

Geoffrey H. Hartman, New Haven

Trauma within the limits of literature

Trauma Study in the arts explores the relation of psychic wounds and signification. Everyone believes in expressiveness: either as the value of articulating clear and distinct ideas that alleviate mental confusion or as the value of unburdening the heart with the aid of innovative signs. The structure of psychic wounding, of "trauma" in its psychical connotation, has a bearing on the second of these: on the pressure and relief of a determining yet deeply occluded experience.

According to Freud, an event that is overwhelming penetrates the "membrane" of the psyche. We either do not have time to prepare for it or whatever receptive capacities (and defenses) are in place prove inadequate. Trauma results from an experience that lodges in a person without having been experienced, that is, without having fully passed into consciousness or stayed there. It is a "foreign body" (*Fremdkörper*) in the psyche, or as Ruth Klüger writes of the memory of Auschwitz, an inoperable bullet.

How trauma affects the formation of words, or how words deal with trauma, can be viewed as a technical matter in which the focus of concern becomes what region of the brain is involved. But neither a neurology nor a formal therapy are the primary concerns of trauma study in the arts. Insofar as there is an established field to which it belongs, it would be close to semiology in Saussure's definition as the study of signs within the context of social interaction.

On the level of the affections, moreover, trauma study is motivated by concerns about social and moral well-being. Freud's hypothesis about the origin of trauma, that what overwhelmed the psyche was often a premature erotic arousal or sexual aggression, had a culture-specific not only physiologic component.¹ Just as today a component with moral implications surfaces, bringing in a global picture of aggression: world wars, the Holocaust and other genocides, but also the impact of electronic media on the sensibility of viewers, especially the transmission of what Luc Boltanski has named "distance suffering" (*souffrance à distance*).²

The fact that stimulus-flooding scenes in the media are now routine, which leads to a vicious cycle of escalation and desensitization, is part of the contemporary problem. It is of moral concern because we fear the damage done to an habituated imagination that seeks out such scenes like a drug. The entire economy of the affections becomes unbalanced.

The vicissitudes of compassion and the imperative to overcome indifference invigorate an inquiry into the emotional effects of trauma. William Blake rightly exposed the hypocrisy of sentimentalism ("Pity would be no more/If there were nobody poor"). But the contemporary emphasis goes beyond social satire, as does Blake's own poetry as a whole. Remedial measures to lessen everyday social injustice, as well as to prevent massive atrocities, are more essential - and visionary - than ever. In the search for such remedies the spectator theory of knowledge, explicit since the Enlightenment, and which assumes the safe distance and ideal objectivity of the knowledge seeker, needs to be revised.

For we have always been, or are all the more in danger of being, "captive observers." A secondary traumatization threatens the bystander who views mechanically transmitted pictures of violence and sorrow from all over the world. The mind's safe house is no longer safe; in a globalized "society of communication" John Donne's "Do not send for whom the bell tolls, it

tolls for thee" resonates in unexpected ways. An anxiety arises that produces a desire for not-knowing rather than knowledge. The "internal other" is jeopardized: that profoundly private image guaranteeing the possibility of thought itself, of an inner dialogue that outlasts invasive empathy or defensive innervation. It is jeopardized not only as regards the victim but also the secondary witness (spectator, researcher).³ How, then, is sympathy for others or for oneself possible, and, if still possible, can it be sustained?

As a specifically literary endeavor trauma study explores the relation of words and wounds. Its main focus is on words that wound, and presumably can be healed, if at all, by further words.⁴ But hurt, striking deeper than realized, may also come through the inadequacy of words, when they cannot find a response, or convey reality, or redress other shocks including the impact of visual images.

Literature both recognizes and offsets that inadequacy. If there is a failure of language, so that silence or mutism ensues, then no working-through or catharsis is possible.⁵ Literary verbalization, however, is a basis for making the wound perceivable and the silence audible. It is a sophisticated and delimited reenactment. As in Hopkins's "Elected silence sing to me/ And beat upon my whorled ear," what seems to be given up is not given up. We are taught to read for what is without words or as yet beyond their reach: for the wound as well as the power of signification that contains or composes it.

Such reading presupposes of *literary* words that they still cry out, that they bear the wound or are scarred by it. In many cases - including the extreme of James Joyce's later fiction - style means distressing the word, disturbing its sound-shape and semantic stability, marking it individually, even if the result is not only a remarkably rich verbal texture but also a not always resolvable ambiguity or plurisignificance.

A central question, in fact, is whether a model of *non-integration* can be developed that would have, at one and the same time, therapeutic value in psychoanalysis and emancipatory-expressive value in art. There is no guarantee that these go together, that every gain in expressiveness is also a step toward psychic strength. But should expressiveness in art be more than a repetition without relief, should it lead away from fixation to a new mental and emotional flexibility, one that tolerates irony, indeterminacy, complexities of communication, even strongly ambivalent feelings - if it also augments, in short, "Knowledge not purchased by the loss of power" (Wordsworth) - then a linkage appears between the arts and psychic health.

Trauma theory within literary studies does shift attention, in any case, to the medium of words, their forcefulness as well as impotence. It is a shift with both an intriguing and a more dubious consequence. When we speak of the nightmare sufferings of war, or of the Holocaust's break with civilized values (*Zivilisationsbruch*), these extra-ordinary determinants of trauma differ from such ordinary ones as an unguarded word or a deliberate insult, or more violent but still random excitations that inflict psychic pain. The questionable consequence of this focus is that it establishes an equivalence between disparate though at times overlapping determinants. Given the existence of the phenomenon called trauma, the variability of human sensitiveness, and the diversity of cultural contexts influencing what is traumatic,⁶ it has so far been easier to describe the symptoms or general structure of trauma than to determine in an assured way trauma's aetiology.

The intriguing, if still problematic, side of this theory deficit, one that has made "trauma" a word applied at present to almost any severe disturbance, comes from two sources. The first emphasizes the closeness of cause (traumatic incident) and effect (psychical trauma), even collapses the one into the other. Here overwhelming power always produces the same effect, which is to turn you into a helpless subject - whether in domestic situations, or war, or natural disasters. This unified view allows Judith Herman to argue, for instance, that "Hysteria is the combat neurosis of the sex war" and all psychological trauma "an affliction of the powerless."⁷ (Many unified theories of this kind, however, serve an ideological, even scapegoating purpose, and eventually prove to be false. Think of the damage brought about by the dogma that autism was caused by "refrigerator mothers.") The second perspective, in contrast, acknowledges the often indeterminate link of cause and effect (rather, of cause and affect, an affect that has an enduring, if chronic, psychic or even somatic resonance⁸). It discerns a complex imaginative process. Retrieved memories, it is well-known, often include a fanciful intervention to fill in details, even to create a sort of phantom reminiscence of what happened.⁹

In our time, the imaginative burden is aggravated by the fact that many families were decimated in the Holocaust, so that the injury suffered becomes an injury to memory itself, to the very possibility of recollection. Remembrance, especially by the immediate descendants, turns in a void as it tries to recover individual details about the life and death of those who disappeared. A *cold* trauma, so to say, may result: not only an immediate, overwhelming affright at that void and the defensive, emotional deadening that may follow, but also a chill brought on by the absence of what facilitates normal sympathetic identification and the working-through of loss.

A process of imaginative elaboration, or the filling of a lacuna, may also take place in the collective memory and explain why, over the long run, legend consolidates as historical fact. Here too "Men make their own history." Real suffering and humiliation as well as vague terrors are delimited, or a defeat is turned into a celebration. For mankind to lose its fear of the gods, Hesiod said, it had to give them a definite shape - even, we might add, free itself from them by an inventive, form-giving power.

Turning once more to issues of personal development: a non-integration model, while making room for a greater degree of self-awareness, does not coincide in all respects with an ego psychology whose *equilibrium* ideal of psychic health dominated the Anglo-American scene for a long time - and enraged Jacques Lacan. In "French Freud," concepts of psychic unity, personal or group identity, and narrative mastery lose their self-evident value. Here too the scopic paradigm of coming-to-knowledge, expressing itself often as a movement from darkness to light, is viewed as deceptive.

A general theory, continuing to rethink its terms, and stymied by the difficulty of achieving a scientific aetiology - Freud called it "the puzzling leap from psychical to physical" - should keep Emmanuel Levinas' axiom in mind: "The interval of space given by light is instantaneously absorbed by light."¹⁰ It is as if light itself did the violence, as if it insisted on mastering all the darkness. A counter-logos to that of the gospel of John is suggested.

Whatever was "In the Beginning," literary words retain a reserve of darkness, or else a temporizing resistance to the claims of clarity.¹¹ "Truth in its raw state," Valéry once wrote, "is more false than falsity." Paul Celan's "Nach dem Lichtverzicht" (After renouncing the light) in *Eingedunkelt* (Overtaken by Darkness), depicts a logos-light making its triumphant way to a bleeding ear.¹² Aspects of healing and hurting in such illuminations are not easily disentangled.

The excess of world over words, or over modes of representation generally, is a challenge to *homo faber*. Post-Hegelian epistemology advances from the immediacy of sensation to a stage in which language "negates" the enticement of phenomena and creates a space for thought in which the sensuous aspect can be conceptualized. This "negativity" is viewed as a fortunate wound, a self-alienation from the state of nature that spurs humanity toward a higher phase of self-reflective existence. But we may regret the loss of immediacy and see mainly the "sad incompetence of human speech" (Wordsworth, *The Prelude*, Book 6). Naming can seem pale compared to sensory experience, pictorial icons, or, at the other end of the cognitive spectrum, the purity of logical sign systems. Language wounds by the abstractness of its signs the concrete reality of things and provokes at best the eloquent *stutterance* called poetry.

The numinous pressure that continues to haunt human wordings and escape naming even while being named includes the *éclat* of phenomena, the luminosity and self-presentation of things, their sort of *material* dignity. In the famous confession attributed by Hofmannsthal to Lord Chandos, words undergo a crisis in which they lose their meaning. "Things" become the meaning as they rebel against language and display their own revelatory - if decentered, non-hierarchical - presence. Van Gogh expresses in a letter his disinclination to picture Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane; instead he will restrict himself to the garden's olive trees and capture their "glow." Wordsworth recalls in *Tintern Abbey* a youthful stage of sensory perception, when the colors and forms of nature inspired "a feeling and a love,/That had no need of a remoter charm,/By thought supplied, or any interest/ Unborrowed from the eye." "Things," Maurice Blanchot tells us, "belong to a different order [than names]; they are what is most familiar, letting us live in their environment without being transparent. Things are lit up, but they do not allow the light to pass through, even were they themselves made of grains of light."¹³ Perhaps, as Blanchot suggests, this pressure of things should be called *transcendental*.

The complexity arising from the interaction of a generic word-wound (a perplexing rather than progressive negativity) with other more narcissistic sources of psychic hurt is conveyed by *The Prelude*, Wordsworth's verse autobiography. This personal epic is basically a story of trauma and recovery. Trauma here is an ellipse with two foci: an early, relatively mute and ecstatic, relation to the sublime in nature - to a beauty that has terror in it - and disorienting incidents from the adult's relation to the social and political world. Curiously enough, the recollection of the youngster's ecstatic response to nature as Nature - as a power and a presence - is what enables him to emerge from the adult trauma of Britain's 1793 betrayal of the French Revolution as well as the Revolution's betrayal of itself. His recovery, however, is linked to Poetry as well as Nature: it comes through the very poem testing his power of recall.

Striking vignettes describe the poet's childhood and adolescent sensibility and go to prove he has survived an impaired imagination and a damaging split in self-identity. *The Prelude* (neither published nor given that name during his lifetime) was meant to be prelude to a theme of "higher" import, such as the Progress of Liberty. That theme turned out to be Wordsworth's own progress in overcoming trauma by calling up his calling as poet from where it lurked in the vacancy of a vanished early mode of sensibility, "great birthright of our being."

Despite choosing for his theme his own psychological development, Wordsworth envisions, like many writers before him, a monument outlasting brassy monuments, a "work of glory" immune to the ravages of time. But he interprets this immunity in an original way. He suggests that great poetry is exempt "from all internal injury" - a definition more appropriate to the psyche producing it. The growth of a poet's mind, which he is the first to make his subject, involves "Nature's" capacity to repair trauma, or internal injury. His advance toward psychic invulnerability nonetheless depicts a clinging together rather than a dissolving or complete sublimation of "terrors, pains, and early miseries/Regrets, vexations, lassitudes....". Despite praise

of Nature's "renovating virtue," its power to restore the wounded psyche, what the poet's development demonstrates is a mysterious and imperfect integration:

There is a dark
Inscrutable workmanship that reconciles
Discordant elements, makes them cling together
In one society.¹⁴

I am considering trauma only within the limits of language and especially literature. Respect for the formal integrity of literature has a salutary side-effect: it prevents theory from being applied reductively. Theory should not insist, in particular, that the psychic wound be located in a single biographical event (for example, the death of Wordsworth's mother when he was five) occulted by literary devices that must be cleared away as if they were defensive structures.¹⁵ Even where texts themselves reference a distinct cause, interpreters should be wary and not allow what could be screen memory or phantasm to distract from the traumatic event's temporality, its double and redoubled blow. In addition to a trigger event which may occur long after the originative event, there are retroactive shocks (the *après coup* dimension) complicating any monocausal picture of that "first" happening. In any case, whether what is suffered was astonishing or appalling, a humiliating word or a shock to the sensory system, the radical surprise of a betrayal or the numinous shine of a world independent of our meanings, a caesura has instituted, however obscurely, a different relation of personal being to time.

The sense that trauma demarcates time, producing a breach in its homogeneous course, often induces a *myth of temporal location*: the haunting idea that there was one event, or one discovery, which turned - overturned - the mind. Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *The Ancient Mariner* vividly illustrates this caesura by depicting the horrific consequences (including a compulsive story-telling) that follow on the Mariner's shooting of the albatross. A change in the self-image of a collective may also be assigned to such a breach, whether marked by despair or (eventually) by triumph. One explanation of the French-Canadian motto, "Je me souviens," is that it commemorates General Montcalm's battle against the British as an inaugural episode in Quebec's collective consciousness.¹⁶ Serbian nationalism focuses on a decisive ancient battle, while the *Hermannsschlacht* becomes a memorial myth for supporters of a new German national greatness.

Trauma study, a recent interpretive mode, has its own issue of temporal location. For although the rapid growth of the field cannot be explained by a single set of coordinates, it is surely linked to a specific ethical or sociocultural tension. This arises from an awareness of the persistence of violence in a culture that no longer condones the martial virtues of war. After Nazism, and totalitarianism generally, yearning for the arts of peace has never been greater. But continual ethnic conflict, genocidal episodes, and irrational and bloody episodes reported as the main staple of the news, set up an intolerable contrast between that yearning and an intractable reality, between our idealism and the necessity to look hard and honestly at what continues to assault human hope.

The study of trauma *is* distorted, however, by a myth of temporal location if it draws attention only to present conditions, or, what is worse, to a single kind of contemporary abuse. A larger, transhistorical awareness of the incidence of trauma, personal or collective, should make us realize the extent of human suffering. Also, at the same time, of a resilience based on a balm we do not yet understand, and which acts as an antidote drawn from a deeply incorporated memory-

source. "The perished patterns murmur," Emily Dickinson wrote; and the word-music of her poems intimates that unforgetful forgetting. Poetry's music goes beyond harmonizing sense and sound: as a concordant discord, it "vibrates in the memory" and resists being foreclosed by concepts or the sociolect.

Can such harmony, however intricate, hold a plea with the rage all around us?

The hope that keeps this question alive turns the word-artist into a magus and his music into what Milton's *Comus* calls a "sweet compulsion." We may have underestimated the magical idea that still inspires the arts.¹⁷ In developmental terms, however, when psychoanalysis and art join forces they suggest a *paideia*: an aesthetic education in which the capacity to feel, as it moves from passive and overwhelmed to active, and broadens into the sympathetic imagination, depends in good part on our relation to a universe of things psychically and physically less vulnerable than we are. Less vulnerable, that is, compared to our advanced individuation, which is accompanied by an acute sense of mortality, an anxiety about loneliness, isolation, exposure. The unsteady autonomy of individuals or even social groups stands in contrast to the apparent stability or self-regenerative capacities of "Nature."¹⁸

It is a stability is more apparent than absolute. There are cataclysmic events like earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, deadly storms and floods: cosmic traumas, as it were, which science extends to the prehistoric birth and decay of stellar systems. These provide a template for apocalyptic fantasies and fears.

In many European countries even today an older image of rural and pre-industrial Nature remains deeply implanted, despite earthquakes and disasters usually named "acts of God." Wordsworth, writing near the beginning of the Industrial Revolution, was already concerned about the impact of Industry on a rural culture (still close to small-scale cultivation) which he considered quintessentially English. *The Prelude* depicts a Nature that tutors the freely roaming youngster via his growing consciousness of modes of being that do not "live like living men" but haunt his reveries with the "incumbent mystery" of the interaction of sense and soul. But this life-world, one in which mind can bond with its habitat, is endangered, according to the poet, by his era's growing disrespect for the interdependence of human beings and nature, as well as by timetable schemes of children's education that pervert Rousseau and urge a form of human engineering.

Already before the rise of Industry, though not before the beginnings of eighteenth-century urbanization, Christopher Smart's verse fragments, named by their first editor *Rejoice in the Lamb*, appear in this light sane rather than mad.¹⁹ Smart's vision of the New Jerusalem is the symbiotic redemption of all creation: animal, vegetable, mineral. Christ as Lord and Lamb presides over a processional of praise in which the nonhuman orders of creation, previously subjected and exploited by human masters, are now "presented" by their oppressors and brought into the new Ark of an inclusive communal covenant. "Let Abraham present a Ram, and worship the God of his Redemption." "Let the Levites of the Lord take the Beavers of the Brook alive into the Ark of the Testimony."

Too exacting a solidarity with the nonhuman may increase, however, rather than decrease, psychic and emotional vulnerability. So Wordsworth cannot subdue his foreboding that the natural world he has known and loved may not be able to continue its regenerative and de-traumatizing role in personal development. The reason is that Nature itself has become vulnerable. It is fading as a crucial object of imaginative regard for an England rapidly changing from agrarian to industrial. This cancels the calming influence of "mute, insensate things" and shifts the burden of caring for them, as for the environment generally, to the poetic imagination.

Wordsworth's foreboding has its basis in the rapid pace of rural change, in socioeconomic factors such as capitalistic farming, industrial development, and urbanization. They threaten to deprive imagination of its natural home (Wordsworth could not conceive of cities as its new home) and trigger an alarm in an area best defined as the ecology of mind and feeling.²⁰ Should Nature's image become destabilized, to the degree that, in terms of emotional perception, what appeared to be everlasting seems now mortally susceptible to injurious changes inflicted by mankind, then a psychic reflex, close to panic, supervenes. The comfort we take in "things" (the other orders of creation), precisely because they are not human, is jeopardized. They now require sympathy and protection, as if they were human. A revived, neo-gothic fantasy of a secret "correspondence" between all things intimates that disquiet vis-a-vis inanimate or nonhuman. When there is no human act, however gratuitous, however unselfconscious, which does not have a significant resonance in a parallel if mainly occult and invisible sphere, the sense of liability is impossible to limit. At the extreme of this visionary extension of sensibility a *moral* madness breaks out based on the feeling that everything is alive and vulnerable in the way humans are; and this suggests that trauma and episodes of compulsive empathy are related. A short consideration of J. M. Coetzee's *The Lives of Animals* (1999) can illustrate one way in which this moral madness reveals itself at the present time.

In Coetzee's book, a terrifying glimpse arises of the disconnect between our normally civilized behavior and our disregard or exploitation of nonhuman types of life: the complacency, most clearly, with which we breed, buy, and eat the corpses of slaughtered animals. Coetzee expresses this disturbing recognition not in his own name but attributes it to Elizabeth Costello, an elderly philosopher-novelist invited to give the annual lecture at a small college. Her qualms recall one of the oldest convictions in the history of ideas: that the world is a creature with feelings and even a type of consciousness it is dangerous to injure wantonly. This returns us to Coleridge's poem, where the mariner's mysterious killing of the albatross triggers retribution by elemental spirits or cosmic powers. It may also recall, even further back in literary time, what follows upon another animal slaughter, that of the Sun God's sacred oxen by Odysseus's crew, to which Homer attributes his hero's long, hazardous journey home. There is certainly a reason why the killing and consumption of animals is surrounded in the ancient world and particularly the Biblical era by elaborate religious rituals.

Historical and literary references have the effect of normalizing and so assuaging shock. Coetzee's book, however, manages to scandalize by an inept if brilliantly developed analogy. His fictive lecturer likens our accepted treatment of livestock to the breach of civilized norms characterizing the Holocaust. "I seem to move around perfectly easy among people," she says, "to have perfectly normal relations with them. Is it possible, I ask myself, that all of them are participating in a crime of stupendous proportions?" The image of ordinary, presumably civilized Germans, who accepted, or evaded knowing about, the murder and torture that took place in the concentration and death camps, is made to mirror our own image, rendered unbearable in that light. As is the case with animals legally massacred, the Nazi's main psychological and anesthetizing cover was that their victims *were* animals, or even less: a form of subhuman life not worthy of being alive.

Coetzee's porte-parole does not analyze the Holocaust in depth; she uses it as an analogy to startle and disorient, to make us realize how habits of thinking (rather, non-thinking) limit the ethical and sympathetic imagination. While a traumatic discovery often removes a veil and leads to deeper knowledge, it can also induce a mental block. Coetzee employs the power of fiction to suspend disapproval and disbelief: he compels us to regard the truth that obsesses a lecturer who

is depicted as slightly absurd, an honest fool. In this way he maintains the decorum of the academic occasion sponsoring his own talks (the Tanner lectures on Human Values delivered at Princeton) yet finds a way to break through to an insight whose consequences strictly followed lead to something other than ... giving up meat.

For nothing less is at issue here than a bitter and perplexed understanding of what it signifies to be human. The Holocaust analogy is a means, not an end: it is flawed, for example, in making no distinction between the perpetrators of the genocide and those who knew about the crime, or between atrocities committed on German soil almost in plain view and the killings away from German eyes in the conquered Eastern territories. What matters for Coetzee is not the logic of the analogy but a deranging insight about human nature, also influenced, surely, by apartheid's treatment of blacks in South Africa - an insight that ricochets from a habitual type of thoughtlessness. One is reminded of Lear's anguished cry: "O fool, fool, I shall go mad!"

"It was and is inconceivable," the lecturer is made to say, "that people *who did not know* ... about the camps [that is, who evaded knowing about them] can be fully human." This after-knowledge about a wilful not-knowing is as distressing to her as the camps' very existence. She is haunted by a continuing, systematic, everyday violence against helpless beings, together with our capacity for normalizing it - the "it" in her case being the industrial butchery and medical exploitation of animals day after day all over the world.

Coetzee does not trivialize what happened under Nazism by ranting about a "holocaust of animals." Instead he brings us to the verge of the insight that sanity is based on the ability to cultivate a not-knowing, even an indifference, *so as not to go mad*: the ability to hide from the consciousness of suffering, cruelty, and savagery by deliberately withdrawing the sympathetic imagination from certain areas. Yet Coetzee's many novels show what happens when the sympathetic imagination feels morally bound to have no bounds. Compassion becomes a passion and leads to something between a *sparagmos* and a transfiguration of personal identity. The demand for participation in another's misery or joy exceeds endurance and becomes self-punishing. Is it not, however, this very risk of widening the sympathetic imagination "for the dignity, benefit and honor of human nature" (Wordsworth, "Preface" of 1800 to *Lyrical Ballads*) that defines art - and should define what it means to be fully human?

References

Please see as well **Geoffrey Hartman, Trauma Within the Limits of Literature**. In: *European Journal of English Studies*, Vol. 7, 2003, No. 3, pp. 257-274 (please see the journal's website URL <http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals>). Geoffrey Hartman's contribution to the trauma-focused issue of the EJES is a revised and extended version of his contribution to our conference in June 2002. I would especially express my great gratitude to Geoffrey Hartman for having given permission to include his lecture in *TRN-Newsletter* 2, as it serves as an introduction to the methodological problems of dealing with trauma in literature and literary theory. In second place, I would like to thank Ortwin de Graef, editor of the EJES, for his permission to print the shorter version of Professor Hartman's article. For the other contributions in the EJES issue on trauma, please see our *TRN-Newsletter*, Newsticker Summer 2004, Section: Publication from Trauma Research Net Members, URL http://www.traumaresearch.net/fr_net.htm or go directly to URL <http://www.extenza-eps.com/extenza/contentviewing/viewJournalIssueTOC.do?issueId=2762>.

¹ Other culture-specific domestic scenes from that era also enter, of course, involving complicated feelings or values that bear mainly, in *Studies on Hysteria*, on the life of women: particularly the nursing of a dying relative and the need to ascertain the (courtship) intention of male friends.

² Translated as *Distant Suffering: Morality, Media, and Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

³ This formulation is indebted to Dori Laub with whom I am in general agreement. I take a darker or more paradoxical view, however, of what he calls the "primary empathic bond", the source of both a "basic human recognition" and the "internal communication with the 'other'" in oneself. Empathic identification can itself be regressive, involuntary, obsessive, and so a source of the very trauma it is said to shield us from. I am relying mainly on Dori Laub and Daniel Podell, *Art and Trauma*, *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis* (1995), 76: 991-992, 991-1005, *passim*.

⁴ Cf. Geoffrey H. Hartman, *Words and Wounds in Saving the Text: Literature/Derrida/Philosophy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981). The talking cure is also a homeopathic cure and literature could be viewed as a talking cure to a higher degree. Freud and Breuer's early understanding of hysteria did not focus on the word-wound, although the "psychical trauma" they analyze often showed a strong "symbolic" element in the somatic conversion of a verbal phrase ("stab in the heart") and similar metaphors taken literally - indeed, as Freud speculates, these may once have been literal in conveying the wounding power of words. Moreover, Freud and Breuer did insist on the curative role of word-presentation. They worked along the lines of an enlightenment model that removed the hysterical symptoms by "bringing clearly to light the memory of the event by which it [the trauma] was provoked and in arousing its accompanying affect, and [being successful] when the patient had described that event in the greatest possible detail and had put the affect into words." See **On the Psychical Mechanism of Hysterical Phenomena: Preliminary Communication** (1893) in *Studies on Hysteria* (1895), and for the somatic effect of metaphorical expressions especially Case 5, that of Fräulein Elisabeth von R.

⁵ Cf. Hans Keilson, **Wohin die Sprache nicht reicht**, in *Psychoanalyse im Exil: Texte verfolgter Analytiker*, ed. Stephan Broser and Gerda Pagel (Würzburg: Königshausen + Neumann, 1987), 30-40.

⁶ For important definitions and analyses of "cultural trauma" see Jeffrey C. Alexander et al., *Cultural Trauma* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2003).

⁷ See Judith Lewis Herman, *Trauma and Recovery* (New York: Basic Books, 1992).

⁸ *Studies on Hysteria* points out that the "precipitating causes" of hysterical (serious somatic) symptoms are "psychical traumas", such as "the affect of fright" that may follow upon even a trifling physical injury. The reason for the disproportionate affect, which leads to its repression and splitting off, preventing in this way normal associative modification and leading eventually to somatic symptoms, remains obscure: *Studies* limits itself to describing the mechanism producing the symptoms and the "therapeutic test" or cure that confirms this mechanism. The inquiry shifts from neurology to why "events experienced so long ago should continue to operate so intensely", or why they cannot fade away like normal memories through "uninhibited association". Ferenczi in an essay of 1919 on **Hysterical Materialization** adds an important speculation on this type of somatic-symbolic conversion.

⁹ The difficulty of establishing the truth of earliest memories is simply and cogently illustrated in J.M. Coetzee's *Boyhood: Scenes from Provincial Life* (1997). The author tells of looking out of a window in Johannesburg and seeing, at dusk, a car hit a small, spotted dog that drags itself away, hind legs paralyzed, squealing with pain. He then adds: "It is a magnificent first memory....But is it true?....Did he really see the car hit the dog, or did he just hear a dog howling, and run to the window? Is it possible he saw nothing but a dog dragging its hindquarters and made up the car and the driver and the rest of the story?"

¹⁰ *Time and the Other*, trans. Richard Cohen (Pittsburgh: Dusquene University Press, 1987), 64.

¹¹ Cf. Jacques Derrida's seminal essay on Levinas in *Écriture et Différence* (1967).

¹² Cf. Geoffrey H. Hartman, *The Longest Shadow: In the Aftermath of the Holocaust* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 163.

¹³ I leave out the vulgar pressure of propaganda on speech, precisely because of its false transparency, its disrespect, as it were, for the materiality of light evoked by Blanchot.

¹⁴ 1850 *Prelude* 1.341-44. It is followed by the passage previously quoted.

¹⁵ Even used in the service of literary appreciation, this monocausal perspective leaves readers dissatisfied. It has become standard, for instance, to say about Paul Celan that news of his mother's murder in a forced labor camp "left behind scars which never healed and are perceptible in his entire oeuvre", or even that "the inception of his most characteristic work dates from the news of his mother's violent death." Both propositions are not false, but neither are they adequate to throw light on the "birth" of poetry in Celan. See Stefan Perl's otherwise sophisticated essay in *Comparative Criticism*, 22 (2000): 109-10. The second statement, cited by Perl, is Michael Hamburger's.

¹⁶ For other explanations, see the official web page of the province of Quebec.

¹⁷ Thomas M. Greene's later scholarly career has explored that magical residue as it persists in poetry and Cratylan linguistic theory.

¹⁸ The depth aspect of the appeal of racialism, in this light, would come from the suppositious value and illusory stability of a pure racial strain (its "Blut und Boden" permanence) - and fears about its contamination.

¹⁹ The fragments survived, collected as a case study of poetic (and religious) mania. Published first in 1939, they were re-edited by W.H. Bond in 1954, who recognized the antiphonal structure basic to Smart's verses.

²⁰For the change in sensibility toward other species, which seems to culminate at the end of the eighteenth century, see Keith Thomas, *Man and the Natural World: Changing Attitudes in England 1500-1800* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983). Thomas pithily characterizes the major debate as one focusing on "Meat or Mercy", which is relevant to the discussion below of Coetzee's book.

Short biographical note

An expert on rhetoric, literary theory and holocaust literature, Geoffrey H. Hartman is Sterling Professor Emeritus of English and Comparative Literature at Yale University, known for his work on romanticism, literary interpretation and theory, philosophy and psychoanalysis. Born in Frankfurt, Professor Hartman was forced to leave Germany in 1939, at the age of 9. In recent years he has turned his attention to the Holocaust, in particular, Holocaust remembrance. He is a co-founder and faculty advisor to the Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies at Yale; has served - among other things - on the education committee of the United States Holocaust Memorial Council.

His books include: *Criticism in the Wilderness - The Study of Literature Today*. New Haven, Yale University Press, 1980; *Saving the Text - Literature, Derrida, Philosophy*. Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981; *The Longest Shadow - In the Aftermath of the Holocaust*. Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1996; *The Fateful Question of Culture*. New York, Columbia University Press, 1997; *A Critic's Journey - Literary Reflections, 1958-1998*. New Haven, Yale University Press, 1999.

Geoffrey H. Hartman

260 Everit Street
New Haven, CT 06511
USA

Email geoffreyhartman@yale.edu

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