Hereafter cited parenthetically.
 6. Antonin Artaud, *The Theatre and Its Double*, trans. Victor Corti (London: Alma, 2010), 63. For Artaud's influence on Kane, see Laurens De Vos, "Sarah Kane and Antonin Artaud: Cruelty Towards the Subjectile," in *Sarah Kane in Context*, ed. Laurens De Vos and Graham Saunders (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), 126–38.

The auditorium will be enclosed within four walls stripped of any ornament, with the audience seated below, in the middle, on swivelling chairs allowing them to follow the show taking place around them. In effect, the lack of a stage in the normal sense of the word will permit the action to extend itself to the four corners of the auditorium. . . . The action will unfold, extending its trajectory from floor to floor, from place to place, with sudden outbursts flaring up in different spots like conflagrations.⁷

Compare this passage to Elaine Scarry's *The Body in Pain*, specifically from the discussion of torture, which argues that torture has much less to do with the extraction of information than it does the affectation of power, and specifically the power of the torturer over the victim's interiority. The torture room is an important element in this argument, for, as she writes, the room is "on the one hand, an enlargement of the body: it keeps warm and safe the individual it houses in the same way the body encloses and protects the individual within" while the room is also "simultaneously a miniaturization of the world, of civilization" (Scarry, 38). This similarity is no accident, for Scarry identifies "higher moments of civilization" with "more elaborate forms of self-extension" such as "the telephone or the airplane" (Scarry, 57).⁸ The room extends the self because it extends the process of enclosure that Scarry, in a Cartesian way, identifies with the process of subject formation: my room contains my body like my skull contains my mind. So-called civilization, then, is a process by which agency, and the act of enclosure, extends to farther and farther vistas. The relationship between torture and enclosure is thus quite important in Scarry, and it has for her a distinctly theatrical element: "the final product and outcome of torture" is, for her, "the fiction of power" (Scarry, 57). Thus, Scarry writes:

Through his ability to project words and sounds out into his environment, a human being inhabits, humanizes, and makes his own a space much larger than that occupied by his body alone. This space, always contracted under repressive regimes, is in torture almost wholly eliminated. The "it" in "Get it out of him" refers not just to a piece of information but to the capacity for speech itself. (Scarry, 49)

7. Artaud, *The Theatre and Its Double*, 68–69.

8. Artaud, *The Theatre and Its Double*, 57. Notably, Scarry also cites Artaud here.

In both cases the power of the performance comes from the dissolution of the spatial divisions that allow the self to be guarded. In Artaud's theater, "direct contact will be established between the audience and the show, between actors and audience, from the very fact that the audience is seated in the centre of the action, is encircled and furrowed by it."⁹ The straightforward stage/audience division of the traditional realist theater, which grants the audience a space that is "real," where the act of fiction has not taken place—and so permits them to keep a mental distance from the show regardless of how shocking it may be—is a luxury Artaud would not permit, for the performance must be all pervasive if it is to achieve its effect. Torture for Scarry operates on similar terms, but more combatively. The torturer does not invite the victim to a night of experimental theater but rather hauls them against their will into the room (or prison cell), forces them to remain there, and—more relevantly here—attempts to colonize the victim's interiority through the infliction of pain and the overwriting of that interiority's extension into the environment.

Lisa Guenther writes in her study of the phenomenology of solitary confinement, "the architectural design of the cell reflected and produced the social and political situation of the prisoner. . . . Buried from the world and confined to this living tomb, prisoners were reduced to their single individualities, their 'cellular souls.'"¹⁰ Pain—which for Scarry is destructive of both language and interiority—serves as a means of attacking this guarded cellular interior, to venture from the shared quasi-interiority of the physical environment (now fully colonized by the torturer) to assault and destroy the actual interiority guarded by that ur-enclosure of the victim's skull. Thus, much like Artaud's writing on the theater of cruelty, Scarry's writing on torture describes not merely a process of affecting power, but rather a whole theory on the relationship between interiority and exteriority, agency and performance, and the self and the world. In a sense, it is a weaponization of what T. S. Eliot called the "objective correlative" of a work of fiction,¹¹ or the way a piece of writing (Shakespearean drama in Eliot's case) depicts a character's interior indirectly by correlating it with the environment.¹²

9. Artaud, *The Theatre and Its Double*, 68.

10. Lisa Guenther, *Solitary Confinement: Social Death and Its Afterlives* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), 16.

11. See T. S. Eliot, "Hamlet," in *The Complete Prose of T. S. Eliot: The Critical Edition: The Perfect Critic, 1919–1926*, ed. Anthony Cuda and Ronald Schuchard (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), 122–28.

12. For an analysis of the role of the objective correlative in the depiction of pain, see the second chapter

Blasted takes place in a hotel room. That in itself is not usual; as critics have noted, the fact that the play begins with a man and a woman showing up at a hotel room is how *Blasted* sets up the realist veneer it will blow a large hole through later.¹³ The hotel room is nevertheless interesting when thinking about the relationship between privacy and interiority. It is a place of transition and temporary occupancy, yet rooms are designed (especially at more expensive hotels, like the one *Blasted* takes place in) to look and feel like home. Like home because they will so rarely resemble any given person's home. The purpose here is verisimilitude, a simulacrum of home-ness mostly detached from what any person's home is like. It is also a place of setting-out, a place of departure. In *Totality and Infinity*, at the start of a section on "The Dwelling," Emmanuel Levinas writes that:

[T]he privileged role of the home does not consist in being the end of human activity but in being its condition, and in this sense its commencement. . . . Yet this inwardness opens up in a home which is situated in that outside—for the home, as a building, belongs to a world of objects. . . . Concretely speaking the dwelling is not situated in the objective world, but the objective world is situated by relation to my dwelling.¹⁴

One's home, one's dwelling, serves as a starting point from which one proceeds in their engagement with the objective world, and it is so caught up in the way that the subject understands their relationship to the outside world that it would be wrong to imagine that the dweller interacts with or conceives of their dwelling objectively. It is the place where one's subjecthood becomes spatialized, and from which one sets out, or departs, toward some other destination. As Levinas remarks in an earlier work, "while the I in the world tends toward things it also withdraws from them. It is an inwardness. The I in the world has

of Jeremy Colangelo, *Diaphanous Bodies: Ability, Disability, and Modernist Irish Literature* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2021), 61–101.

13. For an analysis of Kane's relationship to broader trends in British and Continental European theater, see Andrew Haydon, "Sarah Kane and Mark Ravenhill: The 'Blood and Sperm' Generation," in *Contemporary European Playwrights*, ed. Maria M. Delgado, Bryce Lease, and Dan Rebellato (London: Routledge, 2020), 150–67. See also Ken Urban, "An Ethics of Catastrophe: The Theatre of Sarah Kane," *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art* 23, no. 3 (2001): 36–46.

14. Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969), 152–53.

an inside and an outside.”¹⁵ The resonances here with Artaud and Scarry should be clear. The self, the I, experiences its environment in part through relations of inside and outside, the dwelling being the prototypical inside space from which the I sets out into the world. Scarry’s writing on torture sees the act as a deliberate disruption of this process, which fundamentally attacks the way the subject relates to the world by overwriting the place of their setting-out, turning everything into “outside,” including the mind itself.

It is in this light that we should consider the scene description at the start of *Blasted*, which describes the setting as “a very expensive hotel room in Leeds—the kind that is so expensive it could be anywhere in the world” (3). Eventually this room becomes embroiled in the outbreak of a war, getting blasted open by an errant shell and being invaded by a soldier who treats the room and its inhabitants, Ian (a journalist) and Cate (his lover), as playthings. The nowhere-ness of the room, its lack of specificity, indicates that it is fungible and is integral to the bait-and-switch the play pulls with its seemingly realist environment: the room *could* be anywhere, but it is in Leeds at the eve of a war. Had it been anywhere else, the events of the play could not have happened. And the large hole blasted into the wall at the start of the play’s second half—which individualizes the room and makes it unlike any other—simply confirms this transition. The generic character of a *realist* space is thus contrasted with the specificity of a *real* space. Yet at the start of the play there is at least one person who is “at home” in this room: Ian. For while Cate as she steps in is “amazed at the classiness of the room” (3), Ian *makes* himself at home, pouring himself a drink and throwing his old newspapers around. As a journalist, Ian has no doubt been in many hotel rooms, and their generic appearance means that once you are used to one of them you are used to all of them. Thus, for Ian, it can serve as a dwelling, while for Cate it is part of the objective world. This particular phenomenological relationship, that Ian may dwell in this room while Cate cannot, sets up the power dynamic of the first half of the play.

The destruction of the room and the entry of the Soldier in the second half thus repeats the process. The room may be unique, but it is the Soldier, not Ian, who is used to war and to war-ravaged locales (as his lack of a proper name suggests), so it is he now who is the torturer while Ian is the victim. Notably,

15. Emmanuel Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2001), 39.

then, by the time Cate returns from scavenging she has mastered the new situation to a far greater extent than Ian has, since he is at that point blind and trapped in the room while she is able to leave it and search for food. Cate treats the room much like a dwelling, coming and going as she needs with the play treating the outside “objective” world as literally obscene, being entirely located offstage. Ian, stuck in the room, struggles to dwell in it. The end of the play suggests ambiguously that perhaps he is able to, but in the process he has been brought from a position of power over Cate to a position of dependency. Once again, the question of who may dwell in that room reflects the power balance among the play’s characters.

These observations can be supplemented with some information from the history of privacy and of the architecture of the home. Andrea Tange writes in *Architectural Identities* that in Victorian England “a house was made into a home . . . through careful attention to the interplay between the physical space and the identities contained therein.”¹⁶ This focus on the interplay between different functions of the house and the identities associated with them would have a long influence beyond the nineteenth century. The division of the house between its functions, and the designation of certain parts as being “for company” (like the living room) or “for work” (like the kitchen) would in the bourgeois home serve as a way to manage the various public and private identities that the inhabitants of the house participated in. Similarly, David Vincent argues in his history of privacy that since the Middle Ages, “in the definition and defense of privacy, there was a critical distinction between the inside and the outside of the dwelling place. . . . The expectation of what could be known of thoughts and behaviours changed radically once the threshold was crossed.”¹⁷

Furthermore, Vincent describes how, as a result, among those who could afford them, servants were a frequent site of anxiety with regards to privacy. The presence of a servant brought the room to a hybrid state, where it was at once the one person’s dwelling and another’s workplace. The household “constituted a shared world of personal knowledge,”¹⁸ where the intimate facts of one’s life and thoughts could be laid out in confidence of their secrecy, but where the material conditions which allowed that privacy—owning a large home—also

16. Andrea Kaston Tange, *Architectural Identities: Domesticity, Literature, and the Victorian Middle Classes* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), 6.

17. David Vincent, *Privacy: A Short History* (Cambridge: Polity, 2016), 3.

18. Vincent, *Privacy: A Short History*, 53.

necessitated that the privacy be transgressed by the laborers needed to keep that home functional. If, as Levinas writes, “man abides in the world as having come to it from a private domain, from being at home with himself, to which at each moment he can retire,”¹⁹ then the extension of that “home” to a physical space entails the extension of that intimacy too. Physical privacy—the enclosure of one’s dwelling—creates the precondition for its violation. Antoine Prost writes that “private life makes sense only in relation to public life,” for it is the existence of the exterior public world that makes it both possible and necessary to physically guard a place of seclusion.²⁰

While the historical process by which the bourgeois Victorian household arose may seem of far remove from Kane’s work, the history of privacy speaks to the pervasive anxiety over the public nature of one’s living space. The possibility that one’s presumed social inferior might see one’s dirty laundry—literally or figuratively—creates a tension in the relationship, inextricable from the conditions that make privacy possible, wherein the household’s power hierarchy is constantly under threat of inversion. The dynamic Scarry describes in her chapter on torture could be seen as a special case in this process, where the threat posed by the victim has been made to the greatest extent possible external to the immediate situation: the torture victim may be a political dissident, an enemy combatant, or a member of a subaltern group, but whatever threat they may pose (or may be imagined posing) to the torturer has been reduced to mere virtuality, a possibility that will likely never be actualized.

According to J. Wisniewski, “the pain inflicted on the tortured during interrogation serves to sever her connection to a world of significance.”²¹ Yet its trace of the threat is also what motivates the torture itself; it is the necessary supplement, in the Derridian sense of the term, upon which the whole system relies. Indeed, the active exclusion of the victim’s threatening agency by way of their imprisonment is what creates the situation in the first place. In an ideal act of torture, the infliction of pain breaks down the final enclosure of the victim’s psyche and completes the process of extracting them from the “public,” the broader social context that renders them threatening. As Scarry writes, “Intense pain is world-destroying. In compelling confession, the torturers compel the prisoner to record and objectify the fact that intense pain is world-destroying”

19. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 152.

20. Antoine Prost, “Introduction,” in *A History of Private Life*, Vol 5: *Riddles of Identity in Modern Times*, ed. Antoine Prost and Gérard Vincent (Cambridge: Belknap, 1991), 3.

21. J. Jeremy Wisniewski, *Understanding Torture* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 82.

(Scarry, 29). The goal, then, is to open every door and window of the victim's mental house to better reveal that it is empty.

The relationship between Ian and Cate, and later Ian and the Soldier, shows this process in action, indicating that "a central concern in Kane's work . . . is a passionate, almost pathological identification with pain and trauma and a concomitant desire to communicate the horror of pain *in its own idiom*."²² The idea that pain could be communicated *in an idiom* is I think one of Kane's major dramatic themes, that the body in pain has an *idios*, a private secluded meaning all its own, one that differentiates it from the near meaninglessness it has in Scarry. If, as Richard Ashby argues, in *Blasted* Kane investigates "the crisis of the post-Auschwitz subject, who is trapped in a totalised system that destroys the possibility of autonomy,"²³ then her investigation of pain's idiom shows how the forces producing these totalized systems—including, it would happen, the system of conventional theater she so effectively blasted a hole through—can never be completely successful.

One example of how the act of torture is self-defeating in Kane is the interaction between Ian and the Soldier. The Soldier enters the hotel room not long after it had a hole blown through the wall by an unexpected mortar shell, completely changing its status as a dwelling and, importantly, opening it up to public observation. It is almost as if the destructive power of the shell affects the structure of the stage itself, adding to the already invisible "fourth wall" (through which the audience looks) a broken third wall that allows the performance to be viewed from multiple sides (invoking the image of Artaud's stage that overlaps the audience). Much of the play's third scene (39–50) involves the Soldier asking Ian questions, many of them inane or meaningless, and Ian answering them. Occasionally the Soldier answers a question, but the conversation is highly unidirectional. For example:

IAN: I'm Welsh.

SOLDIER: Sound English, fucking accent.

IAN: I live here.

SOLDIER: Foreigner?

IAN: English and Welsh is the same. British. I'm not an import.

SOLDIER: What's fucking Welsh, never heard of it.

22. Steve Waters, "Sarah Kane: From Terror to Trauma," in *A Companion to Modern British and Irish Drama, 1880–2005*, ed. Mary Luckhurst (London: Blackwell, 2006), 373. My emphasis.

23. Richard Ashby, *King Lear "After" Auschwitz: Shakespeare, Appropriation and Theatres of Catastrophe in Post-War British Drama* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020), 235.

IAN: Come over from God knows where have their kids and call them English
 they're not English born in England don't make you English.
 SOLDIER: Welsh as in Wales?
 IAN: It's attitude. (41)

Neither of them are really talking *to* each other, they are barely interlocutors, yet the Soldier's superior command of the room and his possession of a gun allows him to demand a response from Ian that Ian cannot demand in turn. This pattern holds through the conversation that takes place right before the Soldier rapes Ian:

SOLDIER: You don't know fuck all about me
 I went to school.
 I made love with Col.
 Bastards killed her, now I'm here.
 Now I'm here.

(He pushes the rifle in Ian's face.)

Turn over, Ian.
 IAN: Why?
 SOLDIER: Going to fuck you.
 IAN: No.
 SOLDIER: Kill you then.
 IAN: Fine.
 SOLDIER: See. Rather be shot than fucked and shot.
 IAN: Yes.
 SOLDIER: And now you agree with anything I say. (49)

Note here the lack of first-person pronouns in the Soldier's speech until the last line, right before he begins sexually assaulting Ian. Generally, as we see also at the start of this passage, the Soldier reserves his first-person pronouns for moments of self-assertion, that is, moments where he literally asserts the fact of his selfhood, his inner ego, against the totalizing violence in his life, or in Ian's case against a person he believes represents that violence.

As Stanghellini and Rosfort write, "the self can only become who she or he is by becoming a person through the dialectic of selfhood and otherness. Or to put it differently, the self has to reappropriate itself as a person through other-

ness in order to come to terms with who and what she or he is.”²⁴ What the Soldier has done—and what the act of torture necessarily does—is depersonalize himself through the very act of self-assertion. He asks, but mostly does not answer, questions, and he refuses to relate to Ian or anyone through any means other than violence and aggression. In analyzing the play’s depiction of rape, Kim Solga argues that the “anxiety, and often anger, over the play’s violence turns out, at bottom, to be but the symptom of a much more uncanny fear of the loss of spectatorial control.”²⁵ For anxious, fearful power, the kind of power that engages in the act of torture—whether it is a single soldier or a whole government—it is that the world is not a panopticon, that the privacy of the other exists, and that difference and disobedience cannot be fully brought under control, which torture desperately tries to solve. Yet the very attempt to break through to the enclosure of the mind is what cuts the torturer off from any relation with the other, isolating and diminishing both. One may blast a hole into a room and see what is inside, but one cannot look inside the mind by blowing a hole in someone’s head; in fact, it makes them much more difficult to talk to. Thus, in *Blasted*, both the dialogue and dramaturgy investigate how the problem of the room, the dwelling, the scene, is but a transposition of the problem of the mind that relates to it, a way of trying to access the psyche by other means. Thus, our investigation of the dwelling place in Kane leads us directly to the matter of pain’s expressive quality, and the question of what, if anything, a screaming person has to say.

The Pain in Kane

To what extent can a person in pain communicate their subjectivity? Scarry, as already established, would hold that when pain is sufficiently intense the question of subjectivity becomes moot: there simply isn’t a there *there*. Yet the sociologist Erving Goffman would beg to differ. In his *Forms of Talk*, he relates pain cries to what psychologists refer to as self-talk, the act of talking to oneself, which serves many important psychological self-regulatory functions. Yet, as

24. Giovanni Stanghellini and René Rosfort, *Emotions and Personhood: Exploring Fragility—Making Sense of Vulnerability* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 93.

25. Kim Solga, “*Blasted*’s Hysteria: Rape, Realism, and the Thresholds of the Visible,” *Modern Drama* 50, no. 3 (2007): 352. See also Ian Ward, “Rape and Rape Mythology in the Plays of Sarah Kane,” *Comparative Drama* 47, no. 2 (2013): 225–48.

Goffman argues, self-talk is also “a threat to intersubjectivity” since “it warns others that they might be wrong in assuming a jointly maintained base of ready mutual intelligibility.”²⁶ To talk to yourself is to participate in, and communicate, an internal reality not accessible to others, in this case the internal reality of the pain that no other can directly experience. It is evidence of one’s inaccessible interior, of one’s status as other. Goffman considers pain cries as a variety of self-talk and writes that “the cry in these cases can serve as a self-regulated indicator of what is happening, providing, a reading for the instigator of the pain, who might not otherwise have access to the information needed. The meaning, then, may not be ‘I have been hurt,’ but rather, ‘You are just now coming to hurt me.’”²⁷ The pain cry thus serves two functions: first to regulate one’s own subjective response to the cause of pain, and second to indicate to others that what is currently happening is in fact painful, that the act has had a subjective effect not otherwise visible. Pain expression thus has a *bidirectional* character, where it at once pulls the self inwards (as in Scarry) while also engaging in an act of intersubjective communication. Torture, in seeking out these cries, thus is again at cross-purposes with itself, for in every sign that it takes to indicate the destruction of interiority it may see the shadow of the reciprocity to which it has been invited.

Kane’s later play *Crave* gives a more explicit engagement with the relationship between torture and interiority. The character A for example describes how “I am shaking, sobbing with the memory of her, when she loved me, before I was her torturer, before there was no room in her for me” (177). Though it is difficult to ascribe definite characteristics to the elliptical and intertextual characters in *Crave*,²⁸ A seems to represent in part a kind of patriarchal, chauvinist authority reminiscent of Ian in the first half of *Blasted*. Meg Peters has commented on how the ellipticality of the writing and characterization makes it difficult to note any definite starting point to the various traumas that *Crave* describes, writing that “the cycle of trauma that takes place in the play functions as a barrier to the relief of distress for the characters. . . . There is no clear

26. Erving Goffman, *Forms of Talk* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981), 85.

27. Goffman, *Forms of Talk*, 105–6.

28. With regards to the difficulty in summarizing *Crave*, I note along with Karoline Gritzner the “characters’ problematic relationships with external reality” (*Adorno and Modern Theatre: The Drama of the Damaged Self in Bond, Rudkin, Barker and Kane* [London: Palgrave, 2015], 157). It is difficult to tell reliably what monologues refer to things the characters really (in the world of the play) did, and which ones are merely imagined. I have thus tried to remain agnostic on such matters; whether A really did what they say they did, or merely imagined doing so, is immaterial to my analysis. It is the attitude, the approach to intersubjectivity in the abstract, with which I am concerned.

‘perpetrator’ of violence, and no clear ‘victim.’”²⁹ And while in this passage and elsewhere A self-identifies as the aggressor, the psychological framework of torture serves to efface the relationship between perpetrator and victim. As I. Felipe Alarcón writes, “a torturer does not see a body, but only signs. A torturer is a writer, but a writer of bodies, and with his writing he would render the body invisible.”³⁰ A page later, A has another monologue, again reminiscing their lost love as well as their violent possessiveness:

A: don’t say no to me you can’t say no to me because it’s such a relief to have love again and to lie in bed and be held and touched and kissed and adored and your heart will leap when you hear my voice and see my smile and feel my breath on your neck . . . I will lie to you from day one and use you and screw you and break your heart . . . I will take what I want and then walk away and owe you nothing. (178)

In A’s mind, the Venn diagram of love and torture overlaps at the desire to possess and overwrite the other.

The figure of A in *Crave* is, like Kane’s torturer characters more generally, caught up in a rejection of need, of the fact that they live by being dependent on other people and things. Levinas argues that the traditional argument that identifies need with lack is misguided, for “what we live on does not enslave us; we enjoy it. . . . The human being thrives on his needs; he is happy for his need.”³¹ As he goes on to say, “happiness is made up not of an absence of needs, whose tyranny and imposed character one denounces, but of the satisfaction of all needs. . . . Happiness is accomplishment: it exists in a soul satisfied and not in a soul that has extirpated its needs.”³² A, like Ian, in order to be happy must fulfill their need for touch, for closeness, and for affection, yet they seem to have misidentified the need itself, and not its lack of fulfillment, as the source of their unhappiness. Thus, they heap suffering upon their romantic partners and abuse them in order to keep their otherness at bay; unable to eliminate the need for an other, they try to turn the other into an object so as to secure their pretensions of self-sufficiency. A’s declaration that “I will lie to you from day one and use you and screw you and break your heart” is thus part of the same logical

29. Meg Peters, “‘White on White and Black’: The Terror of Whiteness in Sarah Kane’s *Crave*,” *The Comparatist* 42 (2018): 100.

30. I. Felipe Alarcón, “On the Body: Torture and Writing,” *CR: The New Centennial Review* 12, no. 2 (2012): 252.

31. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 114.

32. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 115.

structure that had him praising the “heart” of their lover earlier in that same monologue (“and your heart will leap when you hear my voice”). A can only accept the fulfillment of their need for the other by denying that otherness, by rejecting their ethical responsibility to the other or by claiming vicarious control over the other’s interior state.

The structure of *Crave*, being composed of several overlapping monologue sequences such that it is not clear whether or where the characters are communicating or simply delivering a soliloquy, means that there are fewer opportunities for A’s delusions to be challenged. More commonly, as I have suggested above, the presence of the suffering person troubles the smooth affectation of the (literal or figurative) torturer’s desire through pain’s bidirectional quality, its capacity to serve as evidence both for and against the existence of an interior state inaccessible to outside observers.

Kane achieves a similar effect through quite different means in her second play, *Phaedra’s Love*, an adaptation of Seneca’s *Phaedra* performed in 1996. The play depicts the title character’s obsessive love for her seemingly repulsive and abusive stepson Hippolytus, the son of the Greek hero Theseus and the amazon Hippolyta. The slothful Hippolytus of Kane’s rendition “starts off as what Artaud would call a mummy, the prototype of Western man, spoiled and brain-dead due to an overdose of consumerism.”³³ Yet, locked in his room watching television, eating sweets, and having sex all day, he is also at the near pinnacle of privacy, able due to his wealth and status to avoid almost any human contact he does not desire and largely rejecting interaction with the outside world. Daniel J. Solove, in his *Understanding Privacy*, cautions us that although it is individuating, we should not think of privacy in solely individualistic terms since it emerges and functions in relation to our relationships with others: “privacy is not something that atomistic individuals possess in the state of nature and sacrifice in order to join the social compact. We establish privacy protections because of their profound effects on the structure of power and freedom within society as a whole.”³⁴ Privacy has an extremely important psychological function, allowing people to “escape from the relentless force of social judgement, which in too pervasive a dose can stunt self-development.”³⁵ Again the relevance of Levinas’s idea of dwelling is evident: the home serves as an extension of the private psyche and as a refuge from which we set out to encounter a

33. Laurens De Vos, *Cruelty and Desire in the Modern Theater: Antonin Artaud, Sarah Kane, and Samuel Beckett* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2011), 92.

34. Daniel J. Solove, *Understanding Privacy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), 93.

35. Solove, *Understanding Privacy*, 94.

world we share with other minds. *Crave* and *Blasted* show us how the bidirectional effect of pain is matched with a similarly doubled character of privacy, the torturer's desire to invade and obliterate the otherness of the other being matched with a desire to preserve their own selfhood.

In all these cases, the aggressive party attempts to establish a double standard—privacy for me and not for thee—which in torture and interrogation is intensified: one party asks the questions and the other answers them. With Ian, who rapes Cate offstage during the first section of *Blasted*, the double standard is reversed upon the arrival of the Soldier, whose inaccessibility becomes complete with his offstage suicide. *Phaedra's Love* follows a similar pattern with the relationship between Phaedra and Hippolytus. But while in *Blasted* the conflict takes place amid sexual assaults, in *Phaedra's Love* the sexual encounters are consensual but deeply unsatisfying, and in Phaedra's case traumatizing.

HIPPOLYTUS: If we fuck we'll never talk again.

PHAEDRA: I'm not like that.

HIPPOLYTUS: I am.

PHAEDRA: I'm not.

HIPPOLYTUS: Course you are.

They stare at each other.

PHAEDRA: I'm in love with you.

HIPPOLYTUS: Why?

PHAEDRA: You thrill me.

[. . .]

They both stare at the television.

Eventually, Phaedra moves over to Hippolytus.

He doesn't look at her.

She undoes his trousers and performs oral sex on him.

He watches the screen throughout and eats his sweets. (80–81)

Recall again Levinas's point about happiness arriving through the fulfillment of a need rather than its removal. Being happy, he says, requires that one accept need and dependency as essential facts of life. Hippolytus's aggressive unhappiness would suggest that he guards his psychological privacy to as great an extent

as his physical privacy. To paraphrase A, he refuses to let his heart “leap.” In a conversation with Phaedra right after the section quoted above, she tells Hippolytus that “I want to see you lose yourself,” to which he replies, “It’s not a pleasant sight” (82).

Hippolytus’s withdrawal from the world, and indeed from pleasure, stems then from his desire to maintain self-control, as well as his interior privacy. Recall that, in both Seneca’s *Phaedra* and the Euripides play *Hippolytus* from which it derives, Hippolytus is closely linked to the idea of chastity. In Euripides, he takes a vow of chastity due to his love of hunting, the Greek goddess of the hunt, Artemis, herself being a virgin. In Seneca he similarly expresses a disinterest in human affairs and a preference for being out in nature on his hunting trips, and at the beginning of the play prays to Diana, the Roman analogue to Artemis, for her favor. In both cases, his rejection of all sexual activity—not merely with his stepmother, but with anyone—is implicitly equated with his lack of interest in human affairs and the maintenance of his private, solitary life hunting in the woods. In Kane’s version, the privacy of the wilderness is replaced with the privacy of the bedroom, a privacy that is far less secure due to its greater proximity to the public life of the palace and the outside world. In attempting to seduce Hippolytus, Kane’s Phaedra thus plays into a now-familiar pattern, where a character, upon entering the private dwelling of another, attempts to overwrite their psychology. In this case, Phaedra wishes to have the love she feels reflected back at her, despite Hippolytus rejecting not just her love, but of love as such. We can therefore see the deliberate lack of interest he takes in her sexual advances—his continuing to watch television, for example—as a kind of psychological retaliation, an attempt to make Phaedra feel his apathy in place of her love.

As with *Crave*, then, we can see in the dynamic of torture and suffering a fear of intersubjectivity. The example from *Phaedra’s Love* is illustrative: Hippolytus does not wish for his face to be visible during an orgasm because, like the grimace of a person in pain, such responses are reflexive and thus honestly communicative of an interior experience. It is *because* such acts are communicative and *because* they are involuntary that, paradoxically from Scarry’s perspective, they can be better reflective of interior mental states than ordinary nonreflexive language. To “lose yourself,” as Phaedra asks Hippolytus to do, in this context does not mean that one loses one’s selfhood, but rather that one ceases, or be forced by one’s body to cease, all of the social niceties that keep that self concealed. When genuine the wince or the grimace, because it is reflex-

ive, signifies the person's interior state without guile, because by definition the possibility of guile has been removed.³⁶ We should also remember that Hippolytus is also trying to enforce a double standard with regards to his relationships: he is perfectly fine with having sex with other people, many of whom no doubt "lose" themselves in the process. He creates a one-way intersubjective relationship, where the sexual partner expresses their interiority while he remains stoic and removed. By asking *him* to lose control, Phaedra asks for emotional reciprocity, which, despite accepting her advances, he refuses to give. While some scholars have read Phaedra as "enslaved by desire" and Hippolytus as "lack[ing] interiority,"³⁷ this reading instead sees the encounter between them as instantiating a conflict over two models of emotional intimacy, one defined by a desire for reciprocity and recognition and the other by a desire for privacy and individuality, the latter marked by an indifference to the privacy and individuality of others.

It is in this context that I see Phaedra's suicide as also an act of retaliation. As Erica Bexley points out, despite all the sex and violence in this play, her suicide is the only obscene act that is literally obscene—that is, offstage.³⁸ This fact is notable given the earlier discussion about the relationship between the space of a dwelling, the space of a stage, and interiority.³⁹ An offstage suicide (like, for example, the Soldier's) is something of an antiobjective correlative. Instead of taking the character's interior thoughts and metaphorically externalizing them as an object visible to the audience, the suicide (whether the character intends it to or not) forecloses access to the interior by both killing the character and providing no representation of that death that the audience could see and interpret. And while of course a character could come in and describe what happened, describe what they saw and heard, even recount the dying character's final words, as Scarry so emphatically argues the internal pains of that character are inaccessible to anyone but them.

By killing herself, Phaedra denies Hippolytus access to her interiority. By

36. I am not the first person to make an argument like this. For a summary of the relationship between pain gestures and communication, see chapter 6 of Joanna Bourke, *The Story of Pain: From Prayer to Painkillers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 159–91.

37. Dror Harari, "Artificial, Animal, Machinal: Body, Desire, and Intimacy in Modernist and Postmodernist Theatre" *NTQ* 29, no. 4 (2013): 318.

38. Erica Bexley, "Show or Tell? Seneca and Sarah Kane's *Phaedra* Plays," *Trends in Classics* 3 (2011): 365–93.

39. Similarly, Kim Solga writes in her reading of the rapes in *Blasted* that "Cate's rape is significant for its very purposeful elision and that, in ignoring its off-stage status, we risk missing the play's most trenchant critique of the workings of realism" ("*Blasted's* Hysteria," 349).

killing herself offstage, she also denies it to the audience, who just earlier watched her have sex with her stepson. The audience is thus aligned with Hippolytus by way of its voyeurism, its having watched something that she quite explicitly does not want other people to know about, and a fact about her interiority, her sexual urges, that she considers shameful. Similarly, Phaedra's claim that she was raped by Hippolytus—in addition to being in line with the classical plays Kane draws from—effectively returns dishonesty for dishonesty. It is a way of protecting Phaedra's interiority by dismissing in advance any claim that she felt attracted to Hippolytus even as she disparages his character. It also, in a seeming paradox, forces Hippolytus out into the public world while also permanently exiling him from any positive social relationship: at the end of the play, his father Theseus pushes him into a crowd of people who, while declaring him a “royal raping bastard,” strangle him and tear his body to shreds (100–101). True to the play's origins in the work of the Roman Seneca, he becomes *homo sacer*, in the ancient sense of one “who may be killed and yet not sacrificed. . . . An obscure figure of Roman law, in which human life is included in the juridical order solely in the form of its exclusion (that is, of its capacity to be killed).”⁴⁰ In a sense, then, Phaedra's rape accusation kills Hippolytus by giving him too much of what he wanted: to be included in society in one way, as a voyeur of interiority, but excluded in another way, by his near total privacy and lonesomeness. In the end, however, he is undone, torn open and fed to vultures on the street, the image of his pain visible for all to see.

Edible Others

We have already seen how Levinas's concept of the dwelling, the base from which one ventures and to which one returns and in relation to which the world of objectivity is understood, allows us to elaborate on Scarry's concept of torture to understand how it applies to a nonideal situation such as the scenario of Kane's *Blasted*. We have also seen how the bidirectional character of pain, which can signify both the absence and presence of interiority and which draws attention to or away from the sufferer's subjectivity, troubles the easy unidirectional psychological relationship Scarry posits, permitting (as we see in *Phaedra's*

40. Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 8.

Love) a mental power struggle over the interior privacy and the need, in a reciprocal romantic relationship, for its involuntary exposure. Hippolytus barely tolerates others to enter his private room and abides no entry to his psychology, which is why critics have tended to see him as a nonsubject, a void of interiority amid the agonized figures of this tragedy. Like A, and like Ian and the Soldier, he uses others and voyeuristically witnesses their undoing (albeit by way of pleasure instead of pain) and rejects any who would undo him.

What is missing from this analysis is the body. One can, after all, invade the body as one might invade a room, entering it through violence or (as discussed here) consumption in order to affect, literally or symbolically, the mind of the other. Critics have noted the prevalence of consumption metaphors in Kane's work, especially in *Blasted*. Seán McCorry writes of Cate's vegetarianism, for example, commenting on her "visceral refusal to allow her body to incorporate the body of the other."⁴¹ There are many such instances of Cate's refusal to symbolically incorporate the other through consumption: at the start of the play it is Ian, not her, who goes for the minibar; she often cleans or wipes herself when Ian kisses her, especially early in the play (e.g., on 17); and after performing oral sex on Ian in the second scene she "spits frantically, trying to get every trace of him out of her mouth" (31) and acts with disgust when she finds a hair in her throat (33). Ian's repeated attempts to undermine her boundaries thus resemble not only the interaction between him and the Soldier in the play's second half, but also the relationship between Phaedra and Hippolytus. In the opening section of the play, after inviting her into a space where he is comfortable and she is not, Ian begins peppering Cate with questions while rarely answering questions of his own and even attempts to undermine her confidence in her ability to find a job, notably right after seeing her nibble on a sandwich (8). The abuse and interrogation here serve to proxy a fight over who gets to access whose interiority, and in what terms, and as with Phaedra and Hippolytus the question is whether or not the relationship will be reciprocal.

The end of the play, where Ian has been left blind and suicidal and dependent on Cate for food, shows at last the reversal of the relationship they had at the play's beginning. If we read Ian's frequent drinking at the play's start in relation to his comfort with the hotel room and its status as a dwelling place, then what he is really consuming there is an image of himself, like Narcissus falling

41. Seán McCorry, "'This Disgusting Feast of Filth': Meat Eating, Hospitality, and Violence in Sarah Kane's *Blasted*," *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 24, no. 4 (2017): 758.

in love with his own reflection. At the end of the play, when he finds and begins to eat the corpse of the baby Cate brought with her after her first trip to find food (60), and which, while it was alive, she had planned to take care of, serves as a transition point. On the one hand, eating a dead person would allow to the nth degree what Hippolytus attempted in his relationships: to consume the other without any chance of the other consuming you. Yet because the baby is dead, *there is no other*, and thus nothing to consume. This moment comes right after Ian begged Cate not to leave him to search for food again:

CATE: I'm hungry.

IAN: I know so am I.

But.

I'd rather—

It's not—

Please, Cate.

I'm blind.

CATE: I'm hungry.

(*She goes.*) (59)

Ian, here, seems to be asking Cate to die with him. The sequence of “I know [you're hungry] so am I. / But. / I'd rather—” suggests that Ian wants the two of them to starve to death together. By this point, Ian has already asked Cate to let him kill himself, and she has refused. Forced to remain alive against his will, and with his subjectivity therefore still available (and while still able to be “undone” by intense pain) he offers reciprocity in the form of their mutual withdrawal from each other. She refuses that also and, in a scene reminiscent of the end of Beckett's *Endgame* where Clov abandons Ham blind (like Ian) in his chair, she leaves in search of food, not abandoning Ian but rather working to keep him alive. Alone, he has the option to let himself starve, but he is at last “undone” by his hunger pains and eats the dead baby. Having revealed his interior—both his hunger and his desire to live—Ian is at last left no choice but to live and to depend on Cate, whose mastery of the world now surpasses his own.

This relationship is iterated in Kane's third play *Cleansed*, first in the relationship between Graham and Grace, and second in the Carl and Rod's responses to Tinker's torture. In the latter case, I refer to what Scarry says of the person who confesses under torture:

World, self, and voice are lost, or nearly lost, through the intense pain of torture and not through the confession as is wrongly suggested by its connotations of betrayal. *The prisoner's confession merely objectifies the fact of their being almost lost*, makes their invisible absence, or nearby absence, visible to the torturers. To assent to words that through the thick agony of the body can be only dimly heard, or to reach aimlessly for the name of a person or a place that has barely enough cohesion to hold its shape as a word . . . is a way of saying, yes, all is almost gone now. (Scarry, 35, my emphasis)

The point of torture for Scarry, remember, is not to extract information, but to perform a fiction of power through the destruction of the mind of the victim. Torture does not function that way in *Cleansed* or, really, in any Kane play. Though it still does not serve, except incidentally, to extract information, and though it does engage in a performance of power, what signifies the success of that power is not the destruction of the victim's interior, but instead its revelation. In this respect I would say that Eva Gil Cuder, in her reading of *Cleansed*, is on the right track in comparing it to Ovid's depiction of the myth of Philomel and her sister Procne, who were mutilated by their rapists to prevent their testimony.⁴² In Ovid—as with other depictions of the myth, like Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*, which alludes to Philomel and Procne though they do not appear—the mutilation is not meant to destroy Philomel and Procne's witnessing, but rather obscure it, the interiority of the two women being intact but inexpressible save by the cleverness of Philomel, who depicted the rape in her weaving.

The plot of *Cleansed* follows the several victims of Tinker, a doctor who performs horrible experiments on his prisoners, mutilating and torturing them for obscure purposes. Rod and Carl are two of his victims, gay men in love with each other yet misaligned in their commitment to the relationship (in their first scene, Carl asks Rod to marry him and Rod refuses [109]). At the beginning of the play, Carl is adamant that he would die for Rod, and Rod does not believe him, instead affirming his love only in the present, when it can be guaranteed: "I'll do my best, moment to moment, not to betray you. / Now" (111). Tinker observes this conversation (112) and later tests Carl's claims by threatening to torture him to death unless he declares he would rather that Rod die instead of

42. Eva Gil Cuder, "More Than Words: Drama and Spectrality for the Articulation of Trauma," *Journal of English Studies* 10 (2012): 76–77

him, and Carl does, crying out “ROD NOT ME” right before Tinker, instead of killing Carl, cuts out his tongue (117–18). This moment begins a pattern of mutilation, where Tinker, whenever he witnesses Carl attempt to communicate, amputates the part of Carl’s body that was used, such as later when Carl tries to write in the dirt and ends up with his hands cut off (leading to the highly morbid stage direction “Carl tries to pick up his hands—he can’t, he has no hands” [129]), or when Tinker sees Carl dancing and so cuts off Carl’s feet (136). Tinker’s treatment of Carl resembles an ironic Dantean punishment, where in failing to convey his true nature when he proposed to Rod he is unable to convey anything about his interior state ever again, robbed of the body parts needed to speak, to write, to dance. One imagines that any creative solutions on Carl’s part—such as writing in the dirt with his nose instead of his fingers—would have a similar result. While Tinker’s motivations are unclear in the play, on a figurative level we can see the interaction with Carl as an attempt to escape the problem of the torturer—that the cry of pain signifies both success and failure—by using mutilation to render Carl a docile, uncommunicative body.

Notably, however, the mutilations lack the characteristics of torture as Scarry describes it. The stage directions are short and to the point—“Tinker produces a large pair of scissors and cuts off Carl’s tongue” (118); “He forces Carl to the ground and cuts off his feet” (136)—which, like the pithy “they fight” direction of a Shakespearean play, leaves it up to the director as to how elaborate the process should be. I take from this concision that the gruesomeness of the mutilation is inessential to the drama and that the play’s broader thematic concerns can be achieved even if the scene is performed quickly. Thus, maybe paradoxically, I hold that the relationship between Tinker and Carl does not disrupt my reading of torture in *Kane* but rather affirms it by omission. The best way Tinker finds to finally cut Carl off from intersubjective expression is to avoid the very trappings of torture that in Scarry are essential; the room, for example, is missing (Tinker simply appears wherever Carl happens to be), as are the theatrics of showing off the torture device or colonizing the victim’s interiority.

Carl’s treatment differs in interesting ways from that of Grace, whose brother, Graham, Tinker helps commit suicide in the play’s opening scene. Grace, over the course of the play, attempts to become her brother, and the entire process is tied up with consumption metaphors. For example, when Grace first arrives at Tinker’s lab, she demands to be given her brother’s old clothes, which she then puts on before breaking down in tears. Tinker at this

point tells her that she has to leave, only for Grace to *volunteer* to be a patient of his in order to continue her transformation. Tinker agrees and represents that agreement by giving Grace a pill to swallow, which she does (112–14). The next scene is where Carl loses his tongue, which ends with Tinker forcing Carl to swallow the wedding ring he used to propose to Rod (118). Both Carl and Grace are forced (or allowed) by Tinker to endlessly consume an other. Grace consumes/is consumed by her brother through her slow transformation, which involves surgical procedures to change her body as well as electrical shocks to cauterize “bits of her brain” (135) and destroy parts of her personality. In the final scene, the play no longer identifies her as Grace, but as Grace/Graham, her brother now fully incorporated into her. Rod and Carl come to a similarly difficult ending: near the conclusion of the play, Rod finally tells Carl “I will always love you,” and then give his own ring to Carl to swallow. Tinker gives Rod the same choice that he gave Carl—“you or him”—and Rod agrees to die, though instead of torturing Rod to death as he threatened with Carl, Tinker simply cuts his throat (142).

Grace and Carl are clear parallels, and both end in similar positions: consuming the interiority of another while their own interiority is either cut off or partially destroyed. Indeed, Grace, in her quest to become her brother, undergoes willingly what, for Scarry, is the goal of all torture: the elimination (partial in Grace’s case) of the otherness of the other through the overwriting of their subjectivity, her mind now partially replaced with what the play represents as being Graham’s. Carl, on the other hand, not only consumes his and Rod’s rings, but also consumes Rod, listening to him, and interacting with him, while never being able to communicate himself. The two end up, in the final scene, in an embrace, sharing nothing but the “insurmountable personal distance”⁴³ they have with everybody else. Yet they have also moved in opposite directions. As Nina White writes, Grace’s transformation is an expression of her grief over her brother, and the process of “giving up her own identity and transforming into Graham is her solution to his loss.”⁴⁴ Carl, however, is left freshly grieving Rod.

Furthermore, while Carl’s means of expression have been diminished, he still has his subjectivity, and he has all the time he needs to dwell on his misfor-

43. Annette Pankratz, “Neither Here nor There: Theatrical Space in Kane’s Work,” in *Sarah Kane in Context*, ed. Laurens De Vos and Graham Saunders (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), 154–55.

44. Nina White, “‘It was like lightning’: The Theatrical Resonances of Sarah Kane in Eimear McBride’s *A Girl Is a Half-Formed Thing*,” *Irish Studies Review* 24, no. 4 (2018): 567.

tunes. Though he has symbolically consumed Rod, the consumption is *only* symbolic and cannot fulfill his need for love and human connection. As Rod advises Carl at one point, "death isn't the worst thing they can do to you. Tinker made a man bite off another man's testicles. Can take away your life but not give you death instead" (136). I would not go on to say that Carl's life is not strictly speaking "take[n] away," as there are plenty of people with disabilities like his who have full and complex lives, but his life *as he knew it* is certainly over, and he has no doubt suffered enormously. And if he did want to die, he would be left in a situation much like Ian is at the end of *Blasted*, stuck being alive against his will because he is rendered by mutilation unable to kill himself.

As Scarry argues, "physical pain is so incontestably real [to the sufferer] that it seems to confer its quality of 'incontestability' on that power that has brought it into being. It is, of course, precisely because the reality of that power is so highly contestable, the regime so unstable, that torture is being used" (Scarry, 27). Sarah Kane's plays are in part an investigation of this conundrum, one that expands it instead of solving it, drawing further attention to the precariousness of a performance of power, which like all performances can only communicate "when actor and audience know each other's codes."⁴⁵ Kane's plays can be read, I think, as tragedies of interiority, and like all classical tragedies their plots are built upon an inevitability.⁴⁶ In this case, the inevitability of the tragic plot arises from the competing needs to escape the other and consume it, to eliminate the otherness of the other by becoming it or obliterating it. Carl and Grace of *Cleansed* represent extremes of this position, but we have already seen the same kind of pattern elsewhere in Kane's work. Kane's depictions of torture, and of situations resembling torture, serve to give this process an objective, stageable form. The result are masterful dramas of phenomenology, not debased but rather enhanced by their relentless gruesomeness.

45. Stefani Brusberg-Kiermeier, "Cruelty, Violence, and Rituals," in *Sarah Kane in Context*, ed. Laurens De Vos and Graham Saunders (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), 81.

46. As Erich Auerbach puts it, "Classical tragedy . . . discloses the end of [the protagonist's] career, when he has left all diversity behind him and no escape is possible; deciphered and manifest, his disastrous fate stands there before him like a stranger . . . he tries to defend himself against the universal which is destined to engulf his individual life; he flings himself into the hopeless final struggle against his own daemon" (*Dante and the Secular World* [New York: NYRB Classics, 2004], 3).

Wit, Illness, and Understanding

Toward an Ethics of Clinical Hermeneutics

The theories of feminist identity that elaborate predicates of color, sexuality, ethnicity, class, and able-bodiedness invariably close with an embarrassed “etc.” at the end of the list. [...] This is a sign of exhaustion as well as of the illimitable process of signification itself. It is the supplément, the excess that necessarily accompanies any effort to posit identity once and for all.

—Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*¹

We must admit that the truth we seek through our text remains something of a mystery. Seldom are the answers in medicine more than tentative.

—Stephen L. Daniel, “The Patient as Text”²

Supplementary Mimetics

Referring to his notably difficult final work, *Finnegans Wake*, the Irish novelist James Joyce once remarked that “one great part of every human existence is passed in a state which cannot be rendered sensible by the use of wideawake language, cutanddry grammar and goahead plot.”³ The “one great part of every human existence” here refers to sleeping and dreaming, and on at least one level of interpretation the *Wake* can be said to “take place” “in” a dream. Its language,

-
1. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London: Routledge, 2008), 196.
 2. Stephen L. Daniel, “The Patient as Text: A Model of Clinical Hermeneutics,” *Theoretical Medicine* 7 (1986): 207.
 3. Qtd. in Richard Ellmann, *James Joyce: New and Revised Edition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 584–85.

then, is mimetic; it is complex in the manner and to the extent that the object it represents is complex. The text is open-ended and yet recursive, obscure and yet colloquial, ineffable and yet quotidian, numinous and yet mundane, because that is what dreams are like, and a text that attempted to represent dreams with the diction and structure of a conventional novel (or a conventional anything, really) would be in a sense dishonest, inscribing under the pretense of a dream a text that is clearly wide awake.

This book has spent a great deal of time interpreting expressions of pain, as well as laying down the philosophical framework within which such interpretations are possible, yet it has given very little attention to the question of pain hermeneutics as such. Largely, this lack of attention has been due to the nature of the argument; having spent so much time demonstrating that “pain hermeneutics” is not somehow a contradiction in terms, I am left with precious little space to elaborate on what it might involve or how it might work. Instead of attempting the impossible task of developing a complete system of interpretation in the space of a chapter, I focus on a question that will no doubt be relevant to future studies of this topic: the question of ambiguity. “Seldom are the answers in medicine more than tentative,” observes Stephen Daniel, and this motility, this nonfinality, repeats the ambiguous nature of human identity, which Judith Butler calls “the *supplément*, the excess that necessarily accompanies any effort to posit identity once and for all.” It should be clear by now that *Agony for Others* does not so much refute the argument that pain opposes language and thinking so much as moves beyond it, showing by way of demonstration that it is not really wrong, but rather incomplete or insufficient. For the central fact of that argument—the inability to directly communicate the qualitative nature of one’s pain to another—is indeed a fact. But where authors like Elaine Scarry take the ambiguity of pain communication (i.e., its bidirectional character) as a reason to form an antihermeneutics, a system of interpreting what the inability to interpret pain might mean, I instead take the ambiguity of pain expression to be, like the dream language of the *Wake*, mimetic, imitative of its object. What we encounter when we encounter another’s pain is not an indeterminate failed expression of some clearly known and understood subjective feeling, but an indeterminate expression of an indeterminate state. For while to have pain is to know *that* I have pain, awareness of the existence of an experience is not the same as experiencing it. An experience of pain occurs over a span of time and in relation to past memories, present contexts, and future expectations. One thus has no more knowledge at the outset of how an

experience of pain will pan out than one has at the outset of how a car accident will pan out: I may know that I have lost control of the wheel and that I am about to hit another car (I know that I am “in a car accident”), but what sorts of results that specifically entails will only be knowable once the event is over. (Indeed, discussions of pain epistemology should in general do better to distinguish between knowledge of the *fact* of pain in another person versus knowledge of the *quality* of pain in another person.) By definition, when one is *in* pain one has not yet felt the *end* of pain, and so the experience is itself indeterminate. Thus, the expression of that pain will be indeterminate in turn.

It is for this reason that I focus this chapter on Margaret Edson’s one-act play *Wit*,⁴ a text that is at least as much about interpretation as it is about pain and illness.⁵ It is also a text that seems to announce its determinacy, declaring, like the start of any good tragedy, what the ending will entail: “it is not my intention to give away the plot” says the protagonist, Vivian Bearing, in the play’s opening scene, “but I think I die at the end.”⁶ Framing the text as a tragedy (though not a perfect one, notice that “I think”) brings into play notions of determinism similar to those discussed at the end of this book’s chapter on Sarah Kane, transforming an open-ended series of events that simply went badly due to chance into something fated, determined in advance, a car crash that you can see happening from the moment the ignition key is turned. Yet as we will see, the tragic framing of the play does not so much impose determinacy than it does strongly suggest it, the gesture acting less as a spoiler for the ending than the creation of an expectation so that it may later be dashed.

I chose *Wit* as the focus of this chapter for several reasons. First, because the sorts of questions I wish to ask here—How can the body in extreme pain be interpreted? How does pain hermeneutics intersect with broader questions of bioethics and patients’ rights?—are themselves directly addressed in the play. Second, because its direct concern with bioethical questions has made

4. The title is sometimes written in a stylized form as *W;t*, reflecting the thematic role of the semicolon in the play.

5. I should also state that I am taking “illness” to be broadly inclusive of pain, though of course not identical with it. Many illnesses after all are experienced *as* pains, which makes pain a common symptom and diagnostic tool. As we see in *Wit*, treatments for illnesses are often in themselves extremely painful. Furthermore, even if this considerable overlap between the two categories, “illnesses” and “pains,” were to be ignored, the complex intersubjectivities these two states of being induce is sufficient reason for insights concerning one area to be applied to the other. Illness is thus coextensive with pain both in how it is experienced and how it is treated.

6. Margaret Edson, *Wit* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2012), 2. All future citations will be parenthetical and indicated with the letter W.

Wit (either as a play or through its film adaptation) a common course text in medical programs, especially in lessons dedicated to improving “bedside manner,” “empathy,” and other virtues thought to counter the well-known tendency for the medical establishment to be cold and objectifying toward those who must endure it. To list a few examples, Catherine Belling has remarked on the use of *Wit* to teach empathy to medical students,⁷ as has Kate Rossiter⁸ as well as Fowler and Shigley;⁹ Christina Gottlieb calls *Wit* “a touchstone in the field of health humanities” while remarking that medical schools often gloss over its complexity;¹⁰ Heath Diehl seconds Gottlieb’s complaint, noting that readings of *Wit* often simplify the text by “ignore[ing] the more complex representational strategy undergirding the . . . narrative”;¹¹ and finally, to end this brief survey, Douglas Robinson argues provocatively that “the patient-unfriendly patient care dramatized in *Wit* is precisely the kind of horror story adduced by MH [medical humanities] scholar-teachers by way of warning future health-care professionals of the *need* for a humanistic/humanizing patient approach to medicine.”¹²

The use of *Wit* in medical schools is also part of the reason for this chapter’s complicated relationship with disability studies. On the one hand, as Sharon L. Snyder and David T. Mitchell have written, university disability studies programs often coexist uneasily beside their more “therapeutic” counterpart fields, fields the disability studies faculty spend much of their time critiquing. As a result, some of these students “have reported feeling ‘unnerved’ by the privileging of disability perspectives . . . even when students in the program advocate nothing more radical than the need to make the therapies more responsive to disabled people’s goals.”¹³ The encounter is far more fraught when students in

7. Catherine Belling, “Begin with a Text: Teaching the Poetics of Medicine,” *Journal of Medical Humanities* 34 (2013): 484.

8. Kate Rossiter, “Bearing Response-Ability: Theatre, Ethics, and Medical Education,” *Journal of Medical Humanities* 33 (2012): 1.

9. Lauren Fowler and Sally Bishop Shigley, “Feeling Your Pain: Exploring Empathy in Literature and Neuroscience,” in *Rethinking Empathy Through Literature*, ed. Meghan Marie Hammond and Sue J. Kim (London: Routledge, 2014), 47–58.

10. Christina M. Gottlieb, “Pedagogy and the Art of Death: Reparative Readings of Death and Dying in Margaret Edson’s *Wit*,” *Journal of Medical Humanities* 39 (2018): 325–36.

11. Heath Diehl, “And Death—capital D—shall be no more—semicolon!”: Explicating the Terminally Ill Body in Margaret Edson’s *W;t*,” in *The Problem Body: Projecting Disability on Film*, ed. Sally Chivers and Nicole Markotic (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2016), 111.

12. Douglas Robinson, *Translationality: Essays in the Translational-Medical Humanities* (London: Routledge, 2017), 191.

13. Sharon L. Snyder and David T. Mitchell, *Cultural Locations of Disability* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 191.

medicine or related fields read arguments like those of Eli Clare, who directly criticizes the presumption that cure should be the central end goal of medical treatments. In many cases I suspect the confusion results from a lack of perspective regarding what the experience of the medical system is like for someone with a complex or chronic disorder. As Clare writes, “I have long brandished vehement anti-cure politics to defend myself against the unending assertions that disability equals damage, lack of health, defect.”¹⁴ Clare’s work shows how the logic of care can serve to diminish patient control over their bodies, forcing them into a pathway that might make them look healthier on paper but that alienates them from their own bodies. If the acceptance of cure is presumed to be the only rational response to serious illness, then anyone refusing care will be assumed irrational, as someone who must be protected from themselves.¹⁵ Thus while it may seem neutral or even straightforwardly correct and positive on its own, the concept of cure can serve as the keystone of a complex of arguments and presumptions that have the net effect of curtailing patient autonomy, their autonomy not only to refuse care as such, but also to refuse painful care, or racist care, or objectifying care, or care that goes against their personal values. While it is true that many effective medical treatments entail suffering of some kind, that suffering must not be gratuitous. Even with diseases that are so horrible to experience that virtually everyone would choose to have them cured, the fact that such care is necessarily optional serves as a guarantor that the beginning of an illness is not also the end of autonomy. *Wit*, as its readers should never forget, ends with a refusal of further attempts at curing and the choice to die rather than be subject to further treatment. Allowing people to refuse being cured without their automatically being dismissed as irrational can make the act of curing more humane and less traumatic by ensuring that the process is entered into voluntarily.

“Attention to the life-world of the patient,” write Tina Williams and Havi Carel, “is essential to making their experience intelligible,”¹⁶ and *Wit* has been

14. Eli Clare, *Brilliant Imperfection: Grappling with Cure* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), 60.

15. As Judy Segal, a scholar of medical rhetoric, writes, “rhetorical theory so clearly predicts the failure of physician-patient persuasion within the current medical model that the more interesting question is perhaps not why so many do not comply with medical advice, but why so many do. Rhetorical theory suggests that noncompliance is an endogenous feature of Western medicine. Most attempts to improve compliance figures can be expected to yield, as they indeed do yield, only minimal benefit, in part because the biomedical model denies the preliminary conditions that are necessary for persuasion to take place” (*Health and the Rhetoric of Medicine* [Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2005], 138. My emphasis.). If medical advice is to retain its status as *advice*, its rhetorical elements must be taken into account, a process that the presumption of cure’s desirability undermines.

16. Tina Williams and Havi Carel, “Breathlessness: From Body Symptom to Existential Experience,” in

central to this effort for many years now, most often as a way to bridge the world of medicine with the world of literary criticism so that the latter's insights might be made useful to current or future physicians. Yet in reading *Wit* simplistically we undermine that very goal by failing to bring to bear the full scope of the field. Reading *Wit* in a medical school context in a manner that diminishes its literariness and complexity would be like teaching literature students germ theory without using or making reference to a microscope. Yes, applying literary hermeneutics, phenomenology, and poststructural theory (as I am about to) absolutely makes the text more difficult, and if done badly can overwhelm those medical students who lack a significant humanities background. Yet literature achieves its effect in part *by* being difficult, by presenting ambiguous and alien systems of significance that must be understood on their own terms. Theory does not so much make a text complex as it does reveal the complexity already within it, and in that sense may be exactly what, so to speak, the doctor ordered. For if, as Robinson writes, part of the point of the medical humanities is to emphasize the importance of the humanity and subjectivity of the patient, an emphasis that itself makes the process of diagnosis and care more complex by increasing the number of factors that must be taken into account with each decision, then it follows that the increasing complexity and ambiguity that a more theoretically oriented reading leads to would itself be mimetic of the very concepts *Wit* is being used to teach. Starting from the simplistic "obvious" meaning and working inwards, teasing out the text's ambiguities and polysemy, and then revealing how those divergent meanings are not mere empty wordplay but rather can be constitutive of a coherent reading, may demonstrate practically and organically what a medical ethics course may otherwise struggle to convey didactically.

To make its point, this chapter reads *Wit* on its own terms, treating the ill patient (Bearing) as a text-within-a-text and focusing on the overlaps between the hermeneutics of literature and disease. Drawing principally from Hans-Georg Gadamer, Jacques Derrida, and William Empson, it seeks to articulate the manner in which failure to consider the lifeworld of the patient deprives them of the capacity to understand and think about their own illness, which thus constitutes what, in Miranda Fricker's terms, amounts to a hermeneutic injustice against them.

Ambiguity: A Differential Diagnosis

Like Vivian Bearing, a patient is both a text and a reader, both the giver of significance and the thing which is made significant, and this process of self-reading occurs in tandem with diagnosis and treatment. The patient reads themselves and decides to visit a doctor; the doctor reads them and provides a diagnosis; the patient then reincorporates this diagnosis into their own framework to arrive at a new conclusion about themselves. This process of mutual interpretation iterates cyclically—the patient interpreting themselves, the doctor interpreting the patient, the patient reinterpreting themselves based on the new information, the doctor interpreting them again—until the patient is cured, dies, or ceases to come to treatment. As Milos Jenicek writes, “thinking and reasoning in medicine is organized around three sequential concepts: postulating an original idea that triggers a reasoning process, producing a series of premises, and analyzing and integrating these premises to produce a conclusion,”¹⁷ while as Fredrik Svenaeus, in a more phenomenological bent, describes it, medicine “is a meeting between two persons and an interpretation of the ill person’s being-in-the-world, with the aim of restoring a life that has turned unhomelike.”¹⁸ Yet these descriptions, though accurate, de-emphasize the importance of the patient’s own interpretation of their situation, an act of interpretation that is nigh unavoidable and essential in many cases to their psychological well-being. The question “what is causing this pain in my stomach?” seeks both a specific meaning (the precise illness and its cure) as well as a general meaning, “am I going to be alright?” I am sure many of the people reading this have had the experience of visiting a doctor with some mysterious problem (a strange mark on the skin, a pain somewhere new, a tingle in the fingers), all the while thinking “what if it’s cancer?” For such a patient, the seemingly vague and inconclusive statement “I don’t know what it is but it doesn’t look serious” is almost diagnosis enough, for it relieves the existential fear that the mere possibility of cancer (or another terminal condition) can invoke. And if the news is bad, if it *is* cancer, then the particular sense of the question becomes more urgent: What kind of cancer? What stage? Is it treatable? And so forth.

The above discussion of course generalizes quite a lot, but its main purpose

17. Milos Jenicek, *How to Think in Medicine: Reasoning, Decision Making, and Communication in Health Sciences and Professions* (London: Productivity Press, 2021), 79.

18. Fredrik Svenaeus, *The Hermeneutics of Medicine and the Phenomenology of Health: Steps Towards a Philosophy of Medical Practice* (London: Springer, 2022), 114.

is to demonstrate the central importance of ambiguity, not only in diagnosing illnesses but living with them as well. Probably the most well-known study of ambiguity as it relates to literature is William Empson's *The Seven Types of Ambiguity*, where he defines as ambiguous "any verbal nuance, however slight, which gives room for alternative reactions to the same piece of language."¹⁹ Extending the scope of this definition beyond the purely linguistic, we can see that ambiguity is essential to the diagnostic process, in the sense that it is the reason diagnosis is a process at all. The fact that, for instance, a pain in one's head could indicate a tumor, a migraine, or that one has been staring at the computer screen for too long, is precisely the reason that one would need a doctor to figure out which of those things it is. Diagnosis is, in this example, a process of disambiguation, one enabled by the physician's expertise. In an alternate universe where each symptom pointed to one—and only one—problem, diagnosis would be possible with an internet search, and being a doctor would mainly involve treating people for problems they already know they have. The appearance of the symptom would produce a sense of tragic inevitability: one would feel a pain somewhere and know almost instantly what fate it told. Symptom and cause would thus be related deterministically at the level of interpretation, in much the same way that the opening act of a tragic drama already contains the protagonist's demise.

That *Wit* is a tragedy that also takes place after the process of diagnosis has already occurred is thus significant. The plot follows Dr. Vivian Bearing, an English professor and specialist in the *Holy Sonnets* of the early-modern English metaphysical poet John Donne. She is also socially isolated, overworked, and dying of stage IV ovarian cancer. Facing a terminal diagnosis, she joins a treatment study led by Dr. Harvey Kelekian, the hospital's head of oncology, who is joined by a group of medical residents that includes Dr. Jason Posner, who as an undergraduate had attended Bearing's course on Donne (earning an A minus), as well as a nurse, Susie Monahan. The study in question is grueling, involving eight cycles of extremely potent chemotherapy drugs, and (though its precise goals and contours are vague) appears to be examining how her body reacts to the high doses while it succumbs to cancer. Note my use of the impersonal "it" here, as it is clear that Bearing is not being studied as a person, but as a body; "she" is not the focus of the examination. Her extreme pain and suffering over the course of the play is essentially a by-product of a process meant to

19. William Empson, *The Seven Types of Ambiguity* (New York: New Directions, 1966 [1930]), 1.

affect and analyze her material body, in phenomenological terms, the *körper* rather than the *leib*.

The medical situation depicted in *Wit* is therefore complex and unusual. She has already been diagnosed, after all, as we see at the start of the play:

VIVIAN: I'll never forget the time I found out I had cancer.

DR. HARVEY KELEKIAN *enters at a big desk piled high with papers.*

KELEKIAN: You have cancer.

VIVIAN: (*to audience*). See? Unforgettable. It was something of a shock.

[. . .]

KELEKIAN: You present with a growth that, unfortunately, went undetected in stages one, two, and three. Now it is an insidious adenocarcinoma, which has spread from the primary adnexal mass— (W, 3)

There are a number of elements in this passage that warrant attention. To begin, one apparent detail is that Bearing already had stage IV cancer (which means that the cancer has spread, or metastasized, far from its initial location) when she arrived at Kelekian's clinic. The scene thus significantly telescopes the process of diagnosis, depicting it as a nigh-instantaneous pronouncement of Kelekian's sole expertise, which does not seem to require any test or examination. Bearing's humor and (attempted) wit is thus likely a way to distance the experience, both for the audience and herself, as indeed is the fourth-wall breaking her character occasionally does. This reading is belied by a scene later in the play where Bearing recalls a discussion with a student in her Donne course:

STUDENT 2: I think it's like [Donne is] hiding. I think he's really confused, I don't know, maybe he's scared, so he hides behind all this complicated stuff, hides behind this *wit*.

VIVIAN: *Hides behind wit?*

STUDENT 2: I mean, if it's really something he's sure of, he can say it more simple—simply. He doesn't have to be such a brain, or such a performer. It doesn't have to be such a big deal. (W, 39)

The Donne poem in question here is Holy Sonnet X, "Death be not proud," which serves as a kind of leitmotif throughout the play. What Donne is thus

allegedly hiding from using his wit (understood not merely as humor but also a display of linguistic intelligence) is the same thing that Bearing is hiding from using hers: death itself. Neither person succeeds.

Part of the play's conflict, however, is that Bearing was never given the chance to hide from the certainty of death with playfulness and ambiguity. The existence of a clear terminal diagnosis (stage IV ovarian cancer has a very low survival rate²⁰) via medical technologies that did not exist in Donne's time, along with the tragic structure of the play that treats her death as an explicit near-certainty. There is simply no doubt within which to hide. Whereas one can read "Death be not proud" and its highly developed poetics and metaphors as a way to navigate the ambiguities of life and death in the context of Christian ideas of the immortality of the soul, in *Wit* the difficulty of the poem serves instead to reintroduce complexity and doubt where certainty and straightforwardness once reigned. A third scene, early in the play, brings this point home. It depicts Bearing as a student under her mentor Dr. E. M. Ashford as they discuss Donne's sonnet:

E.M.: [*Quoting Donne*] And death shall be no more, *comma*, Death thou shalt die.

Nothing but a breath—a comma—separates life from life everlasting. It is very simple really. With the original punctuation restored, death is no longer something to act out on a stage, with exclamation points. It's a comma, a pause.

[. . .]

VIVIAN: Life, death . . . I see. (*Standing*) It's a metaphysical conceit. It's wit! I'll go back to the library and rewrite the paper—

E.M.: (*standing, emphatically*). It's *not* wit, Miss Bearing. It is truth. (*Walking around the desk to her.*) The paper's not the point. (W, 8)

Note here that Ashford does not say that a comma "separates life from *death*" but rather "from life everlasting." Whereas the anonymous student in Bearing's class reads the poem as unsure, Ashford reads it as a confident statement of

20. As the critic John D. Sykes Jr. writes, "Dr. Kelekian and his team know perfectly well that patients do not survive stage four metastatic ovarian cancer. From the time Vivian receives her diagnosis, her prognosis is certain" ("*Wit*, Pride, and the Resurrection: Margaret Edson's Play and John Donne's Poetry," *Renascence* 55, no. 2 [2003]: 164). Thus, the only purpose of the chemotherapy is to generate data. It has no real chance of curing her.

Donne's belief in the immortality of the soul. But what links Ashford with the student—in opposition to Bearing—is that though they diverge on whether the poem is meant to be ambiguous or not, they agree that it should be read in conjunction with some kind of affect or emotion relating to death. The student reads Donne as anxious in the face of death and reads his engagement with that anxiety as the poem's conceptual origin, while Ashford reads the poem as certain and likewise sees that certainty as its origin. Bearing, however, focuses on the language itself, the words themselves, and her reading style thus focuses on a closer and closer analysis of their relation.

As she summarizes her first monograph, which has the rather Shakespearean title *Made Cunningly*, "I devote one chapter to a thorough examination of each [Holy] sonnet, discussing each word in extensive detail" (W, 11). Bearing has long been recognized by critics of *Wit* as a prototypical New Criticism literary scholar,²¹ and we can likewise see how Ashford represents an earlier era of the field (with her focus on what the poem has to teach and what the author intended). Reference to some of the canonical works of New Criticism can thus potentially say something useful about Bearing's attitude toward the act of literary interpretation. In that line, Cleanth Brooks, discussing Donne in his *The Well-Wrought Urn*, notes in a very Bearing-like manner that for Donne and Shakespeare "even the apparently simple and straightforward poet is forced into paradoxes by the nature of his instrument,"²² and writes later that "the only way by which the poet could say what [Donne's] 'The Canonization' says is by paradox. More direct methods may be tempting, but all of them enfeeble and distort what is to be said."²³ While Ashford and the student both focus on what meaning the poem may point to outside of itself, Bearing, like Brooks, focuses on the wit, the mechanics of the words themselves, or, to extend the metaphor, on the poem's body instead of its mind. This is a point that many critics, even those who address the question of Bearing critical sensibilities, often miss: *Wit* is not just comparing diagnosis to literary criticism in general, but to the specific manner of criticism that prevailed during the time when Bearing would have been a professor and that became widely known for ignoring literature's connection to people's lived experiences.

21. Heath Diehl, for instance, explicitly identifies Bearing as a New Critic ("Explicating the Terminally Ill Body," 107–9).

22. Cleanth Brooks, *The Well-Wrought Urn: Studies in the Structure of Poetry* (New York: Mariner, 1956), 10.

23. Brooks, *The Well-Wrought Urn*, 17.

This matter returns us to the question of ambiguity as it relates to diagnosis and hermeneutics. As Empson writes near the end of *Seven Types*,

When you are holding a variety of things in your mind, or using for a single matter a variety of intellectual machinery, the only way of applying all your criteria is to apply them simultaneously; the only way of forcing the reader to grasp your total meaning is to arrange that he can only feel satisfied if he is bearing all the elements in mind at the moment of conviction; the only way of not giving something heterogenous is to give something which is at every point a compound.²⁴

Brooks (like, it would seem, Bearing) arrives at something like this conclusion when he remarks on the necessity of paradox in Donne's "Canonization." Paradox is, when used as a poetic device, a way of presenting two different ideas as a "compound" so that both elements can be "in mind" to the reader at once. Yet Bearing at least seems to miss the fact that these multiple meanings are not limited to the poem's linguistic or formal play, but also include things, as in Donne's case the notion of resurrection, that may at first seem extratextual but are in fact the necessary supplement that makes the poem function. Death cannot be banished from "Death be not proud" no matter how one reads it, and the poem's concluding optimism only makes sense in light of a religious belief in the immortality (and, for that matter, the existence) of the soul. This fact is significant given what Empson names the fourth of his seven types of ambiguity, which "occurs when two or more meanings of a statement do not agree among themselves, but combine to make clear a more complicated state of mind," a form of ambiguity he finds in the sonnets of Donne and Shakespeare.²⁵ One of the reasons why "Death be not proud" is ambiguous is that "death" can mean the literal death and cessation of the body or perhaps the passing into an immortal bliss. Death is ambiguous, even if one has total faith in the afterlife, because one cannot *visit* the afterlife to verify that it exists.

Another kind of death is the death of the author, as Roland Barthes described in his essay by that name. It is an argument whose ghost seems to haunt this play, for while Barthes is never mentioned his conclusions appear to stalk Bearing in every scene. As Barthes writes, "we know now that a text is not

24. Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, 238–39.

25. Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, 133.

a line of words releasing a single ‘theological’ meaning (the ‘message’ of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash,” and he goes on to argue that “to give a text an Author is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing. Such a conception suits criticism very well, the latter then itself the important task of discovering the Author (or its hypostases: society, history, psyche, liberty) beneath the work: when the Author has been found, the text is ‘explained’—victory to the critic.”²⁶ Note how all three readings of Donne represented in *Wit* make some kind of reference to Donne himself and struggle to determine what he “meant” when he wrote it. While Bearing may appear to be avoiding that trap, her exclamation that “it’s a metaphysical conceit” betrays what is actually happening: by casting Donne’s ambiguous use of language as simply a type of wordplay—a complex metaphor made for the sake of having a complex metaphor—she has done precisely what Barthes accuses critics of doing. She imposes certainty on a text that depends on ambiguity in order to function. Her arcane scholarship and demanding teaching style set her up as the high priestess of Donne the Author-God, an intermediary Metatron who takes the place of the original, much like Dr. Kelekian, at his desk, becomes the high priest of Bearing’s cancer.

Bearing and Kelekian’s similar roles as the interpreters of ambiguous gods directs us to the role that *diagnostic* ambiguity plays in the ethical landscape of *Wit*. T. S. Eliot once remarked in a book review that Donne’s sermons give “the sense of the artist as an Eye curiously, patiently watching himself as a man.”²⁷ Bearing limits the ambiguity and interpretive flexibility of the texts she reads for a number of reasons, which include protecting herself from their conclusions (e.g., the thin “comma” between life and death) and setting herself up as an authority on them. In the latter case, the full ambiguity of the sonnets would undermine that authority by overwhelming it, allowing meanings to proliferate until she could no longer master them all. Empson notes that on a discursive level at least, scientific authority works in similar ways. “The sciences,” he writes, “might be expected to diminish the ambiguity of the language, both because of their tradition of clarity and because much of their jargon has, if not

26. Roland Barthes, “The Death of the Author,” in *Image—Music—Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978), 146–47.

27. T. S. Eliot, “The Preacher as Artist,” in *The Complete Prose of T. S. Eliot: The Critical Edition: The Perfect Critic, 1919–1926*, ed. Anthony Cuda and Ronald Schuchard (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), 168.

only one meaning, at any rate only one setting and point of view.”²⁸ For Bearing and her cancer that “point of view” is the point of view from a desk, Kelekian’s desk. I suspect that what the play is asking us to do is to read it somewhat like Brooks says we should read Shakespeare and Donne, by looking out for paradoxes and contradictions that might be compound meanings in disguise. In this case, the extreme similarity between the manner of interpretation that both Kelekian and Bearing engage in suggests that we should be reading either of them as representing both of them.

The effect is something like what Ezra Pound called a super-position,²⁹ where we are meant to imagine the two different elements (like the leaves on the bough and the faces in the crowd in his “A Station of the Metro”) as overlapping and presenting the same thing. In that sense, the criticisms I have levied against Bearing here (that her interpretive style imposes a singular meaning on texts that are ambiguous) can be expected to apply to its depiction of medicine. Bearing and Kelekian are not meant simply to oppose one another, but layer atop each other, producing a third image through their combination. And indeed, as we will see, it does, but first there remains a question: who is the author of Vivian Bearing’s cancer, and how do we know when that author is dead?

Metastatic Metaphors

As Barthes suggests, the question of who the “author” of a text is really amounts to a question about how the procession of ambiguous meanings ought to be arrested. But Michel Foucault notes in his essay “What Is an Author?”—written in part as a response to Barthes—that the notion of authorship is itself ambiguous. As he writes, in the texts of classical Greece and Rome authorship is a way of ensuring one’s life after death (think of Achilles in the *Iliad* dying in battle so his name lives on forever), and in modernity this tendency “has metamorphosized this idea of narrative, or writing, as something designed to ward off death. . . . The work, which once had the duty of providing immortality, now possesses the right to kill, to be its author’s murderer, as in the cases of Flaubert, Proust, and Kafka . . . the

28. Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, 236.

29. Ezra Pound, *Letters of Ezra Pound: 1907–1947*, ed. D. D. Paige (London: Faber and Faber, 1971), 285.

writing subject cancels out the signs of his particular individuality.”³⁰ Both Bearing and Kelekian engage in this type of interpretation: Kelekian by way of his scientific and clinical mode of communication, which seeks to perform objectivity through the active effacement of the self, and Bearing through her New Critical interpretive method, which in many of its foundational texts explicitly formulates itself as an attempt to make literary criticism more scientific.³¹ Yet Bearing adds further ambiguity here through her role as narrator, especially in the early parts of the play where she regularly speaks to the audience and offers commentary that frames and contextualizes the scene. On one level she is interpreting her body in the way she interprets texts, treating them like Kelekian treats her and effacing herself in the process. By stepping outside the play, she is also able to step outside of, and interpret, her own demise, thereby asserting mastery over it (or at least attempt to do so). Here, both she and Kelekian vanish from the text of the study, which they effectively coauthor (though only he gets the credit), becoming simply a particular disease trajectory and the observer who happened to record it. Yet on another level she is like Achilles or Oedipus, or Philoctetes for that matter, inscribing the record of her pain and her death in the name of her own immortality.

Though I mostly discuss cancer and illness in this chapter, both of those things for Bearing entail an immense amount of pain. As she says at one point, “there is cancer eating away at my goddamn bones, and I did not know there could be such pain on this earth” (W, 47). Yet from the perspective of Kelekian’s experiment, that pain is meaningless: the study appears to be focusing on the efficacy of the drugs in reducing the size and spread of Bearing’s tumors, something that can be measured without reference to how painful they are. Kelekian and the other doctors may also wish to avoid too much contact with her and other patients’ suffering in order to protect themselves from being overwhelmed by despair. The composite meaning (to use Empson’s vocabulary) of the pain and the cancer is simply less interesting and useful to them than the singular meaning of the cancer itself. Yet as Elaine Scarry reminds us, to experience pain is to experience *certainty*. One cannot *not* know that one is in pain, at least not without (in Bearing’s case) being sedated to the point of hardly experiencing

30. Michel Foucault, “What Is an Author?” in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow, trans. Josué V. Harari (New York: Vintage, 2010), 102.

31. See for example I. A. Richards’s remark that “criticism will justify itself as an applied science when it is able to indicate how an advertisement may be profitable without necessarily being crass,” *Principles of Literary Criticism* (London: Routledge, 2001), 190. Why criticism would ever *want* to “justify itself as an applied science” I will leave as an exercise for the reader.

anything at all. Bearing thus finds herself overburdened with a meaning that her environment refuses to interpret or acknowledge.

We can therefore see Bearing's decision near the end of the play to accept a "do not resuscitate" designation (which means that if her heart stops the hospital will not try to revive her) as not only an assertion of her personal and bodily autonomy and her interest in minimizing her own suffering, but also an assertion of her right to self-author, to end her life and its ambiguity herself, to write her own tragedy. Following Kelekian's personal system of significance, which values Bearing mainly as a research subject, would mean keeping her alive for as long as possible to maximize the amount of data she can generate; as a system of valuation and significance, it largely treats her pain as merely the cost of doing business. By choosing to die, Bearing effectively dies *as an author*: by ceasing the experiment to minimize her suffering, she makes that suffering important in relation to the experiment, thereby giving it a composite meaning that includes her particular subjective experiences. The result is a brilliant mimesis of the structure of a Donne sonnet, which in the manner of its ending forms the composite meaning that unites the two concepts hitherto considered paradoxical: it is in dying that Vivian Bearing lives.

This reading points us to a significant fact about diseases, and cancer specifically: their meaning is not limited to the singular dimension of illness and cure, improvement and relapse, along which medicine interprets it. As, for instance, Susan Sontag notes, "every characterization of cancer describes it as slow, and so it was first used metaphorically . . . among the earliest figurative uses of cancer are as a metaphor for 'idleness' and 'sloth.'"³² Why this fact matters can be seen in the word "metastasis," a term of art in both medicine and literary studies. In the former "metastasis" designates "the spread of a malignant tumour from its site of origin,"³³ which is precisely how Bearing's ovarian cancer ended up in her bones. But in literary studies, "metastasis" can also be a rhetorical term meaning "a rapid transition from one point to the next, or a glossing over of some point as of too little importance to dwell upon (e.g. if it would be troublesome to the speaker's argument)."³⁴ We can see the two terms overlapping in the scene where Bearing describes ignoring some of her early

32. Susan Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor and AIDS and Its Metaphors* (New York: Picador, 1990), 14.

33. "Metastasis," *Oxford Concise Medical Dictionary*, ed. Elizabeth Martin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), np, via <https://www-oxfordreference-com> (accessed 18 September 2022).

34. "Metastasis," *Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, ed. Chris Baldick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 222.

cancer symptoms because she was in the middle of a project with an approaching deadline (a scene that also emphasizes the role of the patient's interpretation of their own symptoms in determining the kind of health care they receive). She would feel "sharp" pains while teaching, "like a cramp, but not the same," but only visited her gynecologist "after I had turned in the article" (W, 16–17), by which time the cancer had spread. In short, Bearing metastasized her cancer, so her cancer metastasized as well.

Not only is Bearing's cancer metastatic, but her treatment is too, rapidly passing over her gestures of humanity, her efforts to have real conversations, or even just to act "like a person," in order to keep attention on her physical body and her symptoms. As, for example, in this exchange:

TECHNICIAN 1: Name.

VIVIAN: My name? Vivian Bearing.

TECHNICIAN 1: Huh?

VIVIAN: Bearing. B-E-A-R-I-N-G. Vivian. V-I-V-I-A-N.

TECHNICIAN 1: Doctor.

VIVIAN: Yes, I have a PhD.

TECHNICIAN 1: *Your* doctor.

VIVIAN: Oh. Dr Harvey Kelekian. (W, 9)

The technician acts as though Bearing is one of the instruments, a tool that responds in the same way to the same input all the time. And indeed, Bearing is eventually "trained" to act in that way, such as in a later repetition of this scene where her first response to "name" is simply "B-E-A-R-I-N-G. Kelekian" (W, 33), a response that, notably, would make no sense whatsoever outside the context of the previous interaction (why is the correct response *two* names when the question was phrased with "name" in the singular?). To be a "good patient" is to limit one's own ambiguity and participate in a system of authorship in which the clinical meanings of one's illness are the only ones that are relevant and thus cede authorship over one's own body. As, for instance, Christopher Ward remarks, "the questions doctors ask about pain are designed to classify the experience rather than understand its quality,"³⁵ and if patients can

35. Christopher D. Ward, *Between Sickness and Health: The Landscape of Illness and Wellness* (London: Routledge, 2019), 34. Ward refers to these question-and-answer exchanges as "the language game of diagnosis," citing Wittgenstein (34).

only “speak” in relation to their doctors’ concerns, then their pains can *only* be classified, never understood.³⁶

As *Wit* explores, and as disability studies, bioethical philosophy, and the medical humanities more generally have examined in detail, this process of classification begins with one’s induction into the role of the patient. The sociologist Talcott Parsons, in his influential *The Social System*, describes what he refers to as “the sick role” that one assumes upon becoming a patient. It is, in his telling, primarily a social relation, but as we will see it is an interpretive and epistemic role as well. As Parsons writes,

[T]he sick person is helpless and therefore in need of help. If being sick is to be regarded as “deviant” as certainly in important respects it must, it is as we have noted distinguished from other deviant roles precisely by the fact that the sick person is not regarded as “responsible” for his condition. “he can’t help it.” He may, of course, have carelessly exposed himself to danger of accident, but once injured he cannot, for instance, mend a fractured leg by will power.³⁷

One function of the role, and the obligations tied to it, is to prevent what Keith Wailoo refers to as “malingerers,” or people who fake or exaggerate their suffering in order to obtain certain benefits.³⁸ The idea of malingering often serves as justification, or perhaps an excuse, for the surveillance of people claiming assistance for illness, injury, or disability, as, for instance, Tobin Siebers describes in his analysis of what he terms “disability masquerade.”³⁹ In Parsons’s telling, the benefits of the sick role—such as being excused from work—results in sickness having the social force of an *obligation*: “people are often resistant to admitting they are sick and it is not uncommon for others to tell them that they *ought* to stay in bed. The word generally has a moral connotation.”⁴⁰ Following Parsons, Christopher Ward notes that historically

36. To offer a parallel example to the definitions of “metastasis,” Stanton B. Garner Jr. notes that before it was adapted into a literary term, “catharsis” was a term of art in medicine. “Bodies of Knowledge: Theatre and Medical Science,” in *Cambridge Companion to Theatre and Science*, ed. Kirsten E. Shepherd-Barr (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 85.

37. Talcott Parsons, *The Social System* (London: Routledge, 1991), 440.

38. Keith Wailoo, *Pain: A Political History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015), 41–42.

39. Tobin Siebers, *Disability Theory* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008), 96–119. A similar process has been described by the disability theorist Ellen Samuels in her book *Fantasies of Identification: Disability, Gender, Race* (New York: New York University Press, 2014).

40. Parsons, *Social System*, 437.

diseases and pains without “organic” origins—that is, those lacking a physical correlate observable to a third party—have tended to be treated as “fake.”⁴¹

Much of the above can relate back to the discussion of the *leib/körper* distinction in this book’s first chapter, where I explain how an important function of pain is to mediate between the lived body and the physical body, the body as it is subjectively experienced and the body as it appears to other people (e.g., doctors and nurses). Because pain and illness are broadly understood to be legitimate reasons to miss work, skip school, or generally refrain from fulfilling one’s obligations, there exists an incentive (which is not the same as there being a valid justification) among interested third parties to be suspicious of deceit. Since the actual experience of pain or illness is incommunicable in itself, one must instead point to physical correlates: bleeding, bruising, inflammation, and so forth. One must also, however, adopt a “role,” one which seems designed to minimize the so-called benefits of illness: you must stay in bed and do what the doctor orders, since, the thinking goes, if you are well enough to disagree then you are well enough to go to work. Thus, the sick role creates a certain epistemic obligation. If you are sick then you must go to the doctor, submit to their examination, and follow their instructions, or else you will violate the role and forfeit its benefits. But if, like Bearing, you have no choice but to stay in bed (because the cancer makes it too painful not to), and thus have no option besides submitting to the role of an “epistemic subordinate” as Jacob Stegenga argues patients are expected to,⁴² then the “role” of being sick seems more like an imprisonment. It is not an exchange of privilege for obligation but a requirement that you submit yourself completely to the gaze of others or else die suffering, alone, and without help.

The sick role is thus epistemic and hermeneutic as much as it is social. It is a coerced agreement to be what the medical system would prefer you be. This fact has certain implications for the role of interpretation. As Alan Bleakley observes, “the point of scientific thinking is to reduce uncertainty or ambiguity for predictable laws and operations. The point of narration is that it generates ambiguity, purposefully, where contradiction reflects the messiness of life itself.”⁴³ The philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer, whose theories of interpreta-

41. Ward, *Between Sickness and Health*, 5.

42. Jacob Stegenga, *Care as Cure: An Introduction to Philosophy of Medicine* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018), 79.

43. Alan Bleakley, *Medical Humanities and Medical Education: How the Medical Humanities can Shape Better Doctors* (London: Routledge, 2015), 181.

tion I discuss in more detail below, in his *The Enigma of Health* remarks on “the profound inwardization involved in suffering and the endurance of pain.”⁴⁴ If what is “inward” is complex and ambiguous, then too great an enforcement of the sick role and its epistemic requirements can only exacerbate the psychological anguish of the disease.

The matter therefore returns to the earlier question of who the “author” of Bearing’s cancer is, a role that it should now be clear is not occupied by any particular person but is rather a site of contestation. Recall that for Barthes, the role of the author-god is to arrest or limit the play of ambiguity within a text. We might then ask where that ambiguity comes from. Jacques Derrida, in his essay “Différance,” analyzes and depicts the inability of any signifier (such as a symptom) to arrive at a particular, final meaning. He names this inability *différance*, a portmanteau of the French words meaning “to differ” and “to defer,” difference and deferral being the two characteristic features of linguistic meaning as he describes it. The essay is complex and difficult, in part because it is a self-conscious performance of the very slipperiness and ambiguity he describes; the writing style is thus both the statement of the argument and an evidentiary demonstration thereof. As he writes, *différance* “is”⁴⁵ the “playing movement that ‘produces’ . . . these differences, these effects of difference.”⁴⁶ Following the work of the linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, Derrida argues that meaning in language is created by a “play” of differences. The meaning of a given signifier is therefore not “in” it but rather arises from its relation to other signifiers and to the system of language as a whole. Meaning is an emergent property, or an effect, of language, and not something present in a given word. Thus, “the signified concept is never present in and of itself, in a sufficient presence that would refer only to itself. . . . [E]very concept is inscribed in a chain or in a system within which it refers to the other, to other concepts, by

44. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *The Enigma of Health: The Art of Healing in a Scientific Age*, trans. Jason Gaiger and Nicholas Walker (Cambridge: Polity, 1996), 75.

45. Part of the essay’s conceit is that the term itself performs the slipperiness Derrida considers characteristic of all language, thus the general tendency (as seen in the body text of this chapter) to refrain from definite language when discussing *différance*, or, when writing around the problem is too cumbersome, to place a pair of ironic quotation marks around it. Though some critics have accused Derrida of using his complex writing style to hide an alleged lack of substance to his ideas, it is in fact due to the great seriousness of the investigation that the essay refuses to compromise itself by disguising the very phenomenon it seeks to depict simply to satisfy some people’s preference for straightforward language.

46. Jacques Derrida, “Différance,” in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 11.

means of the systematic play of differences.”⁴⁷ To assign definite meaning to a signifier is thus to remove it from its chain and arrest the iterations of deferral and differentiation on which that meaning depends. It is in reference to this play, this uninterrupted flow of meaning, that Derrida insists that *différance* is “neither a word nor a concept.”⁴⁸

For a sense of how this discussion applies to Bearing’s cancer, consider the passage from Judith Butler’s *Gender Trouble* that I quote at the head of this chapter, and specifically her remark on “the excess that necessarily accompanies any effort to posit identity once and for all.”⁴⁹ Butler draws heavily from Derrida, and like him, as this quote indicates, sees personal identity or the “meaning” of a given person’s life (which I take to include their status as a patient) as functioning like Derrida defines the “meaning” of a linguistic sign. Acknowledging this fact implies a certain acceptance of self-definition and self-fashioning, even if the self must be (as it always is) both fashioner and fashioned, and it precludes the sort of epistemic subordination that, as we have seen, is characteristic of the so-called sick role. It is clear throughout *Wit* that both Bearing and the hospital have neglected this fact, this iterated complexity of the self: Bearing by refusing to allow herself, until the very last, to be defined by anything other than her role as an English professor and Donne scholar, and the hospital (with some exceptions) by never treating her as anything but a patient and test subject, or (in Jason Posner’s case) by attempting to fuse the sick role with Bearing’s professor role, a role that is simply impossible for her to maintain given the immense suffering she bears. Bearing’s disease makes it impossible for her to remain the “author” of her own life, to keep that life’s meaning limited her role as a scholar. The sick role also makes it extraordinarily difficult for her to be the author of her own death, and of her own cancer. The disease’s meaning is fixed and limited to those aspects of it that are clinically relevant, the life it disrupts and eventually ends being simply extratextual, the sort of thing a New Critic might say is beyond the scope of their analysis.

The play’s occasional glimpse at Bearing’s childhood shows us how she has been cut off from herself. As Derrida writes, “the privilege granted to consciousness . . . signifies the privilege granted to the present . . . one grants the ‘living present’ the power of synthesizing traces, and of incessantly reassem-

47. Derrida, “Différance,” 11.

48. Derrida, “Différance,” 3.

49. Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 196.

bling them.”⁵⁰ The sick role hides the fact that Bearing was once a child, once a graduate student, once an august and respected scholar, and it emphasizes how cut off Bearing is from the rest of the people in her life. Near the end of *Wit* professor Ashford, who we previously saw imploring a young Bearing to learn what Donne had to teach her, appears in the hospital “now eighty” (W, 51), having been in town visiting her great-grandson “who is celebrating his fifth birthday” (W, 51). According to the character notes at the beginning of the play this birthday makes him exactly one-tenth of Bearing and Kelekian’s ages, as well as a tenth of the age Ashford was in the scene thirty years prior when she was Bearing’s professor. This repetition of fives and fifties suggests that the nameless great-grandson represents what both Bearing and Kelekian (who like her seems married to his work) do not have, which is deep and abiding connections to other people. Ashford, meanwhile, is connected to many people, one of them being Bearing, and she is seemingly the only person not employed by the hospital to express any concern as to Bearing’s well-being. When Bearing, delirious from cancer (or, equally likely, from cancer treatment), refuses to listen to her recite Donne, Ashford pulls out a copy of a children’s picture book, *The Runaway Bunny*, which she had brought for her great-grandson. This reading appears to comfort Bearing, who falls asleep (W, 53).

While there is a clear resonance with *The Tale of the Flopsy Bunnies*, a Beatrice Potter book Bearing reads as a child in a flashback, which partially explains this response, the manner in which Ashford reads the story to her is also important. Much like with Donne in the earlier scene, she uses *The Runaway Bunny* to teach Bearing a lesson, “a little allegory of the soul. No matter where it hides, God will find it” (W, 52) which is clearly meant to comfort her. The scene also perhaps resembles how Ashford reads stories to her great-grandson (as well as her child and grandchild before him), which allows Bearing to become, temporarily and performatively, a member of someone’s family again. Likewise, in attempting to teach Bearing something (which repeats their earlier relationship as student and professor), Ashford expresses *concern for Bearing’s future* at the same time she recapitulates Bearing’s past. Thus, if we can see the act of diagnosis as a type of authorship that establishes a fixed clinical meaning by cutting the patient off from their past (by limiting it to clinically relevant details) or their future (by understanding it purely in prognostic terms), then Ashford’s visit is much closer to that of a poet deliberately creating paradox and contra-

50. Derrida, “Différance,” 16.

diction in order to present a complex, composite idea not expressible in the “wideawake language” of everyday writing. Though I doubt Ashford would consider herself a poststructuralist, her treatment of Bearing in that final scene shows far greater respect for the inherent complexity and iterability of meaning—of *différance*—than any other character’s behavior up to that point.

Diagnostic Injustice

The Ashford visit creates a significant point of contrast with the way Bearing is treated in the rest of the play, a contrast that makes it clear that her treatment by her physicians has harmed her. The foregoing analysis shows, likewise, that this harm has something to do with interpretation and ambiguity, that is, with hermeneutics, or the philosophical study of the process of interpretation. This final section develops on the preceding analysis to sketch a theory of harm, an explanation of why and how these actions harm Bearing (and by extension those treated like Bearing).⁵¹ A concrete theory of harm is vital here given the general tendency among physicians to treat the humanistic elements of medical practice as unimportant, creating a situation where “the body and its physiology and pathology is perceived with complexity, while the patient, as a subject, is approached from a simple systems perspective.”⁵² The humanities are also complex, and humanistic problems must be dealt with in a manner that addresses their complexity. Not doing so can cause real, serious harms, and these harms, as I argue here, take the form of what ethicist Miranda Fricker calls hermeneutic injustice.

I discuss Fricker’s relevance to the study of pain epistemology in broader terms in this book’s first chapter. Relevant to this chapter is her definition and analysis of hermeneutic injustice. Whereas epistemic injustices generally all have to do in some way with knowledge and knowing broadly construed, hermeneutic injustice (sometimes called *hermeneutical* injustice) has to do with a person’s capacity to interpret and make sense of their own lives. At the start of her chapter on the concept, Fricker quotes the feminist theorist Nancy Hart-

51. A theory of harm is also important if we evaluate these sorts of medical situations from a consequentialist standpoint, as one can only say something is wrong due to its negative consequences if one can say what those consequences are and why they are negative.

52. Brenda Hall and Paul Kadetz, “Finding the Subject in the Objectified: Problematising the Dependence on Metrics for Patient Care in the United States,” in *The Routledge Companion to Health Humanities*, ed. Paul Crawford, Brian Brown, and Andrea Charise (London: Routledge, 2020), 200.

sock, who observes that “the dominated live in a world structured by others for their purposes—purposes that at the very least are not our own and that are in various degrees inimical to our development and even existence.”⁵³ Fricker goes on to describe how “relations of unequal power can skew shared hermeneutical resources so that the powerful tend to have appropriate understandings of their experiences ready to draw on as they make sense of their social experiences, whereas the powerless are more likely to find themselves having some social experiences through a glass darkly.”⁵⁴ It is important that in a medical context hermeneutic injustices arising from doctor-patient interactions not be reduced to simply a matter of a doctor having superior expertise and the patient being harmed by their ignorance. The reasons for that interpretation being inappropriate should be clear according to the preceding analysis: there is simply much more at play, epistemically, in the process of diagnosis and treatment for the process to be understandable using a one-dimensional criteria of greater or lesser technical expertise. In any case, patients have expertise of their own, not just in Bearing’s case of being a recognized scholar, but in terms of what the disease broadly *means* in the context of their own lives.

What is the harm of hermeneutic injustice in the context of medical treatment? Fricker provides a clue in her definition of the “primary harm” of a hermeneutic injustice, which is the “exclusion from the pooling of knowledge owing [in Fricker’s main examples] to structural identity prejudice in the collective hermeneutical resource” as well as more broadly “exclusion from participation in the spread of knowledge.”⁵⁵ As Peña-Guzman and Reynolds write in their analysis of epistemic injustice in medical error, “knowledge is fundamentally social, which is to say, produced, shared, interpreted, and transmitted through complex human practices, interactions, and institutions.”⁵⁶ And knowledge of symptoms, we should recall, is relational: a symptom is never a problem in itself, but rather is a problem *for some person*. Cancer cells in a petri dish are no danger to anyone, and pain cannot exist without someone to feel it; the person that the disease is happening to is inseparable from the fact of that disease being a problem. Furthermore, these problems are likewise never expe-

53. Nancy Hartsock, *The Feminist Standpoint Revisited and Other Essays* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1998), 241. Qtd. in Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 147.

54. Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, 148.

55. Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, 162.

56. David. M. Peña-Guzman and Joel Michael Reynolds, “The Harm of Ableism: Medical Error and Epistemic Injustice,” *Kennedy Institute of Ethics Journal* 29, no. 3 (2019): 208.

rienced as problems in general (despite how they might be interpreted by outside observers), but rather particular problems. A general difficulty with walking, for instance, is felt in the stairs that one cannot climb, or the street that one needs help crossing. A person's death is not mourned for the loss of life in the abstract, but rather their particular life and the particular things that they wanted to do and did not get to. One may only access general knowledge about a person's life and experience of disease—"this patient has reduced mobility"—through a synthesis of their accumulated specificity, either by the doctor or by the patient themselves.

Bearing's general isolation, even before the onset of her illness, is thus analogous to the degrading of her hermeneutic autonomy in the hospital. How many people outside of the hospital even know she's dying of cancer? Ashford for sure, but beyond that? How many people will see her obituary and say, "I didn't even know she was sick"? This lack of interpersonal connection, of social capital, is harmful to her in the same way that her epistemic mistreatment in the hospital is harmful; by limiting the topic of discussion to only either the material elements of her disease or her role as a professor and scholar, Bearing is deprived of opportunity to develop self-knowledge, to interpret her own experiences *as* her experiences and not just the experiences-in-general of a role, be that role professor, student, or patient. Bearing's apparent ironic detachment at the start of the play is clearly an attempt to distract from the trauma and suffering she has endured as a result of being diagnosed with terminal cancer at the age of fifty, and any opportunity she might have had to seek out counseling or even just comfort for her drastically shortened life (or, that is, shortened in comparison to what she likely expected) was lost in part because she lacked the vocabulary and the insight to express that need. Instead, the only tools she had to understand her problem were the techniques of literary criticism and the pitiless medical gaze of Kelekian and Posner. The corrosive medical hermeneutic she was subject to—outlined above—thus diminished her ability to name her trauma and seek out ways to mitigate it. She was thus subject to a hermeneutic injustice and was harmed by it.

Put more broadly, the theory of harm I sketch here says that the hermeneutic strategies deployed in doctor-patient relationships resembling the one depicted in *Wit* (which, as stated above, is often used as an example of "what not to do" in medical education) harm the patients subjected to them by diminishing their capacity to acquire self-knowledge pertaining to the disease they are afflicted with, by, for example, limiting the topic of discussion to only those

aspects of the experience of the disease that have physical correlates or which are in some other way epistemically accessible to the physician. The scope, thus circumscribed, epistemically isolates the patient with regards to those disease-related problems—like trauma and grief—that are not directly observable from the outside. Since knowledge is relational, this circumscription reduces the patient's hermeneutic resources and limits their ability to identify and solve (or even mitigate) these problems. One cannot, for example, seek out a grief counselor until one knows that one is grieving. Even terminal patients with no hope of survival deserve comfort in their last days and should be spared additional needless harms.

How does one solve this problem? I do not presume to have a final answer to that question, as indeed it appears to be at the root of much of what the medical humanities do. But given the important role of ambiguity and a multiplicity of interpretations in the matter, a solution could potentially lie in the hermeneutic theories of Hans-Georg Gadamer. In *Truth and Method*, Gadamer outlines what he refers to as “understanding,” a term he invests with additional technical meaning derived in part from its use by Martin Heidegger in his *Being and Time*. As Jean Grondin writes, Gadamer's methods are in many ways in line with those that Bearing advocates, in that he “likes to follow the lead of language. The fact that the basic notions he is unfolding often have many very different meanings does not bother him. Quite on the contrary, he sees in this plurality of meaning an indication that language, long before thinking, is perhaps up to something essential.”⁵⁷ In Heidegger's usage, to “understand” something involves more than simply learning facts about it in a rote or abstract way, and it is better conceived as a capacity to act on or express that knowledge practically. To understand is to do, to engage, to perform in relation to the object at hand, or, as Heidegger puts it, “in all explanation one uncovers understandingly that which one cannot understand.”⁵⁸ Understanding for Heidegger, we should also note, has an important temporal character, one that is relevant given what was noted about the present-focused, atemporal character of Bearing's diagnosis and treatment, which contributed to her alienation. As Heidegger writes, “understanding is grounded primarily in the future: one's *state-*

57. Jean Grondin, “Gadamer's Basic Understanding of Understanding,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Gadamer*, ed. Robert J. Dostal (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 36.

58. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper, 2008), 385. The broader philosophical import of Heidegger's concept of understanding I will skim over here for the sake of brevity. Interested readers should consult Peter Trawny, *Heidegger: A Critical Introduction* (Cambridge: Polity, 2019), especially chapter 2.

of-mind, however, temporalizes itself *primarily* in *having been*.⁵⁹ Thus, given the future-directed nature of acquiring understanding—one studies in the present to understand in the future—combined with the past-directed nature of memory means that for Heidegger understanding amounts to more than just the acquisition of true information. It is a process of integration, not only of the information known but also the manner of knowing it. The memory of the past, the experience of the present, and anticipations of the future must all have their part to play, and knowledge is understood here as a kind of *practice* rather than simply a record of information.

Gadamer adapts these and other elements in the development of his hermeneutics. As he writes in *Truth and Method*, to understand a text is to, in a sense, arrive at an understanding *with* it, to read it on its own terms and within its own frame of reference without extracting it from the processes that generated its particular meaning. “We do not,” he says, “ask the experience of art to tell us how it conceives of itself . . . but what it truly is and what its truth is, even if it does not know what it is and cannot say what it knows.”⁶⁰ How does one achieve this? For Gadamer, the process of interpretation must, in a sense, be iterative, almost experimental. One reads a text, formulates a mental model for what its meaning is, then revises that model when one rereads (for example) and applies the revised model upon the next reading, upon which time the model is revised again. As he writes, this sequence relies upon the temporally integrated structure of understanding we see in Heidegger:

All correct interpretation must be on guard against arbitrary fancies and the limitations imposed by imperceptible hubris of thought, and must direct its gaze “on the things themselves” . . . A person who is trying to understand a text is always projecting. . . . Working out this fore-projection, which is constantly revised in terms of what emerges as he penetrates into the meaning, is understanding what is there.⁶¹

This advice seems widely useful in a medical context, where a wrong first impression—such as too quickly concluding that a person arriving at the ER with an unexplained pain is a “drug seeker”—can hamper the physicians’

59. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 390.

60. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 91.

61. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 279.

understanding of the issue and thereby lead to harmful outcomes. Gadamer writes that “a person trying to understand a text is prepared for it to tell him something. That is why a hermeneutically trained consciousness must be, from the start, sensitive to the text’s alterity.”⁶² How many of the ethical lapses we see represented in *Wit* could have been avoided if Kelekian, Posner, and the rest of the medical team (with the exception of the nurse, Susie) had simply heeded that advice? To treat a patient as simply “a patient” is to render them fungible, functionally identical with all others of its kind, and amounts to the overwriting of their difference, their alterity. It also risks inflicting a hermeneutic injustice on them by limiting their capacity to understand their situation and respond to it in the way that best serves their interests and goals (which may not include being cured at all). The mere fact that it is at times impossible for practical reasons to treat every single person with the care they need to flourish is not a good enough reason to make this ill treatment a habit or, worse, a policy. Much like how the light of the sun in the daytime blocks out the dimmer stars around it, the idea of an impossible perfect solution can blot out the many possible imperfect solutions. But those solutions are still there: one need only wait for the sun to set.

As Grondin writes, for Gadamer understanding works in part by way of “agreement,” and he cites the common English phrase “we understand each other” as an example of the word being used in this way colloquially.⁶³ When one reads a text understandingly, that means in part that one is attempting to understand what the text is “trying to say,” which should not be understood as identical with what the author is trying to say.

When I read a text of Plato on justice, for instance, I do not merely want to record Plato’s opinions on the subject. I also share (and put into play, Gadamer will say) a certain understanding of justice, in the sense that I know or sense what Plato is talking about. According to Gadamer, such a basic understanding of what he emphatically calls the *Sache*, the matter at hand or the subject matter, is inherent in every understanding (it also applies in conversation where the discussion partners share a common ground). If Gadamer insists on this element of agreement, it is to underline the point that understanding is primarily related to the issue at hand and not to the author’s intention as such.⁶⁴

62. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 282.

63. Grondin, “Gadamer’s Basic Understanding,” 39.

64. Grondin, “Gadamer’s Basic Understanding,” 40.

As the scholar Donatella Di Cesare summarizes the matter, “understanding involves understanding the *self* and *other* simultaneously, since self-understanding can articulate itself only through the understanding of the other.”⁶⁵ One cannot understand what Plato personally, individually meant in any given piece of his writing, in part because his mind is inaccessible to us and in part because the linguistic play of *différance* prevents us from arriving at such a concrete and final determination. Yet one also cannot unilaterally impose a completely alien reading on the text, or at least one cannot do so coherently and persuasively, because it would not *agree* with that text—would not be consistent with it—and would not amount to an understanding of it. One would be ignoring the text’s alterity and would act like those readers Barthes criticizes who will turn a work of literature into an expression of their own selves, or turn a human being into just another terminal patient. As Gadamer puts it, “the anticipation of meaning in which the whole is envisaged becomes actual understanding when the parts that are determined by the whole themselves also determine this whole,”⁶⁶ or as he writes in relation to *Hamlet*, “since the play is ambiguous, it can have its effect, which cannot be predicted, only by being played.”⁶⁷ The ambiguity of a text’s meaning or of a person’s identity is precisely the result of this reciprocity of parts and whole, a reciprocity that needs to “play itself out,” so to speak, in order to be understood. To read a text reductively—that is, in terms of scientific reductionism—arrests this play of ambiguity, meaning that reductionism, an epistemic tool designed to help scientists understand the natural world *more*, when applied to a text or to a person results in one understanding *less*.

I am of course not the first person to suggest that Gadamer might have quite a lot to offer medicine and the medical humanities. One could look, for example, to Leah McClimans’s work applying Gadamer’s theories to narrative medicine,⁶⁸ Fredrik Svenaeus’s writing on the medical applications of Gadamer’s writing on *phronesis* or practical knowledge,⁶⁹ Camille Abettan’s work on

65. Donatella Di Cesare, *Gadamer: A Philosophical Portrait*, trans. Niall Keane (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 88.

66. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 302.

67. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 520.

68. Leah McClimans, “A Dialogic Approach to Narrative Medicine,” in *Inheriting Gadamer: New Directions in Philosophical Hermeneutics*, ed. Georgia Warnke (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), 203–17.

69. Fredrik Svenaeus, “Hermeneutics of Medicine in the Wake of Gadamer: The Issue of *Phronesis*,” *Theoretical Medicine and Bioethics* 24 (2003): 407–31.

Gadamer and personalized medicine,⁷⁰ or Kevin Aho's work on *The Enigma of Health*.⁷¹ And certainly the present analysis does not, by itself, amount to a fully developed method or theory of Gadamerian diagnosis. What this chapter does show, however, is the manner in which some of the central harms resulting from the problems represented in *Wit* could be resolved, or at least mitigated, using some of the tools of hermeneutics and literary theory more generally. Similarly, it shows how *Wit* is not, contrary to how it is most often used pedagogically, simply a catalogue of medical malpractices, or an extended example of what not to do. *Wit* provides solutions, but unlike the didactic way it shows the problems of impersonal or dehumanizing medical care, *Wit* expresses these solutions in the way Donne expresses the complex mysteries of death or how Joyce expresses the convoluted structure of a dream: mimetically, by acting the material out, such that one does not read these texts to encounter a straightforward explanation of an idea, but rather to undertake the thought process according to which that idea makes sense. One is invited to read the text as a text, and to face its textual alterity, that is to say, understand it. The largely unheralded brilliance of *Wit* is that it teaches you how to read both itself and Bearing's cancer by teaching you how to read Donne.

In his essay on "The Metaphysical Poets," T. S. Eliot writes that Donne "employ[s] a device which is sometimes considered characteristically 'metaphysical': the elaboration . . . of a figure of speech to the furthest stage to which ingenuity can carry it."⁷² In *Wit* the central conceit is that a person is like a text, and that understanding a person, or a person's afflictions, is akin to reading, a figuration that the play elaborates right up to the death of its protagonist, where Bearing steps away from her body and wanders offstage into the unknown. Stephen L. Daniel, in his essay "The Patient as Text"—an essay that predates the first performance of *Wit* by several years—notes similarly that "the mode of interpretation for literature—the comprehension of meaning—is a general cognitive activity which medical diagnosis exemplifies in a specific way."⁷³ It is uncanny how closely this essay relates to the play despite predating it. Reading

70. Camille Abettan, "Between Hype and Hope: What Is Really at Stake with Personalized Medicine," *Medicine, Health Care, and Philosophy* 19 (2016): 423–30.

71. Kevin Aho, "Gadamer and Health," in *The Gadamerian Mind*, eds. Theodore George and Gert-Jan van der Heiden (London: Routledge, 2021), 177–87.

72. T. S. Eliot, "The Metaphysical Poets," *The Complete Prose of T. S. Eliot: The Critical Edition: The Perfect Critic, 1919–1926*, ed. Anthony Cuda and Ronald Schuchard (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), 375.

73. Daniel, "The Patient as Text," 201.

a text well is hard. There are an infinite number of valid readings, and an infinite number of invalid readings. Yet it is the invalid readings that seem the most numerous, in part because many of them derive, Gadamer tells us, from ourselves. Much like Derrida's analysis of auto-affection, which I discuss in relation to pain in this book's first chapter, what is often taken to come from outside the self is often an internal projection or idealization.

Reading the text itself requires, fittingly enough, reading the text itself, but one can only get to the text by passing through one's own self, as the act of reading cannot exist autonomously from the reading subject. Reading well, then, requires practice, work, effort, and attentiveness; it is a skill that must be developed, and it relies on the cultivation of certain attitudes and epistemic dispositions. What we come to understand when we read *Wit* understandingly is that despite its seeming didacticism, the way it seems at first to be simply a horror show of negative examples, it is in fact a demand that we read the text the way it needs to be read, the way Bearing needs and indeed deserves to be read, with attention to the alterity, ambiguity, and unreducibility of the text. For one must interpret in order to understand, and yet as Gadamer, Derrida, and Barthes all argue, the act of interpretation is itself constitutive of the very meaning being understood. One is always implicated with the other, connected with the other, sutured to that otherness even, or especially, when one cannot understand it. But to override this complexity, to impose a "cutanddry grammar and goahead plot" where none exist already, is nothing less than the infliction of a new pain upon the old, the agony of cancer compounded with the wound of misunderstanding. It is not simply "a matter of interpretation" but a real material harm, one that *Wit* teaches us to recognize, name, and respond to.

SEVEN

Notes on Pain and Dehumanization

How can people aim guns at each other? Sometimes they go off.

—James Joyce, *Ulysses*¹

In 2007, the University of Iowa Press published *Poems from Guantánamo: The Detainees Speak*, a slim volume of twenty-two poems edited by Marc Falkoff, a lawyer and professor of law who had represented several of the people held at this notorious outpost of American imperialism. The collection formed part of the effort to expose and rectify the mass human rights abuses committed at the prison and to advocate for the release of the detainees, many of whom were and are being held without charge. Specifically, the collection aims to reverse the unpersoning of the detainees within Western, and specifically American, discourse, an unpersoning that undermines political opposition to their imprisonment by reducing the perceived injustice of what has been inflicted on them. As the linguistic anthropologist Flagg Miller writes in his introduction to the collection, “allowing for the complexity of the detainees’ poems is an important first step in restoring a human dimension to grander official narratives about Guantánamo.”² The poems are a counterimage, or perhaps a countersignature, to the photographs and videos of detainees in orange jumpsuits and masks, the visibility of their clothes contrasted with the invisibility of their faces, such that the uniform replaces the face as the locus of identification. “The enemy com-

1. James Joyce, *Ulysses*, eds. Hans Walter Gabler, Wolfhard Steppe, and Claus Melchior (New York: Vintage, 1986), 13.1193–1194.

2. Flagg Miller, “Forms of Suffering in Muslim Prison Poetry,” in *Poems from Guantánamo: The Detainees Speak*, ed. Marc Falkoff (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2007), 15.

batant,” writes Erin Trapp in her analysis of *Poems from Guantánamo*, “denotes not only the unnamable negativity of empire, but also the duplicitous position of being assumed guilty and of assuming guilt for the crimes of others.”³

Writings by Guantánamo prisoners have frequently been suppressed or censored prior to their publication. For example, Mohamedou Ould Slahi’s *Guantánamo Diary* was, when first published in 2015, riddled with black-bar redactions, some of which go on for multiple pages⁴ (an unredacted edition was published in 2017). In order to even get to that point, the diary, which was first completed in 2005, needed to overcome active suppression by the American government. The diary’s editor, Larry Siems, writes in his introduction:

[The manuscript] was stamped “SECRET,” a classification level for information that could cause serious damage to national security if it becomes public, and “NOFORN,” meaning it can’t be shared with any foreign nationals or intelligence services. It was deposited in a secure facility near Washington, DC, accessible only to those with a full security clearance and an official “need to know.” For more than six years, Mohamedou’s attorneys carried out litigation and negotiations to have the manuscript cleared for public release.⁵

Falkoff, in *Poems from Guantánamo*, tells a similar story, writing that “the Pentagon refuses to allow most of the detainees’ poems to be made public, arguing that poetry ‘presents a special risk’ to national security because of its ‘content and format.’ . . . [M]ost of the poems that *have* been cleared are in English translation only, because the Pentagon believes that their original Arabic or Pashto versions represent an enhanced security risk,” with said translations being conducted by “linguists with secret-level security clearance.”⁶ It is thus an anthology of simulacra, a book of Arabic and Pashto poetry that can only be read in English, where it is impossible to know the nature and quality of the translations because the originals are classified and held in a secure government facility.

The Pentagon’s claims are as spurious as their decisions are self-serving. For one thing, given the many cases of detainees being held for years and then

3. Erin Trapp, “The Enemy Combatant and Poet: The Politics of Writing in *Poems from Guantánamo*,” *Postmodern Culture* 21, no. 3 (2011): np. <https://doi.org/10.1353/pmc.2011.0023>

4. Mohamedou Ould Slahi, *Guantánamo Diary*, ed. Larry Siems (New York: Little, Brown, 2015).

5. Larry Siems, “Introduction,” in *Guantánamo Diary*, ed. Larry Siems (New York: Little, Brown, 2015), xv–xvi.

6. Marc Falkoff, “Notes on Guantánamo,” in *Poems from Guantánamo: The Detainees Speak*, ed. Marc Falkoff (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2007), 4–5.

released without the government providing any evidence of wrongdoing or even specific charges, it is questionable whether it would be possible for them to inflict any concrete harm or danger with their poetry even if they deliberately set out to do so. The reasoning seems to be that the poems may contain secret messages to the detainees' alleged terrorist comrades, which could then cause or enable harm. But if the detainees are innocent (as they remain until proven guilty), then there are no such comrades with whom they can communicate, no "serious damage to national security" that they could inflict that could justify a secret classification. The argument, then, is circular: without clear evidence of wrongdoing, there is nothing to say that the poems are anything besides. The US government's inability to charge and convict the detainees—to prove in court that they did what they are accused of doing—puts the official justification for censoring their poems into doubt. Let us not mince words. The official justification is almost certainly nonsense, and the officials responsible almost certainly know that.

Why then censor the poems? What benefit might there be in preventing these works from being published and filtering the ones that are published through a sieve of translation? Quite possibly it is to ensure that the poems do not perform the task they were intended for, the humanization of the prisoners and the condemnation of their imprisonment, to hide the pain that these people have suffered so that nobody will intervene to end it. These poems testify, often self-consciously so, to the pain and suffering the detainees have endured, and the very act of releasing them seeks to put that suffering to political work. Look for example at this piece, called "Death Poem," by Jumah Al Dossari, a detainee who made numerous suicide attempts during his confinement before he was released in 2007:

Take my blood.
Take my death shroud and
The remnants of my body.
Take photographs of my corpse at the grave, lonely.
Send them to the world,
To the judges and
To the people of conscience,
Send them to the principled men and the fair-minded.
And let them bear the guilty burden, before the world,
Of this innocent soul.

Let them bear the burden, before their children and before history,
 Of this wasted, sinless soul,
 Of this soul which has suffered at the hands of the "protectors of peace."⁷

How much more powerful would this poem be in its original form? The poem enacts what it describes, drawing out the corpse of its author and bringing forth the wounds it bears to be accounted for. It demands that most basic of legal imperatives, a demand that the prisoners were unable to make until the *Boumediene v. Bush* Supreme Court decision in 2008: habeas corpus, produce the body. Held without evidence, held in secret, cut off from all but the barest communication with the outside world via lawyers bound by strict rules, the detainees were denied both evidence of their alleged crimes and the ability to provide evidence of the crimes committed against them. Denied a trial, they could not contest the charges; denied communication with the public, they could not contest their dehumanization. Even their suicides were treated as acts of aggression. As Falkoff writes, "when three detainees successfully killed themselves in June 2006, the military called the suicides acts of 'asymmetric warfare.'"⁸ The suicidal men were blamed for the fact that their deaths made their abusers feel guilty.

As Elizabeth Werber writes in her analysis of the anthology,

[R]eading the twenty-two published poems means, thus, to read them torn out of their cultural and especially their linguistic and poetological context. It means reading them in the language of the jailor . . . It also means reading them in the language of a universe created to circumvent the constitutional rights that citizens and foreigners alike have on US soil. In short, reading those poems in translation means reading them in a context as forcibly US-American as the prison camp itself.⁹

The word for this process is *propaganda*. As Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky write in *Manufacturing Consent*, "a propaganda system will consistently portray people abused in enemy states as *worthy* victims, whereas those treated with equal or greater severity by its own government or clients will be *unworthy*."¹⁰

7. Jumah Al Dossari, "Death Poem," in *Poems from Guantánamo: The Detainees Speak*, ed. Marc Falkoff (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2007), 32.

8. Falkoff, "Notes on Guantánamo," 2.

9. Elizabeth Weber, "Guantánamo Poems: 'Guántdnamo, amas, amat,'" *Journal of Literature and Trauma Studies* 2., nos. 1–2 (2013): 159.

10. Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of Mass*

They similarly note how propaganda systems will often linger on the suffering of “worthy” victims in order to instill pity.¹¹ I have already discussed in my first chapter how systems of oppression often enact a denial of the pain of the other, indeed of their capacity to feel pain, and it is in this denial that we see why these poems were censored. The Pentagon was afraid they might do what the editors of the anthology hoped they would do: draw out the public’s feelings of pity and indignation and spark opposition to the continued injustices of the prison, resulting in the closure of the prison and the perpetrators of its injustices being held to account. And thus the authors were deprived of legal access to their own work and of the right to express the pain of what had befallen them. Like the sufferers of the final circle of Dante’s Hell, they were not even permitted tears.

To paraphrase an old slogan: if poetry changed anything, they would have made it illegal.



Books that, like *Agony for Others*, direct the resources of humanistic criticism and inquiry at questions underlying major social problems tend to operate under an unstated assumption: that the goal of both author and reader is the creation of a more just and equitable society, however conceived. Over the course of writing this book, I have read hundreds of analyses of the structural, political, and psychological preconditions for violence and the infliction of pain, each of them written under the general assumption that the objects of their study represented serious injustices, problems that needed to be fixed. One frequently writes these sorts of texts *in order* to fix such problems; academics often presume that a problem is best addressed, first, by understanding it, and that their research, however theoretical or abstract, will enable the remedial actions to follow. *Agony for Others* is in line with this pattern. Fundamentally, it is an attempt to understand the political, aesthetic, and phenomenological contours of suffering so that suffering may be reduced.

I wish to draw attention to a major exception to this tendency, Dave Grossman’s *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society*.¹² Though the subtitle implies that the book is a psychological study of war

Media (New York: Pantheon Books, 2002), 37.

11. Herman and Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent*, 42–43.

12. David Grossman, *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society* (New York: Back Bay Books, 2009).

trauma, an examination of how the act of killing harms the minds of those who perform it, the book is actually a study of how militaries can overcome a person's disinclination to inflict violence, can overcome their pity and compassion, and so produce more efficient killers. The book has been highly influential. As Grossman boasts in his introduction to the revised edition, "*On Killing* has become required reading at the FBI Academy, the DEA Academy, and a great many other law enforcement agencies nationwide . . . the USMC [United States Marine Corps] has placed *On Killing* on the Commandant's Required Reading List, and the book is required reading at West Point, the U.S. Air Force NCO Academy, and many other military schools."¹³ Though the book primarily concerns military training and combat, Grossman's connection to police training is both extensive and concerning. To cite one example, Jeronimo Yanez—the police officer who murdered Philando Castile, a thirty-two-year-old Black man, during a traffic stop—was later found to have attended a two-day training course called "The Bulletproof Warrior," which was run by Grossman and Jim Glennon, a former police lieutenant. The *New York Times*, which acquired copies of booklets handed out to students in the course, writes that it "portrays a world of constant and increased threat to officers" and "repeatedly makes the point that officers are allowed to—and need to—use more force than they may believe, and to use it pre-emptively."¹⁴ For example, the course lists as a "myth" the idea that an "officer must use the minimal amount of force necessary to affect their lawful law enforcement objectives."¹⁵ A video of the altercation shows Yanez needlessly escalating an otherwise routine interaction, accusing Castile of drawing a gun when he clearly was not, and then opening fire. Grossman's essay "On Sheep, Wolves, and Sheepdogs," widely taught in police academies, explicitly instructs readers to see themselves as "sheepdogs" protecting the "sheep" (i.e., the vast majority of people) from criminal "wolves." Police, as "sheepdogs," are understood as wolves who use their savagery for good. This cartoonishly simplistic language makes the logic of dehumanization obvious: nobody in this framework is considered a person.

That Grossman writes and teaches this material is, in the larger picture, less important than the fact that the agents of state violence, the police and the military, choose to have it taught. There is clearly a desire, in these organiza-

13. Grossman, *On Killing*, xv.

14. Mitch Smith and Timothy Williams, "Minnesota Police Officer's 'Bulletproof Warrior' Training Is Questioned," *New York Times*, July 14, 2016. <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/15/us/minnesota-police-officers-bulletproof-warrior-training-is-questioned.html>

15. Qtd. in Smith and Williams, "Minnesota Police Officer's 'Bulletproof Warrior' Training Is Questioned."

tions, for the kind of training Grossman describes, and so it makes more sense to treat *On Killing* (and its sequel, *On Combat*) as a particularly notable instance of a larger process than as the process's prime mover. In the first chapter of this book, I discussed Rousseau's analysis of pity and his wavering on the question of whether it is innate or learned. Grossman adopts what many might consider the optimistic view—that pity is innate (or deeply ingrained) for the vast majority of people, that there is a fundamental natural disinclination to inflict violence on another person—and reframes it as an obstacle for the state to overcome through the use of operant conditioning and the systematic dehumanization of the so-called enemy. Yet though his work has disseminated and popularized these methods, he did not create them; his book, rather, attempts to study systematically the methods that the US military has been developing and employing since the end of the Second World War. It is thus a valuable document for humanist scholars who oppose and resist militarism and organized state violence, one we ignore at our peril. It is a systematic study of the creation of violence *from the perspective of the perpetrators*. *On Killing* is thus an accessway into the process by which the preconditions for violence are deliberately created by those people and institutions that benefit from it, stating explicitly what elsewhere is only suggested implicitly, explaining in detail what elsewhere can be only vaguely glimpsed.

How do you convince someone to kill another person? Specifically, how do you convince someone to kill another person—as is usually the case in both war and law enforcement—whom they have never met and do not know, whose misdeeds, if any, are to the prospective killer often only theoretical? Grossman's answer to that question is extremely thorough, and it describes a dynamic wherein a soldier consciously (or unconsciously) takes actions leading to the death of one or more people in the context of their immediate group affiliation (fellow soldiers whom they do not wish to let down), superior officers (onto whom they can divest responsibility), and an enemy who they believe will kill them or their fellows if not prevented from doing so. Grossman frequently cites the work of military historian S. L. A. Marshall, who argues that less than a quarter of the infantry soldiers serving in the Second World War actually fired their weapons with an intent to kill, and instead either did not fire them at all or deliberately missed in order to avoid killing.¹⁶ Grossman draws from Marshall the premise that for all but a small sliver of humanity, the act of killing is so

16. S. L. A. Marshall, *Men Against Fire: The Problem of Battle Command* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2000).

psychologically difficult that people often will not do it even to save themselves. "The soldier who does kill," Grossman writes, "must overcome that part of him that says he is a murderer of women and children, a foul beast who has done the unforgivable. He *must* deny the guilt within him, and he *must* assure himself . . . that his victims are less than animals, that they are evil vermin, and that what his nation and his leaders have told him to do is right."¹⁷

As this quote demonstrates, the dehumanization of the opposing side does not function in a vacuum. Rather, it serves as part of a mutual diffusion of responsibility between political leaders, officers, and the person actually doing the killing. The act of killing confirms that one believes what one has been told, that one accepts the subordinate epistemic position of a dutiful, obedient soldier, and so has abandoned any claim to personal responsibility and the decision-making power that implies (as though such things were possible). The officers making the decisions, as *On Killing* describes, then themselves diffuse responsibility, passing it farther up the chain and further away from the act itself. As Grossman writes, "the honors and decorations that are traditionally heaped upon military leaders at all levels are vitally important for their mental health in the years that follow."¹⁸ The soldier thus passes responsibility to their commanding officer (since it was on that officer's orders that they fired their gun), who in turn passes responsibility up the chain of command, each person along the way being told, through medals and commendations, that they did and are doing the right thing. The highest point of leadership, and the greatest reserve of responsibility, is also at the farthest remove of the act of killing itself, enabling the far greater acts of pitilessness involved in planning military operations in which hundreds or thousands may be killed (Grossman calls "emotional distance" "the veil of denial that makes war possible"¹⁹). Responsibility for the war itself then becomes diffused onto the political leadership, who themselves diffuse responsibility onto the population they purport to serve. The expectation, then, is that the general population will complete the circuit by "supporting" the war, honoring the returning soldiers and venerating them so as to reaffirm that the violence they committed was in fact justified. "Parades are an essential rite of passage to the returning veteran," Grossman writes, "in the same way that bar mitzvahs, confirmations, graduations, weddings, and

17. Grossman, *On Killing*, 212.

18. Grossman, *On Killing*, 90.

19. Grossman, *On Killing*, 158

other public ceremonies are to other individuals at key periods of their lives.”²⁰ By completing the circuit and confirming that the soldier “did the right thing,” responsibility for all acts of violence committed over the course of the war is diffused throughout the entire population. Like a bed of nails, it spreads out the force and so minimizes the pain.

This spreading-out both enables, and is enabled by, the *mass* dehumanization of the opposition. Dehumanization of the opposing side, not only in the mind of the soldier firing the gun, but throughout the whole network of responsibility, is not ancillary but rather essential to the process. What Grossman sketches is the creation, en masse, of what Jean-Paul Sartre calls “bad faith.” In *Being and Nothingness*, he describes bad faith as the rejection of one’s responsibility for one’s actions and for one’s being. It “has in appearance the structure of falsehood. Only what changes everything is the fact that in bad faith it is from myself that I am hiding the truth.”²¹ But the self-lie is ultimately dehumanizing, reducing the subject, even in their own mind, to the status of an object pushed around by external forces rather than an intelligent agent possessed of freedom and all the responsibility that comes with it. As Sartre writes, “a grocer who dreams is offensive to the buyer, because such a grocer is not wholly a grocer. Society demands that he limit himself to his fiction as a grocer, just as the soldier at attention makes himself into a soldier-thing.”²² Comparing Sartre to Grossman in the context of modern research into the mechanisms by which people can be conditioned to kill thus suggests an important facet of how and why dehumanization is violence-enabling: like pain, the process is bidirectional. The act of dehumanizing the enemy is isomorphic with the process of dehumanizing the self, of rendering oneself an object lacking moral responsibility. It is a process we can see reflected in common justifications for violent acts—“I was just following orders,” “I just did what I had to,” “I was just left with no choice,” “I acted on instinct,” “I just did what had to be done”—which disclaim moral responsibility by suggesting that the act was in some sense automatic. A robot does what it has to do because it has no will of its own. It cannot be held responsible for its actions because it lacks the freedom from which responsibility derives.

An example of how the depersonalization of the opposing side enacts the

20. Grossman, *On Killing*, 277.

21. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: A Phenomenal Essay on Ontology*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Washington Square Press, 1984), 89.

22. Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 102.

depersonalization of the self comes from Grossman's own background in the US Army Rangers. In various parts of the book, he describes the training methods the military uses, based on the work of psychologists B. F. Skinner and Ivan Pavlov, to induce an automatic killing response in soldiers, such that in combat they will perform the act of killing without having to consciously decide to kill. Soldiers are presented with realistic targets that quickly jump into view and which they are rewarded for quickly shooting, such that "soldiers are conditioned to shoot as the enemy appears without reflecting on what they are doing."²³ The exercise is repeated again and again until the act of shooting becomes reflexive, so that in combat the soldier will not have time to consider their actions. "Every aspect of killing on the battlefield," Grossman writes, "is rehearsed, visualized, and conditioned."²⁴ It is possible that the conditioning need not even work in order to be effective. The soldier undergoes this training and so is able to say to themselves, "this was a conditioned response; I had my free will taken away and with it my responsibility for the act. I, quite literally, did what I had to do." Grossman describes being subject to this sort of conditioning while undergoing basic training in 1974, training that included chants that glorified extreme violence (spacing and capitalization in original):

Iwanna,
RAPE,
KILL,
PILLAGE'n
BURN, annnnn'
EAT dead
BAAA-bies²⁵

The chant is to be sung while marching, with the emphasized syllables spoken on the left foot. "Our military no longer tolerates this kind of desensitization," writes Grossman, "but for decades it was a key mechanism for desensitizing and indoctrinating adolescent males into a cult of violence in basic training."²⁶ It also, like operant conditioning, permits thoughtlessness (or at least, a feeling

23. Dragan Stanar, "The Vital Significance of Military Ethics," *Journal of Military Ethics* 20, nos. 3–4 (2021): 241.

24. Grossman, *On Killing*, 256.

25. Qtd. in Grossman, *On Killing*, 311–12.

26. Grossman, *On Killing*, 312.

of thoughtlessness) on the part of the soldier. As Elaine Scarry observes in her analysis of the discourse of war in *The Body in Pain*, “although a weapon is an extension of the human body . . . it is instead the human body that becomes in this vocabulary an extension of the weapon.”²⁷ Repeating these violent words and ideas to oneself, doing it aloud in a rhythm while marching as part of a group, familiarizes the ideas and makes them feel less weighty. “Habitualization,” observes Viktor Shklovskii, “devours works, clothes, furniture, one’s wife, and the fear of war.”²⁸ Sometimes intentionally so.

As Janet McIntosh writes in her study of dehumanization in military training, “the military has an interest not only in typing the enemy, but also in making their own participants, as much as possible, into types. The prequel to dehumanizing the enemy is the dehumanization of the soldiers themselves.”²⁹ Dehumanization—“the denial of a distinctly human mind to another person”³⁰—must function mutually in order to fully enact the bad faith that allows the commission of violence. A monstrous, murderous, vicious enemy who kills and maims and tortures without mercy or reason can only be opposed with violence: killing thus becomes easier because one feels as though one’s options are limited. Like a machine that can only do what it is programmed to do, one comes to believe that killing is the only option. Between, on one end, Vladimir Putin declaring war on Ukraine or George W. Bush declaring war on Iraq, and, on the other end, a soldier pointing a gun at another person and pulling the trigger, are thousands of people just minding their own business and doing their jobs, people in factories, payroll departments, food service, and any number of warfare’s quietly vital organs, who must maintain studied ignorance if the war machine is to continue functioning. And so the Ukrainians and Iraqis are subject to widespread dehumanization not only so they may be shot at, but so that the people “at home” will continue going to work, not causing too much

27. Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 67.

28. Viktor Shklovskii, “Art as Technique,” trans. Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis, in *From Symbolism to Socialist Realism: A Reader*, ed. Irene Masing-Delic (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2012), 72.

29. Janet McIntosh, “‘Because it’s easier to kill that way’: Dehumanizing Epithets, Militarized Subjectivity, and American Necropolitics,” *Language in Society* 50 (2021): 586.

30. Omar Sultan Haque and Adam Waytz, “Dehumanization in Medicine: Causes, Solutions, and Functions,” *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 7, no. 2 (2012): 177. For a thorough discussion of the psychology of dehumanization, see Nick Haslam and Steve Loughnan, “Dehumanization and Infrhumanization,” *Annual Review of Psychology* 65 (2014): 399–423. This paper discusses a distinction psychologists make between two types of dehumanization, “animalistic” and “mechanistic,” as well as the history of research on the topic. See also Nour S. Kteily and Alexander P. Landry, “Dehumanization: Trends, Insights, and Challenges,” *Trends in Cognitive Science* 26, no. 3 (2022): 222–40.

of a fuss, and later attending the parade with flag in hand once the war is over, completing the circuit of bad faith and ensuring that responsibility is maximally diffused. The intended result being that, to the greatest extent possible, it will be as though the act of killing was undertaken by nobody at all. For the people who did the killing will be told, by the very people in whose name the war was fought, that what they did was right and just, that the people they killed were not really human and could not feel it anyway, and, most importantly of all, that it was necessary, that they had no real freedom to act otherwise, and so are not responsible for what happened. This permission structure thus enables the act of self-deception and self-objectification on which war relies, at the cost of dehumanizing everyone involved.

One element of *On Killing* that may seem an unusual oversight, but which makes complete sense in the context of what it represents and tries to do, is the utter lack of reflection on the morality of war itself, whether in general or with respect to specific wars. The war Grossman refers to the most in his examples is the American invasion of Vietnam (with the Second World War not far behind), and he does not so much defend the war as act as though its rightness and validity were obvious. This refusal to contextualize, to ask whether the ends to which the methods described in *On Killing* are being aimed validate the misery and pain they will inflict, is itself an expression of what the book describes, and indeed what the act of fighting a war always involves: the refusal of responsibility for one's own actions, which requires nothing less than the refusal to *think about* them. If the first casualty of war is truth, then perhaps the second casualty of war is oneself.



In a 1901 article titled “Lynching and the Excuse for It,” the journalist Ida B. Wells describes how the perpetrators of lynchings and their defenders often justify the act as a form of punishment for heinous crimes, typically rape. As Wells writes,

Among many thousand editorial clippings I have received in the past five years, ninety-nine percent discuss the question upon the presumption that lynchings are the desperate effort of the Southern people to protect their women from black monsters, and, while the large majority condemn lynching, the condemnation is tempered with a plea for the lyncher—that human nature gives way

under such awful provocation and that the mob, insane for the moment, must be pitied as well as condemned.³¹

The nonsensical and self-serving arguments Wells describes (and later eviscerates) bear many resemblances to the permission structures that make warfare possible. Note the claim to necessity and madness on the part of the lyncher, the claim that “human nature gives way” in the face of such (totally fabricated) crimes, and that one simply had no other choice but to murder another person. As Angela Davis observes, “the myth of the Black rapist has been methodically conjured up whenever recurrent waves of violence and terror against the Black community have required convincing justifications.”³² It is a clear example of the self-objectifying function of bad faith, the treatment of oneself as merely an object in the world, blown about by forces outside of one’s control: the lie on which all mass violence sustains and enables itself.

I have often heard it said, in the context of antisemitic conspiracy theories, that the lies describe what would have to be true in order for the violence that follows to be warranted. But these examples show that argument to be off-target. Even if the white supremacists’ allegations were true, a rapist still has a right to due process; furthermore, the truth of the allegation would not, in fact, justify torture and murder. What the accusations do instead is support the idea that the perpetrators did what “had” to be done, what “must” be done, that they had no choice but to act. It is a myth promulgated in order to make the sort of mass, organized violence that white supremacy relies on psychologically possible for a large enough number of people that the violence may be carried out and the relation of supremacy maintained thereby. It does so in the manner discussed above, through the mutual dehumanization of self and other.

The actual motivations for lynching were typically far less exculpating. As Ashraf Rushdy describes in his history of American lynchings, while the excuses given usually involve accusing the victim of some sort of misdeed, the actual reasons most often had to do with eliminating independent, successful, or outspoken Black people so to maintain Black people’s exclusion from political life.³³ In some cases, lynching apologists explicitly framed the act in terms of “military necessity,” again promoting the idea that there were no other options but the

31. Ida B. Wells, “Lynching and the Excuse for It,” in *The Light of Truth: Writings of an Anti-Lynching Crusader*, ed. Mia Bay (New York: Penguin, 2014), 409.

32. Angela Y. Davis, *Women, Race, and Class* (New York: Vintage, 1983), 173.

33. Ashraf H. A. Rushdy, *American Lynching* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 13–15.

ones they chose, distancing themselves from their responsibility for the decisions they made.³⁴ The extent of these apologies also indicates how much lynchings required the *moral* support (or the appearance thereof) of the white population at large. These were not, after all, quiet assassinations conducted with maximum secrecy. Even a Klansman in a mask nevertheless engages in such acts in the open; indeed, the Klan often conducted their murders along the pattern set by earlier killings that attained popular support, so as to reinforce the impression that their acts had the backing of the local white population.³⁵ There is a need, here, for the circuit of responsibility to end in what the perpetrator considers to be the general public, where that responsibility can be most diffused. Though not as organized or systematized as a military command structure, these more ad hoc forms of mass violence nevertheless rely on similar methods in order to enable the act of killing.

It is similarities like this one that makes a text like *On Killing* valuable as an object of study. Such connections show that what the military does to its recruits is, to a large extent, merely a more well-organized and scientific version of what happens elsewhere. Take, for example, Michał Pawiński's description of the psychology of military socialization. "The socialization towards prototype," he writes, "is reached by deemphasizing individualism (depersonalization) and by the elimination of traits that might reduce the military effectiveness and attachment to the group."³⁶ The connection to the Klansman's hood is rather obvious here—like any uniform, it makes everyone look the same. But attention here should go to the phrase "socialization towards prototype," the inculcation of a belief that one is merely part of a group, of a set, a fungible entity interchangeable with any other of the same kind. While it is well understood that racism inflicts fungibility on the marginalized race, treating members of said group as though they are all alike, the importance of depersonalizing the *perpetrator* of violence in the military suggests that organized racist violence similarly relies on the deindividuation of white people. As Steve Martinot writes in *The Machinery of Whiteness*, the attribution of race at birth, "like gender . . . enters the birth room from elsewhere, through us, and attaches to the baby. . . . It is not thought of in terms of performance, of a role the baby will be given to play or a

34. Rushdy, *American Lynching*, 97.

35. Rushdy, *American Lynching*, 12.

36. Michał Pawiński, "Unintended Consequences of Military Cohesion," *International Peacekeeping* 25, no. 2 (2018): 296.

role we are playing. It is simply another uniform.”³⁷ Whiteness is this fungible category, a category to which the Klansman or neo-Nazi has become attached and into which they have submerged themselves. The act of racialization always treats the person as fungible, but white supremacy transforms the fungibility of whiteness into something enabling, an identity that can be threatened and must be protected. The concept of whiteness creates the thing that white supremacist violence claims to protect, and then further enables that violence by diffusing the perpetrator’s perceived individual responsibility for committing it.

One more recent example of this process at play is that of James Fields, a white supremacist who, while attending the 2017 “Unite the Right” protests in Charlottesville, Virginia, drove his car into a crowd of counterprotesters, killing one, Heather Heyer, and injuring several others. Ashley Rondini notes that during the protests earlier in the day, Fields was seen holding up a fake shield, implying that it was *he*, or perhaps white people in general, who was under attack. As she writes, “the shield represents a purported need for protection against an imminent threat, consistent with the racialized fear mongering upon which White supremacist politics have long relied in their justifications for violence and terror.”³⁸ In *On Killing*, Grossman describes an effect he terms “the winds of hate,” wherein a soldier, upon facing the opposing side and being subject to attempts on their life, experiences such a surge of terror that they feel compelled to inflict violence on their attacker in turn. As Grossman writes, “it is not fear of death and injury from disease or accident but rather acts of personal depredation and domination by our fellow human beings that strike terror and loathing in our hearts.”³⁹ To feel as though one is hated, deeply and lethally hated, and under constant threat of harm and domination can become a powerful motivation for violence. Yet the white supremacists’ claims of Black violence are lies; unlike soldiers in a battle, they are in no danger. The mutual fungibility of self and other overcomes this difficulty by transforming every act of violence (or alleged violence) against a member of the in-group by a member of the out-group into a mortal threat to oneself. Hate crimes “do not merely victimize particular individuals. Rather, they constitute a means of controlling

37. Steve Martinot, *The Machinery of Whiteness: Studies in the Structure of Racialization* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2010), 12.

38. Ashley C. Rondini, “White Supremacist Danger Narratives,” *Contexts* 17, no. 3 (2018): 60.

39. Grossman, *On Killing*, 76.

the behaviour of an entire group.”⁴⁰ That group is then held responsible for any and all transgressions (real or imagined) by any specific members.

Just as the victim group is targeted *as a whole*, so too is the aggressor group defended *as a whole*. The fungibility of the self thus enables violence through the creation of bad faith, objectifying the self and denying one’s own freedom to act otherwise (because “I had to defend myself”). Such processes happen in tandem with acts that dehumanize the target group and habituate the aggressor group to the idea of inflicting violence against them. To offer some examples, sociologists Steven Windisch and Pete Sim, in an examination of forum discussions among members of the neo-Nazi website *Stormfront*, found that the circulation of racist humor was essential to the act of in-group formation.⁴¹ The act of circulating these racist jokes, all of which dehumanize the target group, also increased group identification among the white racists, depersonalizing them in turn. Similarly, a study of the prevalence of racist humor in the Ferguson, Missouri, police department prior to the 2014 killing of Michael Brown, a Black teenager, argues that such jokes “have long facilitated the social bonding practices among white in-group members.”⁴² Finally, to return to Wells and the act of lynching, Srimayee Basu, in a paper analyzing the proliferation of photographs of lynchings, writes that “lynching photography was used not nearly as often for anti-lynching journalism as it was for strengthening the civic bonds of the white citizenry.”⁴³ Distributing these photographs of racist violence strengthened the white people’s identification with whiteness—here understood as a mass political identity—and so enabled further acts of violence. My point here, again, is that the dehumanization goes both ways, but while the dehumanization of the other enables violence against them, the dehumanization of the self enables violence on one’s own behalf. Indeed, much like the murderous chant Grossman describes from his training, they may also serve to habituate one to the idea of inflicting violence on another. One repeats the racist joke or distributes a photograph of a gruesome murder, sees one’s fellows laugh at it, and comes to believe that it is perhaps not such a bad thing after all.

40. Ryan D. King, Steven F. Messner, and Robert D. Baller, “Contemporary Hate Crimes, Law Enforcement, and the Legacy of Racial Violence,” *American Sociological Review* 74 (2009): 293.

41. Steven Windisch and Pete Sim, “More Than a Joke: White Supremacist Humour as a Daily Form of Resistance,” *Deviant Behaviour* (2022): 6. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01639625.2022.2048216>

42. Raúl Pérez and Geoff Ward, “From Insult to Estrangement and Injury: The Violence of Racist Police Jokes,” *American Behavioural Science* 63, no. 13 (2019): 1813.

43. Srimayee Basu, “The Aestheticization of Politics: The Case of Lynching Photographs,” *Modernism Modernity Print Plus* 7, no. 3 (2023): np. <https://doi.org/10.26597/mod.0250>

Inurement to the idea of violence, the willing repetition of the jokes or distribution of the imagery, becomes a way of becoming more closely connected with the in-group and more distant from the out-group. The act of killing, should it eventually be carried out, becomes thinkable precisely because it need not be thought about: it was just a joke, it was just self-defense, it was just pest-control, it was just something that had to be done.



The above discourse expresses in detail something Friedrich Nietzsche captured in an aphorism published in the second half of his *Human, All Too Human* (emphasis in the original):

No government nowadays admits that it maintains an army so as to satisfy occasional thirsts for conquest; the army is supposed to be for defence. That morality which sanctions self-protection is called upon to be its advocate. But that means to reserve morality to oneself and to accuse one's neighbour of immorality, since he has to be thought of as ready for aggression just as heatedly as our state does . . . our declaration of why we require an army declares our neighbour a hypocrite and cunning criminal . . . And perhaps there will come a great day on which a nation distinguished for wars and victories and for the highest development of military discipline and thinking, and accustomed to making the heaviest sacrifices on behalf of these things, will cry of its own free will: "*we shall shatter the sword*"—and demolish its entire military machine down to its last foundations. *To disarm while being the best armed*, out of an *elevation* of sensibility—that is the means to *real* peace . . . Better to perish than to hate and fear, and *twofold better to perish than to make oneself hated and feared*—this must one day become the supreme maxim of every individual state!⁴⁴

It seems Nietzsche had Grossman's number decades before he was born. But most relevant here is the way he locates the route to peace in deliberate acts of free will. It is not the weak, but the most powerful, who must disarm, who must give up their delusions of self-defense and accept that their counterparts are not criminals and hypocrites, and that to exist means always to be vulnerable. Peace

44. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human: A Book for Free Spirits*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale, ed. Richard Schacht (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 380–81.

requires the deliberate, self-conscious rejection of the dehumanization of self and other and a refusal to allow the desire for safety to overwrite all other concerns. Peace, in short, demands the abandonment of bad faith and the acceptance of responsibility: accepting that when a person decides to kill another human, *they have decided to kill another human*, that the person who pulled the trigger is the person who pulled the trigger and the person who ordered them to do it is the person who ordered them to do it.

I repeat these tautologies in order to cut through the fog of propaganda that surrounds questions of the validity of mass violence. If a war is truly just and right and necessary, then surely it can be defended on its own terms. A just war would not need to be lied about but instead could be defended rationally and honestly based on publicly known facts. If a political leader believes a war was necessary, then they should make their case without recourse to dehumanization or propaganda. Casting the people on the opposing side as somehow non-human should be treated as the act of deception that it is. The problem here is that the various systems and structures that make war fighting possible—and that become more and more sophisticated and effective with each passing year—occlude the reality of war and of the choices that lead up to it, further estranging decision makers (which includes, in a democracy, the voting population) from their responsibility for their acts and decisions.

Consider, for example, the US military's longstanding ties to the entertainment industry, what scholars have termed the "military-entertainment complex." The Department of Defense (DoD) has long offered assistance and support to the film, television, and video game industries in exchange for influence over the content of the resulting products. In material on their website the DoD describes how "production agreements require the DoD to be able to review a rough cut of a film, so officials can decide if there are areas that need to be addressed before a film is released," oversight that, it claims, is meant to ensure "accuracy,"⁴⁵ the apparent assumption being that an antiwar film or one that depicted the military in a negative light would somehow be "inaccurate." Such oversight is designed to create an impression about the nature of warfare among the general public that is favorable to the military. As Tim Lenoir and Luke Caldwell describe in their study of DoD influence on the video game industry, through the resulting "sanitized war experiences" the military "pro-

45. Katie Lange, "How and Why the DOD Works with Hollywood," defense.gov, U.S. Department of Defense, February 28, 2018, <https://www.defense.gov/News/Inside-DOD/blog/article/2062735/how-why-the-dod-works-with-hollywood>

duces audiences as depoliticized subjects—‘citizen soldiers’—and transmits support for American militarization by making the conduct of war feel cool and fun.”⁴⁶ Such an impression is not only useful for deceiving naive teenagers into signing up for the military, but also for ensuring that the circle of diffusion is able to resolve. It is, after all, much easier to convince people to show up for the parade commemorating a sanitized war, where killing is easy and the enemy is barely human.

These practices are thus related to other forms of sanitization, such as the use of “embedded” reporters, or war correspondents who are attached to the army and who must submit their stories for military approval before they can be published. The practice gained public prominence during the American invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan near the turn of the millennium, though there is a long history of nations attempting to filter the information that the public received about a war in order to shore up their support. For example, after the outbreak of the First World War, the British government secured a controlling stake of the Reuters news wire in order to oversee and filter its coverage.⁴⁷ Embedded reporting achieves similar aims without the need for the government to seize control of private news companies. As M. F. Casper and Jeffrey Child describe in their analysis of the practice during the Iraq war, “the American people became witness to how a high tech war was carried out through images of young heroes and their weapons silhouetted against dusky skies and bittersweet commentaries on hope and home.”⁴⁸ It is an image hardly different from a Hollywood film, and equally propagandistic. A war of choice cannot also be a war of ignorance: we must see the terror and the death we have caused; we must know the consequences of our actions. Someone who has argued that a war is necessary has no right to shrink from the carnage that ensues. And if those consequences disgust and torment us, then let that be a reason to act differently; let our horror at the blood that soaks our hands be a reason and a cause for peace.

These efforts at censorship and propaganda should be interpreted in light of

46. Tim Lenoir and Luke Caldwell, *The Military-Entertainment Complex* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018), 21.

47. Peter Putnis, “Share 999: British Government Control of Reuters During World War I,” *Media History* 14, no. 2 (2008): 141–65.

48. M. F. Casper and Jeffrey T. Child, “Embedded Reporting and Audience Response: Parasocial Interaction and Perceived Realism in Embedded Reporting from the Iraq War on Television News,” in *War and the Media: Essays on News Reporting, Propaganda, and Popular Culture*, ed. Paul M. Haridakis, Barbara S. Hugenberg, and Stanley T. Wearden (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2009), 206.

what late twentieth-century American conservatives termed “Vietnam syndrome,” or the American public’s growing unease toward militarism in the wake of the Vietnam War. Following Vietnam, “the American people had grown increasingly alienated from the military, and increasingly distrustful of the publicly stated objectives of national security policy.”⁴⁹ That this feeling of unease toward warfare would be pathologized as a “syndrome,” or what the conservative commentator Norman Podhoretz described as “the sickly inhibitions against the use of military force,”⁵⁰ speaks to an underlying contempt for democracy and of public criticism of the military. The idea that the public might engage in some form of oversight, might disagree with the military and its aims and attempt to restrain it from the violence that gives it purpose and a reason for existing, is, as in Grossman, dismissed in advance. The military never defends its actions, but merely asserts their rightness, not rebutting critiques but smothering them in a world made entirely of their self-sustaining ideology and within which there appears to be no outside.

That it is the “inhibitions” that Podhoretz finds “sickly” is, I think, instructive here in light of the filtering effect of the military-entertainment complex. In *Frames of War*, Judith Butler argues that “the ways of selectively carving up experience” of warfare is “essential to the conduct of war.”⁵¹ As already discussed, the processes that enable the violence of warfare require its support “at home.” Yet the vast majority of people find the reality of killing utterly abhorrent and would recoil from it if exposed directly (thus the need for military training). Indeed, during the Vietnam War antiwar activists deliberately sought out “evidence of atrocities” and “dispers[ed] information about the damage inflicted on the civilian population through U.S. bombing and chemical warfare” in order to create public opposition.⁵² What complaints about “Vietnam syndrome” seem to express, then, is frustration at the breaking of the frame, at the failure of the existing levers of propaganda to insulate the civilian population from the realities of what they support and enable. The implication, then, is that the best and easiest way to get people to support a war is to hide what it is they are supporting, the pain and death and misery that follows, in part, from

49. Ben Buley, *The New American Way of War: Military Culture and the Political Utility of Force* (London: Routledge, 2007), 63.

50. Qtd. in Herman and Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent*, 236–37.

51. Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* (London: Verso, 2016), 26.

52. Sylvia A. Ellis, “Promoting Solidarity at Home and Abroad: The Goals and Tactics of the Anti-Vietnam War Movement in Britain,” *European Review of History—Revue européenne d’histoire* 21, no. 4 (2014): 564.

their decision. What we encounter here is an analogue to the use of operant conditioning to induce an automatic shooting response in soldiers: war without thought, support without insight, killing without recognition, action without conscious intent. Either through ignorance or automaticity, the military detaches people from their actions and the consequences thereof, resulting in the maintenance of war and the military-industrial complex without real public oversight. The very sentiment that Nietzsche considered the “supreme maxim” that all nation states must adopt—“*better to perish than to make oneself hated and feared*”—is rendered unthinkable, save as a kind of syndrome or disease that must be stamped out as quickly as any plague.



Sympathy is, in the end, an act of interpretation: one sees the pain expression of another, a set of physical acts that symbolize through repeated correlation particular frameworks of subjective experience that one then mirrors within oneself. One can thus no more sympathize with all the world's suffering than one can read all the world's books. But the problem goes deeper than mere quantity. For the mere fact that a book is in one's hands, open, with one's eye glancing over every word, does not imply that one has undertaken an act of interpretation that would convert these mere symbols into meaning. This fact applies not only to pain but to any intersubjective relation. A word, for example, is merely a sound or a mark, and it becomes kind, cruel, true, false, racist, ignorant, noble, or sadistic depending on how it is interpreted, and even acts of mercy and mourning are subject to such ambiguity. Whether the sympathetic feelings trigger reflexively or not, the fact that the objective details must enter and be symbolized within a mind in order to affect that mind's thoughts and actions creates a gap that can be exploited, by oneself or others, to keep the feeling of pity at bay and so enable acts of cruelty that would otherwise be prevented. Such interruptions can occur at both the individual and collective level, violence proceeding as the shadow of the pitilessness that enables it, and pitilessness spreading as the wake of the violence that demands it.

Earlier in this book, I discussed Dante, in the final circle of Hell, refusing to remove the ice from a sinner's face despite promising to do so, and how his refusal of mercy reaffirmed a moral outlook in which God's condemnation is always appropriate and correct, a viciousness seemingly justified by the very violence it condones. Yet the refused interpretation, the idea that the condem-

nation of any person, no matter how cruel, to eternal torment cannot be the work of a loving god hovers over the scene, and indeed the whole of *Inferno*, present in the form of its rejection. Dante himself almost falls into it, showing sympathy for a sinner before turning away once again. The moral framework in terms of which this suffering is understood as acceptable must be affirmed as a whole or else lost as a whole, and the enormity of the change and the ambiguity it opens creates fear and doubt that cut short the process of reasoning.

Yet this process is not infallible, and repeated exposure to the humanity of the victim can eventually wear down a person's internal defense against pity if not belayed. One psychological study of executioners, for example, notes that among the subjects the author interviewed, "each of them begins as a staunch proponent of the death penalty. Most come to repudiate it. . . . Those few chaplains and wardens who maintain their support for the death penalty after participating in multiple executions describe the strategies they employ, or that the state employs, to maintain their distance from the men and women, or from the act of executing them."⁵³ Is Dante's refusal to remove the ice from Alberigo's face born out of respect for the will of God or from a desire to remain distant from unacceptable suffering? Perhaps those are the same thing. And if the pain of the other is truly as unknowable, as Scarry argues, why do these "chaplains and wardens" need to engage in strategies of containment when the pain of the other should already be contained? In any case, once the sympathy creeps in, once one finds oneself recognizing the other person as another person rather than as a sinner, the meaningless cruelty of the act of killing becomes obvious. Thus the decision by some prison wardens to prevent death row chaplains from meeting the condemned until the "last mile," lest they begin to doubt the righteousness of state-sponsored murder.⁵⁴

Yet both recent and historical examples show that one can perform this work on oneself if sufficiently motivated to accept cruelty as unavoidable. I had the misfortune of coming across an especially galling example in late 2024, while I watched news coverage of the Democratic National Convention (DNC), part of that year's US presidential election. The incumbent Democrats had spent roughly a year at that point aiding and abetting Israel's genocidal war on Gaza in response to the attacks of October 7, 2023. The attack on Israel, which eschewed military targets for a music festival and the homes of civilians, was

53. Susan A. Bandes, "What Executioners Can—and Cannot—Teach Us About the Death Penalty," *Criminal Justice Ethics* 35, no. 3 (2016): 191.

54. Bandes, "What Executioners Can—and Cannot—Teach Us," 193.

itself a crime, and I agree with the International Criminal Court's (ICC) decision to charge the leaders of both Hamas and Israel with crimes against humanity in response to the carnage that ensued. While Israel justifies its behavior in terms of a right of self-defense, from the beginning of their campaign it was clear that their target was not simply Hamas, the group that conducted the attack, but Palestinians as a whole. In November of 2024 the BBC, citing the UN's Human Rights Office, reported that nearly 70 percent of the war's victims in Gaza "are women and children," and that "the ages most represented among the dead were five to nine-year-olds."⁵⁵ A report in *The Guardian* cites descriptions by doctors in Gaza of "a steady stream of children, elderly people and others who were clearly not combatants with single bullet wounds to the head or chest,"⁵⁶ a report consistent with ICC findings of "widespread and systematic attack[s] against the civilian population of Gaza."⁵⁷ Do these soldiers imagine that the October 7 attacks were carried out by a squad of children and elderly people? Or does this behavior indicate a belief that, in the words of a video posted by an official account of the Israeli government, "there are no innocent civilians" in Gaza?⁵⁸

By the time of the DNC, the Democratic Party had spent months aiding and abetting these crimes and was not about to stop. Reportage at the time focused on the rejection of a Palestinian speaker from the convention, Georgia State Rep. Ruwa Romman, whose speech was eventually published by *Mother Jones*.⁵⁹ A similar but far less well-known incident occurred just outside the event, where several protesters stood reciting the names and ages of the children whose deaths this political party had caused. Attendees were caught on camera pushing their way through this crowd, openly mocking the recitation of names,

55. Mallory Moench, "Nearly 70% of Gaza War Dead Verified by UN Are Women and Children," *BBC News*, November 8, 2024, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cn5wel11pgdo>

56. Chris McGreal, "'Not a normal war': Doctors Say Children Have Been Targeted by Israeli Snipers in Gaza," *The Guardian*, April 2, 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/apr/02/gaza-palestinian-children-killed-idf-israel-war>

57. "Situation in the State of Palestine: ICC Pre-Trial Chamber I Rejects the State of Israel's Challenges to Jurisdiction and Issues Warrants of Arrest for Benjamin Netanyahu and Yoav Gallant," *International Criminal Court*, November 21, 2024, <https://www.icc-cpi.int/news/situation-state-palestine-icc-pre-trial-chamber-i-rejects-state-israels-challenges>

58. David Ingram, "Israeli Government Sparks Outcry with X Videos Saying 'There Are No Innocent Civilians' in Gaza," *NBC News*, June 14, 2024, <https://www.nbcnews.com/tech/social-media/israel-posts-video-saying-are-no-innocent-civilians-gaza-rcna157111>

59. Noah Lanard, "Here Is the Speech That the Uncommitted Movement Wants to Give at the DNC," *Mother Jones*, August 22, 2024, <https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2024/08/dnc-speech-uncommitted-movement-harris-walz-ruwan-romman/>

rolling their eyes, and *plugging their ears with their fingers*.⁶⁰ The behavior is reprehensible, but also instructive: this here is the work that one must do on oneself to accept and abet this cruelty, the effort one must put into killing one's own conscience in the name of power and political expediency, the refusal to accept even momentary guilt or shame or any negative consequence for one's cruelty at all. As Grossman describes, the dehumanization of the other must occur at every level of society if the guilt of killing is to be spread thin and made bearable. And here we see people willingly and self-consciously denying themselves information about the consequences of their actions if that information might pierce the enabling ignorance of the other's humanity. It is the weakness and cowardice of people who wish to benefit from violence without having to feel bad about it; it is a desire to avoid emotional distress that deserves neither sympathy nor patience.

In this context, we can see another angle to the story of Dante and the sinners in the ice. The frozen tears in their eyes, which prevents the expression of their pain, is really there for Dante's sake, and for the reader's. It is God's gift to us weak, pathetic mortals who cannot accept the righteous cruelty of His judgment. America—a far weaker god—has no such power, and so its functionaries must instead perform the task themselves, blinding their eyes, plugging their ears, and stunting their minds, so that the violent work of the American empire can continue apace.



The role of ignorance in the creation and maintenance of power has seldom been well-understood. One scholar whose work is an exception to this fact is Eve Sedgwick, who writes in *The Epistemology of the Closet*:

Knowledge, after all, is not itself power, although it is the magnetic field of power. Ignorance and opacity collude or compete with knowledge in mobilizing the flows of energy, desire, goods, meanings, persons. If Monsieur Mitterrand knows English but Mr. Reagan lacks—as he did lack—French, it is the urbane Monsieur Mitterrand who must negotiate in an acquired tongue, the ignorant Mr. Reagan who may dilate in his native one.⁶¹

60. "DNC attendees cover their ears as the names of dead Palestinian children are read," posted August 21, 2024, by BreakThroughNews, YouTube, 0:30, https://youtu.be/EdZRhgluRkU?si=Vh92_CVyTeDZZfq5

61. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008),

It is in this spirit, and in light of the foregoing discussion of propaganda, dehumanization, and the means by which one becomes capable of inflicting pain and death upon others, that I return to *Poems from Guantánamo* and the history of its translation. As Butler observes in her commentary on the collection, “the unreasoned schism that structures the military field of affect cannot explain its own horror at the injury and loss of life sustained by those representing the legitimate nation-state, or its righteous pleasure at the humiliation and destruction of those others not organized under the sign of the nation-state.”⁶² My analysis of *On Killing* reveals a major cause of this inability: the fact that the psychology of killing *requires* self-deception in order to function. The act of killing, torturing, and imprisoning someone relies, as Grossman describes in detail, on the conscious or unconscious acceptance of numerous falsehoods, principal among them being that the victim is inhuman. It is this ignorance and false belief that acts as the “magnetic field” of the power that the guards and their superiors wield over the Guantánamo Bay prisoners. It is likewise essential to the power that a white supremacist wields over their victims, and that a sniper wields over the person at the other end of their scope. As Achille Mbembe writes, this “separation” is also essential to the endeavors of colonialism: “colonizing broadly consisted in a permanent work of separation: on one side, my living body; on the other, all those ‘body-things’ surrounding it.”⁶³ But they are not “body-things”; they are bodies, and this fact must be pushed out of the mind if the violence on which the system of oppression relies is to continue.

In “The Task of the Translator,” Walter Benjamin describes the act of translation as a process of mutual undermining, where the apparent primacy of one language, its claim to representing the totality of possible meanings, is undone by the failure to perfectly transmit the message of the translated text—a failure leveraged to obscure the pain of the detainees. As he writes, translation “instead of resembling the meaning of the original, must lovingly and in detail incorporate the original’s mode of signification, *thus making both the original and the translation recognizable as fragments of a greater language*, just as fragments are part of a vessel.”⁶⁴ To translate is thus not to turn one language into another but,

4. Another rendition of this passage appears in Sedgwick’s essay “Privilege of Unknowing: Diderot’s *The Nun*” (in *Tendencies* [Durham: Duke University Press, 1993], 23).

62. Butler, *Frames of War*, 58.

63. Achille Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, trans. Steven Corcoran (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019), 46.

64. Walter Benjamin, “The Task of the Translator: An Introduction to the Translation of Baudelaire’s *Tableaux parisiens*,” in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 2007), 78. My emphasis.

in Jacques Derrida's phrasing, "to *re-mark* the affinity among the languages."⁶⁵ An accurate and unfiltered edition of *Poems from Guantánamo*, one that included the originals alongside translations by specialists, as well as the poems currently locked away behind classification, would do precisely what the military does not want to do: humanize the detainees by affirming that they are not alien but rather participants in the "greater language" we all can only know in part. To translate is to face both the otherness and the humanness of the other, to see oneself as incomplete and dependent, and thus to see *their* incompleteness and dependence as similar to one's own. Whereas being trained to kill closes oneself off from others to the point of nearly eliminating it, translation reveals the self's dependence on the other, not as another version of oneself, but as a different fragment of the same vessel.

The translation of *Poems from Guantánamo* thus represents in miniature the broader politics of dehumanization that I have been sketching throughout this chapter. As McIntosh writes in her earlier-cited analysis of the military uses of dehumanization, "American military control over this process has been sloppy at best,"⁶⁶ and an analysis of instances of torture during interrogations conducted by the military concludes that "if hatred is an essential or at least useful strategy in facilitating violence against an enemy in combat, then it is perhaps not surprising that armed forces find it difficult to 'put the muzzle back on' . . . within the context of an interrogation."⁶⁷ Yet the similarities between the methods of conditioning used in military training with the psychological processes underlying white-supremacist violence, combined with forms of propaganda the military clearly carries out intentionally, suggests that, at the level of the general public, the spillover of dehumanization is not accidental or innocent. The military clearly has an interest in its public failing to recognize certain groups of people as fellow humans, an interest in the sort of passive dehumanization that Butler describes as the absence of grievability and which Herman and Chomsky describe in terms of worthy and unworthy victims. It is not merely the case that humanizing the victims of war reduces public support for war in the sense of depriving prowar politicians of votes and compelling legisla-

65. Jacques Derrida, "Des tours de Babel," in *Psyche: Inventions of the Other, Volume I*, eds. Peggy Kamuf and Elizabeth Rottenberg, trans. Joseph F. Graham (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 209.

66. McIntosh, "Because it's easier to kill that way," 584.

67. Laurence Alison and Emily Alison, "Revenge Versus Rapport: Interrogation, Terrorism, and Torture," *American Psychologist* 72, no. 3 (2017): 269.

tors to curtail military spending and aggression, though certainly that is an element. At least as important is the public's role as the grounding wire of military guilt, the dispersal of the internal pressure created by the reality of what the soldier did, a reality that, in cases of close-quarters infantry combat, is readily apparent. The soldier, unlike the civilian, *sees* the dead bodies, sees the prisoners dragged about on leashes and chained in stress positions, sees the civilians killed and wounded by their actions. And so, to maintain the bad faith on which those actions rely, it is the role of the ignorant public to constantly affirm the necessity of that violence, a role that they, having not been conditioned to the act of killing, can only be "trusted" to perform in ignorance: lies and propaganda being the only effective vaccine against Vietnam syndrome. The fact that this passive dehumanization also protects other forms of injustice, as for instance Charles Mills describes in his essay on "White Ignorance,"⁶⁸ is, it seems, a cost the military-industrial complex has decided we must pay.

The picture these relations paint is a disturbing one, where the violence committed by a minority of beneficiaries of a system that relies on that violence in order to exist (e.g., the minority of people who actually join the army or the police) are enabled in their actions through processes that bring the general public (here understood from the perpetrators' perspective, the civilians they would consider to be on their "side") as close as possible to the mindset of the perpetrators without actually becoming aware of the true circumstances of said violence. These circumstances not only include the gruesome details of the act of killing, but also the humanity of the victim and the full spectrum of possible ways one could relate to them. As explored in this book's chapter on James Baldwin, in the case of white supremacist violence the "civilian" population includes white bystanders who may consider themselves nonracist but who, in their refusal to condemn the violence committed on their behalf, enable future violence by permitting the diffusion of responsibility and maintaining the racial categories that lend the dehumanizing fungibility of self and other on which the bad faith of the perpetrator depends. The Manicheanism of the citizen/criminal divide enforced and maintained by the criminal justice system enacts a similar process, as does the dehumanization of the opposing side among the civilian population during wartime. In order to play their role, the population must be

68. Charles Mills, "White Ignorance," in *Race and Epistemologies of Ignorance*, ed. Shannon Sullivan and Nancy Tuana (New York: State University of New York Press, 2007), 11–38.

kept ignorant of the full complexity of the situation and led to dehumanize the population being targeted with violence so that they perform their role in much the same way that operant conditioning encourages the soldier to play *their* role, without fully realizing what it is they just did at least until it has already been done. In this way we can see that systems of violence are enabled by bad faith at every stage and at every point in the process.



Scarry writes in *The Body in Pain* that “physical pain has no voice.”⁶⁹ For decades, scholars have taken this position to heart, citing Scarry’s insights again and again in innumerable examinations of the incommunicability of pain. In response, I have written this book, not against her conclusions but against the naturalization thereof, against the persistent assumption of their inevitability. Whereas Scarry discusses at length the processes by which pain is rendered unspoken, I have, in this chapter, analyzed some of the mechanisms by which pain is deliberately made unheard. Whereas the majority of this book was spent analyzing the complexity and depth of pain expression from a number of modalities, here I took the opportunity to give attention to a lesser-analyzed but equally important process by which that complexity and depth is rendered invisible.

The deliberate use and leveraging of the difficulty of communicating pain by militaries and other organizations that rely on the infliction of violence on others reinforces this book’s thesis. It more broadly demonstrates the need for a strain of humanistic scholarship that refuses to take conclusions like Scarry’s as given, that examines how the incommunicability of pain is manufactured, distributed, and cultivated in order to produce the death and violence upon which all systems of domination depend. In this respect, literature has much to teach, not only as aesthetic objects but as laboratories of thought and knowledge, where phenomenology and epistemology may be explored and toyed with to investigate different ways of thinking and different forms of thought. *Agony for Others* bounds between topics—animal pain, genocide, racism, torture, war—because they are not sealed-off and isolated systems of violence, but rather expressions of related processes, much like how the methods described

69. Scarry, *The Body in Pain*, 3.

in *On Killing* can be seen in justifications for lynching written before its author was even born. Pain does not respect disciplinary boundaries, and so scholars of pain must boldly transgress them.

While it is impossible to have either the first word or the last word on anything of importance, if this book achieves anything, it should be the broadening of the scope and the concerns of pain studies. The question of pain is connected to—often times, at the root of—numerous issues of justice, philosophy, and art, and it requires an analysis as complex and supple as the feeling itself. As Jasbir Puar reminds us, “much social suffering is neither random nor arbitrary.”⁷⁰ And it is time that the humanities understood that.

70. Jasbir K. Puar, *The Right to Maim: Debility, Capacity, Disability* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), 69.

Conclusion

Disregarding the Pain of Others

As simple as it sounds, pediatric trans medicine would be radically transformed by actually *asking trans children what they want* and truly basing care on that knowledge. Giving up the etiological paradigm would disarm the transphobic pretenses in construing children's social transitions, puberty pauses, and hormonal prescriptions as dramas or crises. This reframing of trans pediatric medicine requires adult authorities to recognize that the very feeling that trans children's medical decisions require the conceit of panic and emergency is a way to disavow the fact that cisgender children never have to justify their gendered lives to this extent.

—Julian Gill-Peterson, *Histories of the Transgender Child*¹

When, on June 18, 2025, the Supreme Court of the United States (SCOTUS) released its decision in the case of *United States v. Skrametti*, their upholding of a Tennessee law that banned gender-affirming care for trans minors was hardly surprising in either its facts or its cruelty. Who, after all, would seriously expect a humane ruling from this corrupt and lawless Supreme Court? Yet the manner and logic according to which this outcome was produced has important bearing on the manner in which pain, and the denial of pain, are leveraged for political purposes, and how the requirement that one's pain expression be interpreted by another in order to become politically relevant can become a

1. Julian Gill-Peterson, *Histories of the Transgender Child* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2018), 198–99.

lever of power and a tool for the oppression of minority groups. It thus ties together many of the themes and arguments of this book.

To begin with the relevant facts: for trans people, the process of going through the wrong “natal” puberty inflicts deep, lasting misery and trauma, one that continues to affect their lives well into adulthood. It is not simply the experience of becoming more of a man (when you hate being a man) or more of a woman (when you hate being a woman), of the simple fact that puberty enhances and exaggerates precisely those aspects of one’s body that are most painful, but also because of the lasting cost of having gone through these changes. Many puberty effects are permanent, and some are only reversible with surgery. As one study of gender dysphoria in children and adolescents describes, “The distress can be so debilitating that it can hinder normal development and activities of daily living, often resulting in depression, suicidal ideation, and drug use.”² The effects, then, go beyond the immediate experience of pain (dysphoria) in itself, and will harm the subject well into adulthood, even if they do successfully transition as adults. That these facts are so rarely part of the general discourse on pediatric transition is itself a product of the general disregard and, indeed, contempt with which trans people are treated, of a presumption that the goal of treating a trans child should be to ensure that they do not become a trans adult. It is for this reason that, as Julian Gill-Peterson writes, “actually *asking trans children what they want and truly basing care on that knowledge*” would amount to a revolution in this domain: for to ask for, and accept, the desires of these children would be to take genuine expressions of trans identity at face value, and to respond with neither fear nor disgust.

We have the capacity to alleviate this distress and thereby save untold numbers of people from this misery. Puberty blockers, which have been prescribed to children for decades to treat early “precocious” puberty, prevent this suffering, and if the subject decides that they do not wish to transition they can simply end the treatment and trigger their natal puberty late. Yet the vast and organized hate campaign against trans people, which profits immensely from fearmongering about trans children, has suppressed these treatments and all but eliminated the fact of childhood dysphoria from the public conversation. It is this campaign that resulted in the *Skrmetti* case: Tennessee passed a law banning the use of puberty blockers, not in general, but specifically as a treatment for gender dys-

2. Nicos Skordis et al., “Gender Dysphoria in Children and Adolescents: An Overview,” *Hormones* 19, no. 3 (2020): 268.

phoria. The case, then, would seem to be a blatant case of discrimination, which ought to trigger heightened scrutiny by the courts. Indeed, it was based on this logic that the lower level district court struck down the law. The Sixth Circuit then reversed that decision, resulting in an appeal to SCOTUS.

The case, then, involved two important questions: First, whether trans people constituted a “suspect class” that was being targeted for discrimination (which would violate the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment), and second, whether the goals of the legislation were about targeting trans people or simply a matter of health care law. Chief Justice John Roberts, who authored the decision, largely avoided the first question, finding, ridiculously, that the law was simply a kind of medical regulation. It is thus not to this opinion that this conclusion directs its attention, but rather to the concurring opinion written by Justice Samuel Alito, which went beyond Roberts’s legalistic face saving to explicitly claim that trans people were not a suspect, or even “quasi-suspect,” class, and so could have no recourse to the equal protection clause.

In the process of developing this argument, Alito makes claims that are as illustrative as they are despicable. Much of his argument rests on distinguishing anti-trans discrimination from racism, claiming that the fourteenth amendment, because it was initially passed to alleviate racial discrimination, can only apply to forms of discrimination that are substantially similar. He writes that “entitlement to ‘suspect class’ status is largely reserved for those groups whose members tend to ‘carry an obvious badge’ of their membership in the suspect class.”³ He goes on to write that “moreover, transgender status, unlike race and sex, is often not accompanied by visibly identifiable characteristics. A person’s ‘gender identity’ is an ‘internal sense’ . . . Nor do they necessarily tend to ‘carry an obvious badge’ of their membership in the class that might serve to exacerbate discrimination.”⁴ These quotes do not exhaust Alito’s argument, which also includes the absurd claim that trans people have not been subject to *de jure* discrimination in a decision that upholds just such an instance. But, unlike the historical claim, which could even if true now be rendered untrue by later events, these passages root the exclusion of trans people from the equal protection clause in their ontology. It is this fact that makes them especially insidious.

3. *United States v. Skrammetti*, 605 U.S. 495, 14 (2025) (Alito, S., concurring).

4. *United States v. Skrammetti*, 21.

What Alito is saying here is that the children who are being prevented from accessing treatment for their pain can be obstructed because the trait that links them—their dysphoria—is not externally visible the way, for example, skin color is. Yet that dysphoria, to the people experiencing it, is as certain as any other kind of pain; even one who has not recognized that their suffering is dysphoria suffers it nevertheless. To be prescribed puberty blockers or HRT necessarily involves identifying *oneself* as suffering: to have told someone (often multiple people) that one's current sexed embodiment is a source of misery. The logic of Alito's opinion, then, would have it that discrimination against trans people is legally acceptable because it attacks them based on their professed self-knowledge rather than based on an external characteristic. It is the weaponization of pain epistemology for the purpose of excluding an oppressed group from legal protection.

While the pain of gender dysphoria and the pleasure of gender euphoria are both invisible to a person not experiencing them, the behavior those feeling motivate—that is, transitioning—is visible and, in many cases, obvious. Indeed, Alito's argument would seem to assume that every trans person passes as cis, which simply is not the case. The means and consequences of transition are, in fact, the primary vectors through which transphobia is enacted on specific people. The *Skrimetti* case, in denying access to puberty blockers, is one such example: it discriminates against trans people, and not cis people, by targeting a means of transitioning. It also results in greater difficulty passing later on, as there are many permanent effects of puberty which can act as tells, one might say “an obvious badge,” that a person has transitioned. Laws that require official identification to reflect one's “birth sex” act similarly, by creating an inconsistency in a person's gendered presentation that serves as a mark of having transitioned. For a trans person, the only sure-fire way to avoid being subject to transphobia is to never transition: to agonize in silence, to keep one's hand upon the stove even as it burns down to the bone. This is not equality, but compulsory dysphoria: needless suffering enforced by law.

“To have pain is to have *certainty*; to hear about pain is to have *doubt*.”⁵ It does not seem to matter how well-documented this pain is, how many people profess to suffer it, how many studies measure its effects, or how artistically or rhetorically it is communicated: because Alito cannot see it the way he professes

5. Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 13.

to see race and gender, it is legally irrelevant. The fact that the law being upheld specifically targets the alleviation of that pain by banning one of the most effective treatments for it while permitting those same drugs to be given to children of the same age but for different reasons, this too is irrelevant. Because the lawmakers of Tennessee have found a way to target trans children in a different manner than the one by which Black people have been targeted, they can inflict as much harm as they wish. It is the doubt of the transphobe that reigns supreme over the certainty of the trans person. And that doubt is invincible.

Thus, SCOTUS's decision in *United States v. Skrametti*, and especially the concurring opinions of Alito and Justice Amy Coney Barrett (who makes similar claims), represent the main thesis of this book in miniature: power cannot be compelled to recognize the pain of another, and so whose pain is recognized depends on who holds power. We might contrast this case, then, with Susan Sontag's analysis of war photography, where she notes that "war's murderousness destroys what identifies people as individuals, even as human beings."⁶ Visible injury both calls on and, through repetition, exhausts the capacity for pity, and the extensiveness of the wounds of war themselves eliminate the corporeal signifiers of personhood. Ignoring the pain of gender dysphoria requires a kind of inverted process. For it is *not* the case that this pain is unrepresented: the act of transitioning is itself a sign of a desire to be embodied differently. It is not a one-off decision, but rather a persistent effort, undertaken intentionally over a great deal of time, motivated by powerful internal feelings. Trans people undertake these changes because doing so improves their quality of life and diminishes their pain. To act as though these behaviors do not "mark" trans people is to refuse to take these signs as signs. Indeed, if trans people were *not* marked, then the discrimination they suffer would have no target. To say that, for example, a trans woman being mocked as a "man in a dress" has not been marked and identified as trans is to say that the mockery is directed at nothing. If trans people are not in some way "marked," then how do bigots know who to target?

The *Skrametti* decision and its concurrences thus represent the essentially political nature of pain recognition. By casting blatant discrimination as mere regulation, it dismisses as irrelevant the very pain that the now banned treatment was meant to prevent. By justifying the exclusion of trans people from the equal protection clause, it leverages the mechanisms of pain epistemology to ensure that this exclusion cannot be rectified. *Skrametti* is thus nothing less

6. Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Picador, 2003), 61.

than the elevation of a “strategy of containment” to the status of law, enacting the very *de jure* oppression it claims does not exist. What is really at stake here is not whether American jurisprudence recognizes trans people as worthy of protection, but whether the justices do. So long as the conservative supermajority holds firm in their inhumanity, trans people will continue to be denied their rights.

Rectifying this problem requires that the essentially political and intersubjective nature of pain be recognized and understood. The aesthetic and literary elements of pain interpretation are not themselves irrelevant to politics, but are a factor in the development of that politics. To say that a person arriving at the ER is a “drug seeker,” that trans people do not “‘carry an obvious badge’ of their membership,” that the massacre of a population is not a genocide, that the “griefs” of Black people “are transient”: each of these statements derive from and depend on the reading of signifiers toward a particular judgment. They are *interpretations*. Every such judgment—whether concerning a specific person, a group, or a population—occurs in a political context and relates to the distribution of resources and aid. To achieve a better, more just, and more equal world we must understand these processes, not deny them. We must, unlike Dante, peel back the ice from the faces in the ice so that we may know their tears.

Bibliography

- Abettan, Camille. "Between Hype and Hope: What Is Really at Stake with Personalized Medicine." *Medicine, Health Care, and Philosophy* 19 (2016): 423–30.
- Adorno, Theodore W. *Negative Dialectics*. Translated by E. B. Ashton. New York: Continuum, 2007.
- Agamben, Giorgio. *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. Translated by Daniel Heller-Roazen. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998.
- Agamben, Giorgio. *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*. Translated by Daniel Heller-Roazen. New York: Zone Books, 1999.
- Ahmed, Sara. *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. 2nd edition. London: Routledge, 2015.
- Aho, Kevin. "Gadamer and Health." In *The Gadamerian Mind*, edited by Theodore George and Gert-Jan van der Heiden, 177–87. London: Routledge, 2021.
- Al Dossari, Jumah. "Death Poem." In *Poems from Guantánamo: The Detainees Speak*, edited by Marc Falkoff, 32. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2007.
- Alarcón, I. Felipe. "On the Body: Torture and Writing." *CR: The New Centennial Review* 12, no. 2 (2012): 247–57.
- Alexander, Philip S. "Mysticism." In *The Oxford Handbook of Jewish Studies*, edited by Martin Goodman, np. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199280322.013.0028>
- Alison, Laurence, and Emily Alison. "Revenge Versus Rapport: Interrogation, Terrorism, and Torture." *American Psychologist* 72, no. 3 (2017): 266–77.
- Alomar, Maisam. "'This Isn't the South Bronx': Race, Criminality, and Disability in the Contemporary Opioid Epidemic." *Social Text* 38, no. 3 (2020): 27–53.
- Améry, Jean. *At the Mind's Limits: Contemplations by a Survivor on Auschwitz and its Realities*. Translated by Sidney Rosenfeld and Stella P. Rosenfeld. New York: Schocken, 1990.
- Artaud, Antonin. *The Theatre and Its Double*. Translated by Victor Corti. London: Alma, 2010.

- Ashby, Richard. *King Lear "After" Auschwitz: Shakespeare, Appropriation and Theatres of Catastrophe in Post-War British Drama*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020.
- Astro, Alan. "Revisiting Wiesel's *Night* in Yiddish, French, and English." *Partial Answers: Journal of Literature and the History of Ideas* 12, no. 1 (2014): 127–53.
- Auerbach, Erich. *Dante and the Secular World*. New York: NYRB Classics, 2004.
- Austin, J. L. *How to Do Things with Words*. Edited by J. O. Urmson and Marina Sbisa. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975.
- Baer, Jonathan R. "Redeemed Bodies: The Functions of Divine Healing in Incipient Pentecostalism." *Church History* 70, no. 4 (2001): 735–71.
- Baldwin, James. *Blues for Mister Charlie*. New York: Vintage, 1992.
- Baldwin, James. "Everybody's Protest Novel." In *Collected Essays*, edited by Toni Morrison, 11–18. New York: Library of America, 2008.
- Baldwin, James. *The Fire Next Time*. In *Collected Essays*, edited by Toni Morrison, 291–348. New York: Library of America, 2008.
- Baldwin, James. *Go Tell It on the Mountain*. In *Early Novels and Stories*, edited by Toni Morrison, 1–216. New York: Library of America, 1998.
- Bandes, Susan A. "What Executioners Can—and Cannot—Teach Us About the Death Penalty." *Criminal Justice Ethics* 35, no. 3 (2016): 183–200.
- Barthes, Roland. "The Death of the Author." In *Image—Music—Text*, translated by Stephen Heath, 142–48. New York: Hill and Wang, 1978.
- Basu, Srimayee. "The Aestheticization of Politics: The Case of Lynching Photographs." *Modernism Modernity Print Plus* 7, no. 3 (2023): np. <https://doi.org/10.26597/mod.0250>
- Beardsley, Brent. "The Endless Debate Over the 'G Word.'" *Genocide Studies and Prevention* 1, no. 1 (2006): 79–82.
- Beckett, Samuel. *Three Novels: Molloy, Malone Dies, The Unnamable*. New York: Grove, 2009.
- Benjamin, Walter. "The Task of the Translator: An Introduction to the Translation of Baudelaire's *Tableaux parisiens*." In *Illuminations*, edited by Hannah Arendt, translated by Harry Zohn, 69–82. New York: Schocken, 2007.
- Bentham, Jeremy. *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1907.
- Berlant, Lauren. "Introduction: Compassion (and Withholding)." In *Compassion: The Culture and Politics of an Emotion*, edited by Lauren Berlant, 1–14. London: Routledge, 2004.
- Belling, Catherine. "Begin with a Text: Teaching the Poetics of Medicine." *Journal of Medical Humanities* 34 (2013): 481–91.
- Beauvoir, Simone de. *The Second Sex*. Translated by H. M. Parshley. London: Jonathan Cape, 1953.
- Bexley, Erica. "Show or Tell? Seneca and Sarah Kane's *Phaedra* Plays." *Trends in Classics* 3 (2011): 365–93.

- Bleakley, Alan. *Medical Humanities and Medical Education: How the Medical Humanities Can Shape Better Doctors*. London: Routledge, 2015.
- Booth, Alison. "The Scent of a Narrative: Rank Discourse in 'Flush' and 'Written on the Body.'" *Narrative* 8, no. 1 (2000): 3–22.
- Bourke, Joanna. *The Story of Pain: From Prayer to Painkillers*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.
- Brazil*. Terry Gilliam, dir. 1985. West Hollywood: Embassy International Pictures, 2002. DVD.
- Brooks, Cleanth. *The Well-Wrought Urn: Studies in the Structure of Poetry*. New York: Mariner, 1956.
- Browning, Elizabeth Barrett. "Flush or Faunus." In *The Complete Poetical Works of Elizabeth Barrett Browning*, edited by Horace Elisha Scudder, 196. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1900.
- Browning, Elizabeth Barrett. "Grief." In *The Complete Poetical Works of Elizabeth Barrett Browning*, edited by Horace Elisha Scudder, 99. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1900.
- Brusberg-Kiermeier, Stefani. "Cruelty, Violence, and Rituals." In *Sarah Kane in Context*, edited by Laurens De Vos and Graham Saunders, 80–88. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010.
- Buchman, Daniel Z., Anita Ho, and Daniel S. Goldberg. "Investigating Trust, Expertise, and Epistemic Injustice in Chronic Pain." *Journal of Bioethical Inquiry* 14 (2017): 31–42.
- Budelmann, Felix. "The Reception of Sophocles' Representation of Physical Pain." *American Journal of Philology* 128 (2007): 443–67.
- Buley, Ben. *The New American Way of War: Military Culture and the Political Utility of Force*. London: Routledge, 2007.
- Butler, Judith. *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex."* London: Routledge, 1993.
- Butler, Judith. *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* London: Verso, 2016.
- Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. London: Routledge, 2008.
- Butler, Judith. *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*. London: Verso, 2004.
- Carbone, Larry. "Pain in Laboratory Animals: The Ethical and Regulatory Imperatives." *PLOS ONE* 6, no. 9 (2011): np. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0021578>
- Carney, Kelly Walter. "Brother Outsider: James Baldwin, Ta-Nehisi Coates, and Exile Literature." *CLA Journal* 60, no. 4 (2017): 448–57.
- Carroll, Roy. "US Chose to Ignore Rwandan Genocide." *The Guardian*, March 31, 2004. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2004/mar/31/usa.rwanda>
- Casper, M. F. and Jeffrey T. Child. "Embedded Reporting and Audience Response: Para-social Interaction and Perceived Realism in Embedded Reporting from the Iraq War on Television News." In *War and the Media: Essays on News Reporting, Propaganda, and Popular Culture*, edited by Paul M. Haridakis, Barbara S. Hugenberg, and Stanley T. Wearden, 205–22. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2009.

- Cassel, Eric J. *The Nature of Suffering and the Goals of Medicine*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991.
- Cesare, Donatella Di. *Gadamer: A Philosophical Portrait*. Translated by Niall Keane. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013.
- Chism, Jonathan. *Saints in the Struggle: Church of God in Christ Activists in the Memphis Civil Rights Movement, 1954–1968*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2019.
- Clare, Eli. *Brilliant Imperfection: Grappling with Cure*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2017.
- Clark, Keith. *Black Manhood in James Baldwin, Ernest J. Gaines, and August Wilson*. Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2002.
- Cobb, Michael L. *Racial Blasphemies: Religious Irreverence and Race in American Literature*. London: Routledge, 2013.
- Colangelo, Jeremy. "The Body Politic in Pain." *Modernism Modernity Print Plus* 7, no. 3 (2023): np. <https://doi.org/10.26597/mod.0248>
- Colangelo, Jeremy. *Diaphanous Bodies: Ability, Disability, and Modernist Irish Literature*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2021.
- Colbert, Soyica Diggs. "Go Tell it on the Mountain: Baldwin's Sermonic." In *The Cambridge Companion to James Baldwin*, edited by Michele Elam, 56–69. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015.
- Colesworthy, Rebecca. *Returning the Gift: Modernism and the Thought of Exchange*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018.
- Congdon, Brad. *Leading with the Chin: Writing American Masculinities in Esquire, 1960–1989*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018.
- Cuder, Eva Gil. "More Than Words: Drama and Spectrality for the Articulation of Trauma," *Journal of English Studies* 10 (2012): 65–80.
- Daniel, Stephen L. "The Patient as Text: A Model of Clinical Hermeneutics." *Theoretical Medicine* 7 (1986): 195–210.
- Dante, Alighieri. *Inferno*. In *The Divine Comedy*, edited by David H. Higgins, translated by C. H. Sisson, 45–196. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.
- Davidson, Michael. *Invalid Modernism: Disability and the Missing Body of the Aesthetic*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019.
- Davis, Angela Y. *Women, Race, and Class*. New York: Vintage, 1983.
- Deleuze, Gilles. *Coldness and Cruelty*. New York: Zone Books, 1999.
- Dennett, Daniel C. *Consciousness Explained*. London: Little, Brown and Company, 1991.
- Derrida, Jacques. *The Animal that Therefore I Am*. Edited by Marie-Louise Mallet. Translated by David Willis. New York: Fordham University Press, 2008.
- Derrida, Jacques. "Des tours de Babel." In *Psyche: Inventions of the Other, Volume I*, edited by Peggy Kamuf and Elizabeth Rottenberg, translated by Joseph F. Graham, 197–225. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007.
- Derrida, Jacques. "Différance." In *Margins of Philosophy*, translated by Alan Bass, 1–28. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984.

- Derrida, Jacques. *Of Grammatology*, translated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997.
- Descartes, René. *The Passions of the Soul and Other Late Philosophical Writings*. Translated by Michael Moriarty. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015.
- De Vos, Laurens. "Sarah Kane and Antonin Artaud: Cruelty Towards the Subjectile." In *Sarah Kane in Context*, edited by Laurens De Vos and Graham Saunders, 126–38. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010.
- De Vos, Laurens. *Cruelty and Desire in the Modern Theater: Antonin Artaud, Sarah Kane, and Samuel Beckett*. Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2011.
- Dickinson, Emily. "[Pain—has an Element of Blank—]." In *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson*, edited by Thomas H. Johnson, 323. New York: Little, Brown, 1976.
- Diehl, Heath. "And Death—capital D—shall be no more—semicolon!": Explicating the Terminally Ill Body in Margaret Edson's *W;t*." In *The Problem Body: Projecting Disability on Film*, edited by Sally Chivers and Nicole Markotic, 109–28. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2016.
- "DNC Attendees Cover Their Ears as the Names of Dead Palestinian Children Are Read." Posted August 21, 2024, by BreakThroughNews. YouTube, 0:30. https://youtu.be/EdZRhgluRkU?si=Vh92_CVyTeDZZfqs
- Duffee, Charlotte Mary. "Pain versus Suffering: A Distinction Currently without a Difference." *Journal of Medical Ethics* 47, no. 3 (2021): 175–78.
- Durkheim, Émile. *Selected Writings*, edited by Anthony Giddens. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.
- Edelman, Lee. *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2004.
- Edson, Margaret. *Wit*. London: Nick Hern Books, 2012.
- Eliot, T. S. "Hamlet." In *The Complete Prose of T. S. Eliot: The Critical Edition: The Perfect Critic, 1919–1926*, edited by Anthony Cuda and Ronald Schuchard, 122–28. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014.
- Eliot, T. S. "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock." In *The Poems of T. S. Eliot: Volume I*, edited by Christopher Ricks and Jim McCue, 5–9. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015.
- Eliot, T. S. "The Metaphysical Poets." In *The Complete Prose of T. S. Eliot: The Critical Edition: The Perfect Critic, 1919–1926*, edited by Anthony Cuda and Ronald Schuchard, 375–85. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014.
- Eliot, T. S. "The Preacher as Artist." In *The Complete Prose of T. S. Eliot: The Critical Edition: The Perfect Critic, 1919–1926*, edited by Anthony Cuda and Ronald Schuchard, 165–69. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014.
- Ellis, Sylvia A. "Promoting Solidarity at Home and Abroad: The Goals and Tactics of the Anti-Vietnam War Movement in Britain." *European Review of History—Revue européenne d'histoire* 21, no. 4 (2014): 557–76.

- Ellmann, Richard. *James Joyce: New and Revised Edition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983.
- Empson, William. *The Seven Types of Ambiguity*. New York: New Directions, 1966.
- Falkoff, Mark. "Notes on Guantánamo." In *Poems from Guantánamo: The Detainees Speak*, edited by Marc Falkoff, 1–6. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2007.
- Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks*. Translated by Richard Philcox. New York: Grove, 2008.
- Field, Douglas. *James Baldwin*. Tavistock: Northcote House, 2011.
- Fifield, Peter. *Modernism and Physical Illness: Sick Books*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020.
- Foucault, Michel. "What Is an Author?" In *The Foucault Reader*, edited by Paul Rabinow, translated by Josué V. Harari, 101–20. New York: Vintage, 2010.
- Fowler, Lauren, and Sally Bishop Shigley. "Feeling Your Pain: Exploring Empathy in Literature and Neuroscience." In *Rethinking Empathy Through Literature*, edited by Meghan Marie Hammond and Sue J. Kim, 47–60. London: Routledge, 2014.
- Fricker, Miranda. *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.
- Gadamer, Hans-Georg. *The Enigma of Health: The Art of Healing in a Scientific Age*. Translated by Jason Gaiger and Nicholas Walker. Cambridge: Polity, 1996.
- Gadamer, Hans-Georg. *Truth and Method*. Translated by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall. London: Bloomsbury, 2013.
- Garner, Daniel Osborn. *Antitheodicy, Atheodicy and Jewish Mysticism in Holocaust Theology: Atheodic Theologies After Auschwitz*. Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2014.
- Garner, Stanton B., Jr. "Bodies of Knowledge: Theatre and Medical Science." In *The Cambridge Companion to Theatre and Science*, edited by Kirsten E. Shepherd-Barr, 85–100. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020.
- Geniusas, Saulius. *The Phenomenology of Pain*. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2020.
- Gill-Peterson, Julian. *Histories of the Transgender Child*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2018.
- Goffman, Irving. *Forms of Talk*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981.
- Goldman, Jane. "Flush: A Biography: Speaking, Reading, and Writing with the Companion Species." In *A Companion to Virginia Woolf*, edited by Jessica Berman, 163–75. Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2019.
- Good, Mary-Jo DelVecchio, Paul E. Brodwin, Byron J. Good, and Arthur Kleinman. "Pain as Human Experience: An Introduction." In *Pain as Human Experience: An Anthropological Perspective*, edited by Mary-Jo DelVecchio Good, Paul E. Brodwin, Byron J. Good, and Arthur Kleinman, 1–28. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994.
- Gottlieb, Christina M. "Pedagogy and the Art of Death: Reparative Readings of Death and Dying in Margaret Edson's *Wit*." *Journal of Medical Humanities* 39 (2018): 325–36.

- Gourevitch, Philip. *We Wish to Inform You That Tomorrow We Will Be Killed with Our Families: Stories from Rwanda*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1999.
- Grahek, Nikola. *Feeling Pain and Being in Pain*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007.
- Gritzner, Karoline. *Adorno and Modern Theatre: The Drama of the Damaged Self in Bond, Rudkin, Barker and Kane*. London: Palgrave, 2015.
- Grondin, Jean. "Gadamer's Basic Understanding of Understanding." *The Cambridge Companion to Gadamer*, edited by Robert J. Dostal, 36–51. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.
- Grossman, David. *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society*. New York: Back Bay Books, 2009.
- Grubgeld, Elizabeth. *Disability and Life Writing in Post-Independence Ireland*. London: Palgrave, 2020.
- Grüny, Christian. *Zerstörte Erfahrung. Eine Phänomenologie des Schmerzes*. Würzburg: K&N, 2004.
- Guarracino, Serena. "The Scene and The Stage: A Queer Reading of Pain and Catharsis in Sarah Kane." *Whatever: A Transdisciplinary Journal of Queer Theories and Studies* 3 (2020): 333–50.
- Gunther, Lisa. "Epistemic Injustice and Phenomenology." In *The Routledge Handbook of Epistemic Injustice*, edited by Ian James Kidd, José Medina, and Gaile Pohlhaus, 195–204. London: Routledge, 2017.
- Gunther, Lisa. "Six Senses of 'Critical' in Critical Phenomenology." Critical Phenomenology Reading Group. Lecture, Université de Montréal, Montreal, April 14, 2022.
- Gunther, Lisa. *Solitary Confinement: Social Death and Its Afterlives*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013.
- Hall, Brenda, and Paul Kadetz. "Finding the Subject in the Objectified: Problematizing the Dependence on Metrics for Patient Care in the United States." In *The Routledge Companion to Health Humanities*, edited by Paul Crawford, Brian Brown, and Andrea Charise, 196–203. London: Routledge, 2020.
- Hamoui, Lea. "Historical Horror and the Shape of *Night*." In *Elie Wiesel: Between Memory and Hope*, edited by Carol Rittner, 120–29. New York: New York University Press, 1991.
- Haq, Omar Sultan, and Adam Waytz. "Dehumanization in Medicine: Causes, Solutions, and Functions." *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 7, no. 2 (2012): 176–86.
- Harari, Dror. "Artificial, Animal, Machinal: Body, Desire, and Intimacy in Modernist and Postmodernist Theatre." *NTQ* 29, no. 4 (2013): 311–20.
- Hardy, Clarence E., III. *James Baldwin's God: Sex, Hope, and Crisis in Black Holiness Culture*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2009.
- Haro, Agustín Serrano de. "New and Old Approaches to the Phenomenology of Pain." *Studia Phaenomenologica* 12 (2012): 227–37.
- Hartman, Saidya V. *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997.

- Hartsock, Nancy. *The Feminist Standpoint Revisited and Other Essays*. Boulder: Westview Press, 1998.
- Haslam, Nick, and Steve Loughnan. "Dehumanization and Infrahumanization." *Annual Review of Psychology* 65 (2014): 399–423.
- Haydon, Andrew. "Sarah Kane and Mark Ravenhill: The 'Blood and Sperm' Generation." In *Contemporary European Playwrights*, edited by Maria M. Delgado, Bryce Lease, and Dan Rebellato, 150–67. London: Routledge, 2020.
- Heidegger, Martin. *Being and Time*. Translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson. New York: Harper, 2008.
- Heidegger, Martin. *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude*. Translated by William McNeill and Nicholas Walker. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995.
- Heidegger, Martin. *Ponderings VII–XI: Black Notebooks 1938–1939*. Translated by Richard Rojcewicz. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2017.
- Herman, David. *Narratology Beyond the Human: Storytelling and Animal Life*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018.
- Herman, Edward S., and Noam Chomsky. *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of Mass Media*. New York: Pantheon Books, 2002.
- Herzfeld, Chris. *The Great Apes: A Short History*. Translated by Kevin Frey. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017.
- Hobson, Christopher Z. *James Baldwin and the Heavenly City: Prophecy, Apocalypse, and Doubt*. East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2018.
- hooks, bell. *Remembered Rapture: The Writer at Work*. New York: Holt, 1999.
- Hovanec, Caroline. *Animal Subjects: Literature, Zoology, and British Modernism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018.
- Husserl, Edmund. *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology: An Introduction to Phenomenological Philosophy*. Translated by David Carr. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970.
- Husserl, Edmund. *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*. Translated by W. R. Boyce Gibson. London: Routledge, 2012.
- Husserl, Edmund. *Logical Investigations*. 2 vols. Translated by J. N. Findlay. London: Routledge, 2001.
- Ingram, David. "Israeli Government Sparks Outcry with X Videos Saying 'there are no innocent civilians' in Gaza." *NBC News*, June 14, 2024. <https://www.nbcnews.com/tech/social-media/israel-posts-video-saying-are-no-innocent-civilians-gaza-rcna157111>
- Ittner, Jutta. "Part Spaniel, Part Canine Puzzle: Anthropomorphism in Woolf's *Flush* and Auster's *Timbuktu*." *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal* 39, no. 4 (2006): 181–96.
- James, William. *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature*. Edited by Martin E. Marty. New York: Penguin, 1982.

- Jameson, Frederic. "Criticism and Categories." *PMLA* 137, no. 3 (2022): 563–67.
- Jameson, Frederic. *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*. London: Routledge, 2002.
- Jefferson, Thomas. *Notes on the State of Virginia*. Edited by Frank Shuffelton. New York: Penguin, 1999.
- Jenicek, Milos. *How to Think in Medicine: Reasoning, Decision Making, and Communication in Health Sciences and Professions*. London: Productivity Press, 2021.
- Joyce, James. *Ulysses*. Edited by Hans Walter Gabler, Wolfhard Steppe, and Claus Melchior. New York: Vintage, 1986.
- Kafer, Alison. *Feminist, Queer, Crip*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013.
- Kane, Sara. *Complete Plays*. London: Bloomsbury, 2001.
- Kidd, Ian James, and Havi Carel. "Epistemic Justice and Illness." *Journal of Applied Philosophy* 34, no. 2 (2017): 172–90.
- King, Ryan D., Steven F. Messner, and Robert D. Baller. "Contemporary Hate Crimes, Law Enforcement, and the Legacy of Racial Violence." *American Sociological Review* 74 (2009): 291–315.
- Klein, Colin. *What the Body Commands: The Imperative Theory of Pain*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2015.
- Kotampitsi, Maria. "The Representation of Pain in Selected Works by Samuel Beckett, Sarah Kane, and Howard Barker." PhD dissertation. Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, 2020.
- Kteily, Nour S., and Alexander P. Landry. "Dehumanization: Trends, Insights, and Challenges." *Trends in Cognitive Science* 26, no. 3 (2022): 222–40.
- Lackey, Michael, and Todd Avery. "Virginia Woolf and Biofiction." *Virginia Woolf Miscellany* 93 (2018): 12–29.
- Lanard, Noah. "Here Is the Speech That the Uncommitted Movement Wants to Give at the DNC." *Mother Jones*, August 22, 2024. <https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2024/08/dnc-speech-uncommitted-movement-harris-walz-ruwan-romman/>
- Lang, Beryl. *Act and Idea in the Nazi Genocide*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2003.
- Lange, Katie. "How & Why the DOD Works with Hollywood." February 28, 2018. U.S. Department of Defense. <https://www.defense.gov/News/Inside-DOD/blog/article/2062735/how-why-the-dod-works-with-hollywood>
- Lenoir, Tim and Luke Caldwell. *The Military-Entertainment Complex*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018.
- Levinas, Emmanuel. *Existence and Existents*. Translated by Alphonso Lingis. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2001.
- Levinas, Emmanuel. *Otherwise than Being, or, Beyond Essence*. Translated by Alphonso Lingis. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1998.
- Levinas, Emmanuel. *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*. Translated by Alphonso Lingis. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969.

- Lewis, C. S. *The Problem of Pain*. London: The Centenary Press, 1940.
- Lincoln, C. Eric, and Lawrence H. Mamiya. *The Black Church and the African American Experience*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1990.
- Linett, Maren Tova. *Bodies of Modernism: Physical Disability in Transatlantic Modernist Literature*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2017.
- Linett, Maren Tova. *Literary Bioethics: Animality, Disability, and the Human*. New York: New York University Press, 2020.
- Low, Philip. "The Cambridge Declaration of Consciousness." Edited by Jaak Panksepp, Diana Reiss, David Edelman, Bruno Van Swinderen, Philip Low, and Christof Koch. Cambridge, UK, 2012. <https://fcmconference.org/img/CambridgeDeclarationOnConsciousness.pdf>.
- Macadré, Pauline. "'Solving the problem of reality' in Virginia Woolf's *Flush*." *Cahiers victoriens et édouardiens* 88 (2018): np. <https://doi.org/10.4000/cve.3853>.
- Mampe, Birgit, Angela D. Friederici, Anne Christophe, and Kathleen Wermke. "New-borns' Cry Melody Is Shaped by Their Native Language." *Current Biology* 19, no. 23 (2009): 1994–97.
- Man, Paul de. "Autobiography as De-Facement." *MLN* 94, no. 5 (1979): 919–30.
- Marshall, S. L. A. *Men Against Fire: The Problem of Battle Command*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2000.
- Martínez, Ernesto Javier. "Dying to Know: Identity and Self-Knowledge in Baldwin's *Another Country*." *PMLA* 124, no. 3 (2009): 782–97.
- Martinot, Steve. *The Machinery of Whiteness: Studies in the Structure of Racialization*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2010.
- Massumi, Brian. "Becoming Animal in the Literary Field." In *Animals, Animality, and Literature*, edited by Bruce Boehrer, Molly Hand, and Brian Massumi, 265–83. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018.
- Mbembe, Achille. *Necropolitics*. Translated by Steven Corcoran. Durham: Duke University Press, 2019.
- McClimans, Leah. "A Dialogic Approach to Narrative Medicine." In *Inheriting Gadamer: New Directions in Philosophical Hermeneutics*, edited by Georgia Warnke, 203–17. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016.
- McCorry, Seán. "'This Disgusting Feast of Filth': Meat Eating, Hospitality, and Violence in Sarah Kane's *Blasted*." *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 24, no. 4 (2017): 753–66.
- McGreal, Chris. "'Not a normal war': Doctors Say Children Have Been Targeted by Israeli Snipers in Gaza." *The Guardian*, April 2, 2024. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/apr/02/gaza-palestinian-children-killed-idf-israel-war>
- McIntosh, Janet. "'Because it's easier to kill that way': Dehumanizing Epithets, Militarized Subjectivity, and American Necropolitics." *Language in Society* 50 (2021): 583–603.
- McWeeny, Jennifer. "Operative Intentionality." In *50 Concepts for a Critical Phenomenol-*

- ogy, edited by Gail Weiss, Ann V. Murphy, and Gayle Salamon, 255–62. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2020.
- Medina, José. *The Epistemology of Resistance: Gender and Racial Oppression, Epistemic Injustice, and Resistant Imaginations*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.
- Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. *The Phenomenology of Perception*. Translated by Donald A. Landers. London: Routledge, 2014.
- Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. *The Visible and the Invisible*. Edited by Claude LeFort. Translated by Alphonso Lingis. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968.
- “Metastasis.” In *Oxford Concise Medical Dictionary*. Edited by Elizabeth Martin. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015. Available at <https://www-oxfordreference-com>
- “Metastasis.” In *Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*. Edited by Chris Baldick, 222. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015.
- Miller, Donald E., and Tetsunao Yamamori. *Global Pentecostalism: The New Face of Christian Social Engagement*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007.
- Miller, Flag. “Forms of Suffering in Muslim Prison Poetry.” In *Poems from Guantánamo: The Detainees Speak*, edited by Marc Falkoff, 7–18. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2007.
- Mills, Charles. “Epistemological Ignorance.” In *50 Concepts for a Critical Phenomenology*, edited by Gail Weiss, Ann V. Murphy, and Gayle Salamon, 107–14. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2020.
- Mills, Charles. *The Racial Contract*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997.
- Mills, Charles. “White Ignorance.” In *Race and Epistemologies of Ignorance*, edited by Shannon Sullivan and Nancy Tuana, 11–38. New York: State University of New York Press, 2007.
- Mitchell, David T. “Body Solitaire: The Singular Subject of Disability Autobiography.” *American Quarterly* 52, no. 2 (2000): 311–15.
- Moench, Mallory. “Nearly 70% of Gaza War Dead Verified by UN Are Women and Children.” *BBC News*, November 8, 2024. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cn5wel11pgdo>
- Monti, Martin M., Audrey Vanhauzenhuyse, Martin R. Coleman, Melanie Boly, John D. Pickard, Luaba Tshibanda, Adrian M. Owen, and Steven Laureys. “Willful Modulation of Brain Activity in Disorders of Consciousness.” *New England Journal of Medicine* 362, no. 7 (2010): 579–89.
- More, Elizabeth. “International Humanitarian Law and Interventions—Rwanda, 1994.” *Genocide Studies and Prevention* 2, no. 2 (2007): 155–72.
- Morina, Christina. “The Imperative to Act: Jews, Neighbors, and the Dynamics of Persecution in Nazi Germany, 1933–1945.” In *Probing the Limits of Categorization: The Bystander in Holocaust History*, edited by Christina Morina and Krijn Thijs, 148–67. New York: Berghahn Books, 2019.
- Morrison, Kevin A. “Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s Dog Days.” *Tulsa Studies in Women’s Literature* 30, no. 1 (2011): 93–115.

- Nāgārjuna. *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middleway: Nāgārjuna's Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*. Translated by Jay L. Garfield. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995.
- Nagel, Thomas. *Mortal Questions*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Human, All Too Human: A Book for Free Spirits*. Translated by R. J. Hollingdale. Edited by Richard Schacht. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.
- Nikopoulos, James. "Ethical Criticism in Hell: The Sympathetic Fallacy of *Inferno* 32–33." *Philosophy and Literature* 46, no. 2 (2022): 468–89.
- O'Brien, Valerie. "Autobiographical Subjects: Disability and Social Identity in Life Writing." PhD dissertation, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2020.
- Oforlea, Aaron Ngozi. *James Baldwin, Toni Morrison, and the Rhetorics of Black Male Subjectivity*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2017.
- Oksala, Johanna. "The Method of Critical Phenomenology: Simone de Beauvoir as a Phenomenologist." *European Journal of Phenomenology* 31, no. 1 (2023): 137–50.
- Ortega y Gasset, José. *Man and People*. Translated by Willard Ropes. New York: Norton, 1957.
- Outka, Elizabeth. "Disability, Illness, and Pain." In *The Oxford Handbook of Virginia Woolf*, edited by Anne E. Fernald, 504–20. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021.
- Outka, Elizabeth. *Viral Modernism: The Influenza Pandemic and Interwar Literature*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2020.
- Pandey, Manish. "Octopuses Feel Pain and Need Legal Protection, Say MPs." BBC News. BBC, June 18, 2021. <https://www.bbc.com/news/newsbeat-57528249>
- Pankratz, Annette. "Neither Here nor There: Theatrical Space in Kane's Work." In *Sarah Kane in Context*, edited by Laurens De Vos and Graham Saunders, 149–72. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010.
- Parsons, Talcott. *The Social System*. London: Routledge, 1991.
- Patsavas, Alyson. "Recovering a Cripistemology of Pain: Leaky Bodies, Connective Tissue, and Feeling Discourse." *Journal of Literary and Cultural Disability Studies* 8, no. 2 (2014): 203–18.
- Pawiński, Michał. "Unintended Consequences of Military Cohesion." *International Peacekeeping* 25, no. 2 (2018): 293–313.
- Peña-Guzman, David M., and Joel Michael Reynolds. "The Harm of Ableism: Medical Error and Epistemic Injustice." *Kennedy Institute of Ethics Journal* 29, no. 3 (2019): 205–42.
- Pérez, Raúl, and Geoff Ward. "From Insult to Estrangement and Injury: The Violence of Racist Police Jokes." *American Behavioural Science* 63, no. 13 (2019): 1810–29.
- Peters, Meg. "'White on White and Black': The Terror of Whiteness in Sarah Kane's *Crave*." *The Comparatist* 42 (2018): 98–114.
- Pett, Sarah. "Rash Reading: Rethinking Virginia Woolf's 'On Being Ill.'" *Literature and Medicine* 37, no. 1 (2019): 26–66.

- Pickford, Henry W. *The Sense of Semblance: Philosophical Analyses of Holocaust Art*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2013.
- Pound, Ezra. *Letters of Ezra Pound: 1907–1947*. Edited by D. D. Paige. London: Faber and Faber, 1971.
- Price, Margaret. “The Bodymind Problem and the Possibilities of Pain.” *Hypatia* 30, no. 1 (2015): 268–84.
- Prost, Antoine. “Introduction.” In *A History of Private Life, Vol 5: Riddles of Identity in Modern Times*, edited by Antoine Prost and Gérard Vincent, 3–8. Cambridge: Belknap, 1991.
- Prystash, Justin. “Learning from the Human: Virginia Woolf, Olaf Stapledon, and the Challenge of Behaviorism.” *Configurations* 28, no. 4 (2020): 433–57.
- Puar, Jasbir K. *The Right to Maim: Debility, Capacity, Disability*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2017.
- Putnis, Peter. “Share 999: British Government Control of Reuters During World War I.” *Media History* 14, no. 2 (2008): 141–65.
- Pybus, Cassandra. “Thomas Jefferson and Slavery.” In *A Companion to Thomas Jefferson*, edited by Francis Cogliano, 271–83. Malden: Blackwell, 2012.
- Quayson, Ato. *Aesthetic Nervousness: Disability and the Crisis of Representation*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2007.
- Quine, W. V. *Word and Object*. Mansfield: Martino, 2013.
- Raja, Srinivasa N., Daniel B. Carr, Milton Cohen, Nanna B. Finnerup, Herta Flor, Stephen Gibson, Francis J. Keefe, Jeffrey S. Mogil, Matthias Ringkamp, Kathleen A. Sluka, Xue-Jun Song, Bonnie Stevens, Mark D. Sullivan, Perri R. Tutelman, Takahiro Ushida, and Kyle Vader. “The Revised International Association for the Study of Pain Definition of Pain: Concepts, Challenges, and Compromises.” *Pain* 161, no. 9 (2020): 1976–82.
- Reynolds, Joel Michael. *The Life Worth Living: Disability, Pain, and Mortality*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2022.
- Richards, I. A. *Principles of Literary Criticism*. London: Routledge, 2001.
- Rippl, Gabriele, Philipp Schweighauser, Tiina Kirss, Margit Sutrop, and Therese Steffen, eds. *Haunted Narratives: Life Writing in an Age of Trauma*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013.
- Robinson, Douglas. *Translationality: Essays in the Translational-Medical Humanities*. London: Routledge, 2017.
- Rondini, Ashley C. “White Supremacist Danger Narratives.” *Contexts* 17, no. 3 (2018): 60–62.
- Rossiter, Kate. “Bearing Response-Ability: Theatre, Ethics, and Medical Education.” *Journal of Medical Humanities* 33 (2012): 1–14.
- Rorty, Richard. *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980.

- Rosenberg, Sheri P. "Genocide Is a Process, Not an Event." *Genocide Studies and Prevention* 7, no. 1 (2012): 16–23.
- Roth, John K. *The Failure of Ethics: Confronting the Holocaust, Genocide, and Other Mass Atrocities*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015.
- Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality Among Men*. In *The Basic Political Writings*, edited and translated by Donald A. Cress, 93–120. Indianapolis: Hackett, 2011.
- Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. "Essay on the Origin of Languages." In *Two Essays on the Origin of Language*, translated by John H. Moran and Alexander Gode, 5–83. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986.
- Rushdy, Ashraf H. A. *American Lynching*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012.
- Ryan, Derek. "'Was it Flush, or Was it Pan?': Virginia Woolf, Ethel Smyth, and Canine Biography." In *Reading Literary Animals: Medieval to Modern*, edited by Karen L. Edwards, Derek Ryan, and Jane Spencer, 264–81. London: Routledge, 2020.
- Salamon, Gayle. "What's Critical about Critical Phenomenology?" *Puncta: Journal of Critical Phenology* 1 (2018): 8–17.
- Sampson, Fiona. *Two-Way Mirror: The Life of Elizabeth Barrett Browning*. London: Profile Books, 2021.
- Samuels, Ellen. *Fantasies of Identification: Disability, Gender, Race*. New York: New York University Press, 2014.
- Samuels, Ellen. "Six Ways of Looking at Crip Time." *Disability Studies Quarterly* 37, no. 3 (2017): np.
- Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Antisemite and Jew: An Exploration of the Etiology of Hate*. Translated by George J. Becker. New York: Schocken, 1995.
- Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*. Translated by Hazel E. Barnes. New York: Washington Square Press, 1984.
- Saunders, Graham. *Love Me or Kill Me: Sarah Kane and the Theatre of Extremes*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002.
- Scarry, Elaine. *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985.
- Schabas, William A. "Genocide and the International Court of Justice: Finally, a Duty to Prevent the Crime of Crimes." *Genocide Studies and Prevention* 2, no. 2 (2007): 101–22.
- Schmidt, Justin O. *The Sting of the Wild: The Story of the Man Who Got Stung for Science*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016.
- Schmidt, Justin O., Murray S. Blum, and William L. Overal. "Hemolytic Activities of Stinging Insect Venoms." *Archives of Insect Biochemistry and Physiology* 1, no. 2 (1984): 155–60.
- Scholem, Gershom. *Origins of the Kabbalah*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987.
- Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. *Epistemology of the Closet*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008.

- Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. *Tendencies*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1993.
- Segal, Judy C. *Health and the Rhetoric of Medicine*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2005.
- Segev, Alon. *Thinking and Killing: Philosophical Discourse in the Shadow of the Third Reich*. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013.
- Shepherd, Emma. "Chronic Pain as Emotion." *Journal of Literary and Cultural Disability Studies* 14, no. 1 (2020): 5–20.
- Shklovskii, Viktor. "Art as Technique." Translated by Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis. In *From Symbolism to Socialist Realism: A Reader*, edited by Irene Masing-Delic, 64–81. Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2012.
- Siebers, Tobin. *Disability Theory*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008.
- Siems, Larry. "Introduction." In *Guantánamo Diary*, edited by Larry Siems, xv–xlix. New York: Little, Brown, 2015.
- Simpson, Hannah. *Samuel Beckett and the Theatre of Witness: Pain in Postwar Franco-phone Drama*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022.
- "Situation in the State of Palestine: ICC Pre-Trial Chamber I Rejects the State of Israel's Challenges to Jurisdiction and Issues Warrants of Arrest for Benjamin Netanyahu and Yoav Gallant." *International Criminal Court*, November 21, 2024. <https://www.icc-cpi.int/news/situation-state-palestine-icc-pre-trial-chamber-i-rejects-state-israels-challenges>.
- Skordis, Nicos, Andreas Kyriakou, Shai Dror, Avital Mushailov, and Nicolas C. Nicolaides. "Gender Dysphoria in Children and Adolescents: An Overview." *Hormones* 19, no. 3 (2020): 267–76.
- Slahi, Mohamedou Ould. *Guantánamo Diary*, edited by Larry Siems. New York: Little, Brown, 2015.
- Slatman, Jenny. "The *Körper-Leib* Distinction." In *50 Concepts for a Critical Phenomenology*, edited by Gail Weiss, Ann V. Murphy, and Gayle Salamon, 203–10. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2020.
- Smith, Mitch, and Timothy Williams. 2016. "Minnesota Police Officer's 'Bulletproof Warrior' Training Is Questioned." *New York Times*, July 14, 2016, sec. U.S. <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/15/us/minnesota-police-officers-bulletproof-warrior-training-is-questioned.html>
- Snediker, Michael D. *Contingent Figure: Chronic Pain and Queer Embodiment*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2021.
- Snyder, Sharon L., and David T. Mitchell. *Cultural Locations of Disability*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006.
- Solga, Kim. "Blasted's Hysteria: Rape, Realism, and the Thresholds of the Visible." *Modern Drama* 50, no. 3 (2007): 346–74.
- Solove, Daniel J. *Understanding Privacy*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010.

- Sontag, Susan. *Illness as Metaphor and AIDS and Its Metaphors*. New York: Picador, 1990.
- Sontag, Susan. *Regarding the Pain of Others*. New York: Picador, 2003.
- Sophocles. *Philoctetes*. In *Oedipus the King and Other Tragedies*, translated by Oliver Taplin, 139–208. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015.
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorti. *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999.
- Stanar, Dragan. “The Vital Significance of Military Ethics.” *Journal of Military Ethics* 20, nos. 3–4 (2021): 237–50.
- Stanghellini, Giovanni, and René Rosfort. *Emotions and Personhood: Exploring Fragility—Making Sense of Vulnerability*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.
- Stanier, Jessica, and Nicole Miglio. “Painful Experience and Constitution of the Inter-subjective Self: A Critical-Phenomenological Analysis.” In *Phenomenology of Bioethics: Technologies of Lived Experience*, edited by Susi Ferrarello, 101–14. Cham: Springer, 2021.
- Stegenga, Jacob. *Care as Cure: An Introduction to Philosophy of Medicine*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018.
- St. Pierre, Joshua. “Living with Chronic Pain.” *Puncta: Journal of Critical Phenomenology* 3, no. 2 (2020): 30–32.
- Strachey, Lytton. *Queen Victoria*. New York: Blue Ribbon Books, 1921.
- Svenaesus, Fredrik. *The Hermeneutics of Medicine and the Phenomenology of Health: Steps Towards a Philosophy of Medical Practice*. London: Springer, 2022.
- Svenaesus, Fredrik. “Hermeneutics of Medicine in the Wake of Gadamer: The Issue of *Phronesis*.” *Theoretical Medicine and Bioethics* 24 (2003): 407–31.
- Sykes, John D., Jr. “Wit, Pride, and the Resurrection: Margaret Edson’s Play and John Donne’s Poetry.” *Renascence* 55, no. 2 (2003): 163–74.
- Tange, Andrea Kastón. *Architectural Identities: Domesticity, Literature, and the Victorian Middle Classes*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010.
- Taplin, Oliver. “Introduction to *Philoctetes*.” In *Oedipus the King and Other Tragedies*, edited by Oliver Taplin, 141–50. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015.
- Taylor, Kristine. “Racial Capitalism and the Production of Racial Innocence.” *Theory and Event* 24, no. 3 (2021): 702–29.
- Tazudeen, Rasheed. “‘Discordant Syllabing’: The Language of the Living World in Virginia Woolf’s *Between the Acts*.” *Studies in the Novel* 47, no. 4 (2015): 491–513.
- Toker, Leona. *Gulag Literature and the Literature of Nazi Camps: An Intercontextual Reading*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2019.
- Tosas, Mar Rosàs. “The Downgrading of Pain Sufferers’ Credibility.” *Philosophy, Ethics, and Humanities in Medicine* 16, no. 1 (2021): np. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13010-021-00105-x>
- Trapp, Erin. “The Enemy Combatant and Poet: The Politics of Writing in *Poems from Guantánamo*.” *Postmodern Culture* 21, no. 3 (2011): np. <https://doi.org/10.1353/pmc.2011.0023>

- Trawney, Peter. *Heidegger: A Critical Introduction*. Cambridge: Polity, 2019.
- Üngör, Uğur Ü. "When Persecution Bleeds into Mass Murder: The Processive Nature of Genocide." *Genocide Studies and Prevention* 1, no. 2 (2006): 173–96.
- United States v. Skrmetti*, 605 U.S. 495 (2025).
- Urban, Ken. "An Ethics of Catastrophe: The Theatre of Sarah Kane." *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art* 23, no. 3 (2001): 36–46.
- Utell, Jane. "View from the Sickroom: Virginia Woolf, Dorothy Wordsworth, and Writing Women's Lives of Illness." *Life Writing* 13, no. 1 (2016): 27–45.
- Vincent, David. *Privacy: A Short History*. Cambridge: Polity, 2016.
- Vondey, Wolfgang. *Pentecostalism: A Guide for the Perplexed*. London: Bloomsbury, 2012.
- Wailoo, Keith. *Pain: A Political History*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014.
- Walsh, Arlene M. Sanchez. *Pentecostals in America*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2018.
- Ward, Christopher D. *Between Sickness and Health: The Landscape of Illness and Wellness*. London: Routledge, 2019.
- Ward, Ian. "Rape and Rape Mythology in the Plays of Sarah Kane." *Comparative Drama* 47, no. 2 (2013): 225–48.
- Waters, Steve. "Sarah Kane: From Terror to Trauma." In *A Companion to Modern British and Irish Drama, 1880–2005*, edited by Mary Luckhurst, 371–82. London: Blackwell, 2006.
- Weber, Elizabeth. "Guantánamo Poems: 'Guántdnamo, amas, amat.'" *Journal of Literature and Trauma Studies* 2, nos. 1–2 (2013): 159–82.
- Weiss, Gail. "The Body as a Narrative Horizon." In *Thinking the Limits of the Body*, edited by Jeffrey Jerome Cohen and Gail Weiss, 25–38. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003.
- Wells, Ida B. "Lynching and the Excuse for It." In *The Light of Truth: Writings of an Anti-Lynching Crusader*, edited by Mia Bay, 408–14. New York: Penguin, 2014.
- White, Nina. "'It was like lightning': The Theatrical Resonances of Sarah Kane in Eimear McBride's *A Girl Is a Half-Formed Thing*." *Irish Studies Review* 24, no. 4 (2018): 564–77.
- Wiesel, Elie. *Night*. In *The Night Trilogy: Night, Dawn, Day*, translated by Marion Wiesel, 1–134. New York: Hill and Wang, 2008.
- Williams, Sebastian. "Anthropocentric Ableism and Virginia Woolf's *Flush*." *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal* 53, no. 1 (2020): 107–23.
- Williams, Tina, and Havi Carel. "Breathlessness: From Body Symptom to Existential Experience." In *Existential Medicine: Essays on Health and Illness*, edited by Kevin Aho, 145–60. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2018.
- Windisch, Steven, and Pete Sim. "More Than a Joke: White Supremacist Humour as a Daily Form of Resistance." *Deviant Behaviour* (2022): 381–97.

- Wisniewski, J. Jeremy. *Understanding Torture*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010.
- Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Philosophical Investigations*. Translated by G. E. M. Anscombe, P. M. S. Hacker, and Joachim Schulte. Malden: Blackwell, 2009.
- Woolf, Virginia. *Flush*. Edited by Kate Flint. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.
- Woolf, Virginia. *The Letters of Virginia Woolf: Vol. 5 (1932–1935)*. Edited by Nigel Nicolson and Joanne Trautmann. Boston: Mariner, 1982.
- Woolf, Virginia. *Mrs Dalloway*. Edited by David Bradshaw. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.
- Woolf, Virginia. "The New Biography." In *Selected Essays*, edited by David Bradshaw, 95–100. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.
- Woolf, Virginia. "On Being Ill." In *Selected Essays*, edited by David Bradshaw, 101–110. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.
- Woolf, Virginia. "Street Haunting: A London Adventure." In *Selected Essays*, edited by David Bradshaw, 177–87. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.
- Wylie, Dan. "The Anthropomorphic Ethic: Fiction and the Animal Mind in Virginia Woolf's *Flush* and Barbara Gowdy's *The White Bone*." *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 9, no. 2 (2002): 115–31.
- Xavier, Subha. "When Rhetoric Responds to Violence: Literature and Human Rights in the DRC." *Research in African Literatures* 32, no. 3 (2021): 1–19.
- Yong, Ed. *An Immense World: How Animal Senses Reveal the Hidden Realms Around Us*. Toronto: Knopf Canada, 2022.
- Young, J. *James Baldwin's Understanding of God: Overwhelming Desire and Joy*. London: Palgrave, 2014.
- Zierler, Wendy. "'My Holocaust Is Not Your Holocaust': 'Facing' Black and Jewish Experience in *The Pawnbroker*, *Higher Ground*, and *The Nature of Blood*." *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 18, no. 1 (2004): 46–67.

Index

- Abettan, Camille, 184
 Adorno, Theodor, 125
 Agamben, Giorgio, 11, 111, 113, 118–19, 130
 Ahmed, Sara, 26, 98
 Aho, Kevin, 185
 Alexander, Philip S., 128
 Alito, Samuel, 218
 Améry, Jean, 108–9
 analgesia, 30
 Artaud, Antonin, 133–35, 137, 140, 145
 asymbolia, 7, 30, 33
 Austin, J. L., 52, 110
- Baer, Jonathan, 98
 Baldwin, James, 4, 11, 83–105, 107, 213; *Blues for Mister Charlie*, 93, 96; *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, 84, 87, 90–91, 95, 97, 99–102, 104, 107; *The Fire Next Time*, 83, 85, 87, 90–91, 94, 98, 102
 Barrett Browning, Elizabeth, 10, 56, 67–70, 73–74, 77–81
 Barthes, Roland, 167–68
 Basu, Srimayee, 202
 Bearing, Vivian. *See* Edson, Margaret
 Beauvoir, Simone de, 21
 Beckett, Samuel: *Malone Dies*, 6, 20, 66
 Belling, Catherine, 159
 Benjamin, Walter, 211
 Bentham, Jeremy, 35–36, 48, 53, 121
 Berlant, Lauren, 39–40
 bidirectional character. *See* pain, bidirectional
- Booth, Alison, 69
Brazil (directed by Terry Gilliam), 9, 15–18, 21, 37, 46
 Brentano, Franz, and intentionality, 28
 Butler, Judith, 14–15, 22, 52, 90, 114, 211–12; *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?*, 45, 206; *Gender Trouble*, 156–57, 176
- Caldwell, Luke, 204
 Carel, Havi, 160
 Casper, M. F., 205
 Cassel, Eric J., 7
 Child, Jeffrey, 205
 Chomsky, Noam, 190, 212
 chronic pain. *See* pain, chronic
 Clare, Eli, 160
 Clark, Keith, 91
 Cobb, Michael L., 95
 Colbert, Soyica, 96
 Colesworthy, Rebecca, 64
 community, 23, 84, 115, 119; Black, 199; religious, 97, 100, 106
 conditioning, operant, 13, 193, 196, 207, 212, 214
 context of pain, 182
 correlative, 133, 148; objective correlative, 10–11, 66–68, 74, 77–78, 80, 135; subjective correlative, 66–67, 73, 77
 credibility. *See* pain, disbelief
 Cuder, Eva Gil, 152
 culture, 20; and pain responses, 36

- Daniel, Stephen L., 185
 Dante: *Inferno, The Divine Comedy*, 14–18, 50–51, 69, 207–8, 210
 Davis, Angela, 199
 death, 76, 125, 148, 165, 171, 174, 189; and Jon Donne, 167
 dehumanization, 124, 185, 187–215; mass dehumanization, 195; of the enemy/of the other, 193–95, 210; of the self, 199, 202, 204
 Deleuze, Gilles, 2
 de Man, Paul, 113–14
 denial, 191
 Dennett, Daniel, 64–67, 80
 depersonalization, 118, 142, 195–96, 200, 202
 Derrida, Jacques, 27, 36, 80–81, 161, 176, 186, 212; on communication, 42–43; *différance*, 175–77; on pity, 40, 48; on suffering, 45–46
 Descartes, René, 40–42, 48
 Di Cesare, Donatella, 184
 Dickinson, Emily, 1–2, 76
 Diehl, Heath, 159
 disability, 18–19, 57–58, 61, 114
 Donne, John, 163–69, 171, 176–77, 185
 Dossari, Jumah Al: “Death Poem,” 189
 Durkheim, Émile, 83–84, 87–88, 92, 94
 dysphoria. *See* gender dysphoria

 Edelman, Lee, 34
 Edson, Margaret: *Wit*, 4, 12, 47, 116, 158–59, 163, 165, 176
 Eliot, T. S., 1–2, 10, 66–67, 73, 135, 168; “The Metaphysical Poets,” 185
 Ellison, Ralph, 85, 104
 empathy, 57, 112, 117, 159
 Empson, William, 161, 163, 167–68, 170
 endurance, 175
 ethics, 48, 50, 53–55, 59, 80–82, 117, 129, 158; medical, 161, 173, 180, 182–83
 expression. *See* pain expression

 Falkoff, Marc, 187–88, 190
 Fanon, Frantz, 22, 90, 97
 Field, Douglas, 97
 Fields, James, 201
 Fifield, Peter, 27, 71
 Foucault, Michael, 121, 169
 Fricker, Miranda, 48, 51, 89, 161, 178–79. *See also* hermeneutic injustice

 Gadamer, Hans-Georg, 12, 161, 174, 181–86
 Gaza, 110, 208–9
 gender dysphoria, 219–20
 Geniusas, Saulius, 2, 5, 28, 86
 genocide, 108–13, 116–18, 120, 123–24, 130, 214, 221
 Gilliam, Terry. *See* Brazil
 Gill-Peterson, Julian, 217
 God, 84–85, 87, 92, 98–100, 102, 104–5, 127, 207, 210; Dante on, 51
 Goffman, Erving, 142–43
 Goldman, Jane, 70
 Gottlieb, Christina, 159
 Gourevitch, Philip, 109
 Grahek, Nikola, 6, 29–32
 Grondin, Jean, 181, 183
 Grossman, Dave, 192; *On Killing*, 191–96, 198, 200–203, 206, 210–11
 Grüny, Christian, 28
 Guantánamo Bay Prison, 187–88, 211–12
 Guenther, Lisa, 22, 23, 88–90, 93–94, 103, 125–26, 135

 Hartman, Saidiya: on racism, 21, 49–50
 Hartsock, Nancy, 178–79
 Heidegger, Martin, 56, 65, 181–82
 Herman, David, 76
 Herman, Edward, 90, 190, 212
 Hermeneutic injustice, 51, 53, 89, 91, 102, 106, 161, 178–80, 183
 hermeneutics, pain. *See* pain hermeneutics
 Herzfeld, Chris, 56–57
 Holocaust, 11–12, 108, 111–13, 115–17, 119–25, 128–30, 130
homo sacer, 12, 111, 113, 118, 119–20, 122–23, 128, 149. *See also* Agamben, Giorgio
 Hovanec, Caroline, 67
 Husserl, Edmund, 7; *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, 14, 22; *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*, 23, 25; *Logical Investigations*, 24, 28–30. *See also* *körper*; *leib*

 identity, 44, 53, 138
 illness, 68, 70, 72–73, 156–86
 intentionality, 10, 24, 28, 29–31, 33–34
 interiority, 10–11, 44, 129, 132–36, 143, 145, 147–55

International Association for the Study of
Pain (IASP), 5
Ittner, Julia, 69

James, William, 84
Jameson, Fredric, 47
Jefferson, Thomas, 45–47, 52
Jenicek, Milos, 162
Joyce, James, 156, 185

Kafer, Alison, 34, 61
Kane, Sarah, 132–55; *Blasted*, 136–43, 146, 150–
51, 153; *Cleansed*, 151–55; and *Crave*, 143–46;
Phaedra's Love, 145–51
Klein, Colin, 22
Kleinman, Arthur, 20
körper, 26, 30–32, 34, 164, 174

Lang, Beryl, 124
legality, 48
leib, 26, 31–33, 52, 164, 174
Lenoir, Tim, 204
Levinas, Emmanuel, 58–59, 80–82, 132–33,
136–37, 139, 144–46, 149
Lewis, C. S., 20
Linett, Maren, 60

Marshall, S. L. A., 193
Martinot, Steve, 200
Massumi, Brian, 61
Mauriac, François, 123–24
Mbembe, Achille, 100, 103, 119, 211
McClimans, Leah, 184
McGill Pain Questionnaire, 6
McWeeny, Jennifer, 24
medicine, 19, 159–61, 164–86; and suffering,
48
Medina, José, 53, 93
Merleau-Ponty, Maurice, 4, 23–24, 31, 33, 36,
93
Miller, Flagg, 187
Mills, Charles, 11, 85, 93, 213
Mitchell, David T., 114, 116, 159
More, Elizabeth, 109
Morrison, Kevin A., 78
Muhammad, Elijah, 102

Nāgārjuna, 20
Nagel, Thomas, 10, 57–58, 61–67, 73, 79–81

Nietzsche, Friedrich: *Human, All Too Human*,
203, 207

Night. See Wiesel, Elie
Nikopoulos, James, 51
nociception, 6
noema, 22, 23
noesis, 22, 23
normalization, 108; of violence, 193–97

objective correlative. See correlative,
objective
Oksala, Johanna, 22–23
operant conditioning. See conditioning
Ortega y Gasset, José, 29
Orwell, George: *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, 15–16
Outka, Elizabeth, 60, 72

pain, bidirectional, 10, 35, 48–49, 52, 80, 133,
143, 145–46, 149, 157, 195; Baldwin on, 11;
Hartman on, 49; Kane on, 12; *Philoctetes*,
38, 45
pain, chronic, 29, 34–35, 103, 160; *Flush*, 10,
68, 74
pain, definitions of, 5–6
pain, descriptions of, 16, 27, 79, 103, 172
pain, and disbelief, 48–49, 52
pain-complex, 7, 9, 22, 30, 33
pain experience, 2–10, 13, 17, 20–22, 26, 28–35,
46, 48, 58, 67–68, 83–84, 86–87, 95, 98, 103–
4, 107, 112, 133, 143, 147, 157–58, 160, 170, 172,
174, 217; in animals, 58, 62, 73, 81
pain expression, 2, 13, 15–16, 18, 20, 35–36, 41,
48, 51–55, 70, 98, 103, 116–17, 143, 157–58,
191, 207, 210, 214, 216; *Flush*, 10; Kane on,
133, 142; and sympathy, 207
pain hermeneutics, 157–58, 167, 178
pain imperative, 22
pain object, 10, 21, 23–27, 32, 36, 157
Palestine, 110–11, 209
Parsons, Talcott, 173
Patsavas, Alyson, 20, 85–86
Pawiński, Michał, 200
Peña-Guzmán, David M., 179
performativity, 12, 36, 52–54; and identities,
114; Kane on, 133; Scarry on, 92; Woolf on,
75, 81
Pett, Sarah, 71
phenomenology, 92
Philoctetes. See Sophocles

- pity, 36, 39–40, 42–43, 45–46, 48, 50, 117, 191, 193
- Plato, 183–84
- Podhoretz, Norman, 206
- politicization, 19–20, 49–50, 54, 58, 95, 102, 118–19, 129, 212, 216, 221
- Pound, Ezra, 169
- Price, Margaret, 20
- privacy, 3–4, 9, 11–13, 23, 46, 62, 68–69, 78, 87–88, 96, 98, 104, 127, 129, 133, 136, 138–39, 142, 145–50
- Proust, Marcel, 24, 169
- Prystash, Justin, 69
- Puar, Jasbir, 215
- Quayson, Ato, 20, 61
- Quine, W. V., 37, 48
- racism, 19, 86–91, 94, 100–102, 104, 199–201, 213, 218; and antisemitism, 120, 199
- Raja, Srinivasa N. et al., “The Revised IASP Definition of Pain: Concepts, Challenges, and Compromises,” 6
- religion, 11, 73, 83, 88, 90–92, 94–96, 98, 101, 103–7, 115, 129, 167. *See also* God
- Reynolds, Joel Michael, 18, 129, 179
- Robinson, Douglas, 159, 161
- Rondini, Ashley, 201
- Rorty, Richard, 26–27, 30
- Rossiter, Kate, 159
- Roth, John, 117
- Rousseau, Jean-Jacques, 36, 48, 193; on pity, 40–44
- Rushdy, Ashraf, 199
- Rwanda, 108–10, 124
- Ryan, Derek, 67
- Salamon, Gayle, 90
- Samuels, Ellen, 34
- Sartre, Jean-Paul, 26–27, 29–31, 33–34; on antisemitism, 120; on bad faith, 195
- Scarry, Elaine: *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*, 3–4, 7–8, 12–13, 19–21, 25–28, 34–37, 42, 46, 48–49, 54, 57, 58, 68, 71, 83, 84, 86–89, 92–93, 103, 113, 116, 118, 130, 132–35, 137, 139, 140, 142–43, 147–49, 151–55, 157, 170, 197, 208, 214, 219
- Schmidt, Justin O.: *The Sting of the Wild: The Story of the Man Who Got Stung for Science*, 16, 17, 18, 21–22, 25
- Sedgwick, Eve, 210
- Segev, Alon, 112
- Shakespeare, William, 5, 67, 70, 71, 74, 152, 166–67, 169
- Siebers, Tobin, 20; on disability, 173
- Siems, Larry, 188
- Sim, Pete, 202
- Slahi, Mohamedou Ould, 188
- Slatman, Jenny, 31
- slavery, 21, 45–47, 51, 125; Hartman on, 49
- Snediker, Michael D., 34
- Solga, Kim, 142
- Solove, Daniel J., 145
- somatic, 2, 11, 84, 86, 96, 98–99, 102, 107
- Sontag, Susan, 220
- Sophocles: *Philoctetes*, 36, 38–39, 43–46, 170; *Trachiniae*, 38
- St. Pierre, Joshua, 103
- Strachey, Lytton, 75–76
- Strategies of containment, 47–49, 51, 55, 208, 221
- Stumpf, Carl, 28
- subjective correlative. *See* correlative, subjective
- suffering, 21, 35, 41, 48–49, 121, 131, 171, 208; Dante on, 50–51; Derrida on, 45–46; disability, 18, 61; illness, 68, 72; normalization of, 108; recognition of, 53, 110; representation of, 130–31; shared suffering, 19, 119; and slavery, 46–47, 49; transgender, 217, 219
- Svenaesus, Fredrik, 162, 184
- sympathy, 48, 112, 116, 121, 131, 207–8, 210
- Tange, Andrea, 138
- Taudeen, Rasheed, 69
- Taylor, Kristine, 92, 94
- Toker, Leona, 120
- torture, 16, 21, 134–35, 137, 139–40, 142, 144–45, 147, 149, 151–54, 212
- transgender, 216–21
- Trapp, Erin, 188
- United States v. Skrmetti*, 216–20
- Utell, Janine, 70

- violence, 103, 191–93, 203, 212; mass violence,
204; systems of, 214
- Vondey, Wolfgang, 95
- Wailoo, Keith, 21, 173
- Ward, Christopher, 172–73
- Weiss, Gail, 30
- Wells, Ida B., 198
- Werber, Elizabeth, 190
- Wiesel, Elie: *Night*, 4, 11, 52, 56, 108, 111–12,
114–17, 119, 121–24, 126–30
- Williams, Tina, 160
- Windisch, Steven, 202
- Wisniewski, J. Jeremy, 139
- Wit*. See Edson, Margaret
- Wittgenstein, Ludwig, 37, 48
- Woolf, Virginia, 5–6, 10–11, 17, 27, 41, 56–59;
Flush, 67–72, 75–78, 80–82; “On Being Ill,”
70–74; “Street Haunting,” 60, 63–64
- Wylie, Dan, 69
- Yong, Ed, 79