

**AMONG SCHOOL CHILDREN:  
THE USE OF BODY DAMAGE TO EXPRESS PHYSICAL PAIN**

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One day long ago, I was in the midst of looking at paintings in a museum when a sweet voice (but quite loud and belonging to no one I could see, for it came from beyond the doorway) suddenly spoke: “Now children, I want you to go into the next room and sit in front of the painting that has the most physical pain in it.” A second later, a large crowd of 7 year-olds came tumbling through the doorway, and, for a while, as they milled around the large gallery and I went back to looking at paintings, I lost track of them. But before long, their motion and murmuring subsided; the room was still; the disarray of children had coalesced into two coherent gatherings. Half of the children sat huddled together on the floor beneath Rubens’ *Prometheus Bound*; the other half (actually, a little more than half) sat silently beneath Pacecco de Rosa’s *Massacre of the Innocents*.

Prometheus, bright white with pain, is naked and upside down. His face and arm fill the lower right hand corner; his bare chest, groin, thighs and feet proceed upward on a diagonal. He is held in place by a giant eagle whose outstretched wings are wider than Prometheus is long. Because the colors of the feathers—painted at Rubens’ request by Frans Snyders, a leading painter of birds—merge with the swirling tree above and cliff below, the raptor seems vaster still, as though encasing the big-bodied man. The eagle resides on the same tilting diagonal as Prometheus, but because he is buoyant and right-side-up, he is at ease and in his element. He has slammed the man to the ground, yet seems somehow almost to be carrying him through the air.

The bird overpowers the man, as the painting overpowers those who stand or sit below it. “A sudden blow”; “a feathered rush.”<sup>1</sup> Talons rest lightly on Prometheus’ nostril, temple, belly and groin, poised to penetrate the moment the man resists or pushes up against his assailant. But he has already been penetrated: the eagle’s beak has sliced open a neat cut below one breast through which he fishes out the tip of an organ, a ghastly tongue-like projection that occupies the center of the canvas. Our eyes, the eyes of the bird, and the eyes of the man are gathered together around this central event.

Depicted in *Prometheus Bound* (Figure 1 on CD) are both the agent of injury (the raptor) and body damage (the exposed organ)-and it is probably through these two elements that the museum

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<sup>1</sup> The phrases are from Yeats’ “Leda and the Swan,” describing Zeus’ rape of Leda.

children have inferred that the man is in pain. The equally overwhelming *Massacre of the Innocents* (Figure 2 on CD), where swords flash and babies bleed, similarly depicts both the weapon and body damage, and it is probably again these two elements that let the museum children sense the presence of pain. How body damage enables us to perceive pain, yet sometimes also greatly confuses our perception is the subject of the essay that follows.



Because the existing vocabulary for pain contains only a small handful of adjectives, one passes through direct descriptions very quickly and (as V. C. Medvei noted in his 1948 treatise on pain<sup>2</sup>) almost immediately encounters an “as if” structure: it feels as if . . . ; it is as though . . . . On the other side of the ellipses there reappear again and again (regardless of whether the immediate context of the vocalization is medical or literary or legal) two and only two metaphors, and they are metaphors whose inner workings are very unstable. The first specifies an external agent of the pain, a weapon that is pictured as producing the pain; and the second specifies bodily damage that is pictured as accompanying the pain. Thus a person may say, “It feels as though a hammer is coming down on my spine,” even where there is no hammer; or “It feels as if my arm is broken at each joint, and the jagged ends are sticking through the skin,” even where the bones of the arms are intact, and the surface of the skin is unbroken. Physical pain is not identical with (and often exists without) either agency or damage, but these phenomena are referential, they have observable material features of shape, weight and color; consequently we often call on them to convey the experience of the pain itself.<sup>3</sup>

In order to avoid confusion here, it should be noted that it is of course true that in any given instance of pain, there may actually be present a weapon (the hammer may really be there) or wound (the bones may really be coming through the skin); and the weapon or wound may immediately convey to anyone present the sentient distress of the person hurt. In fact, so suggestive will they be of the sensation of hurt that the person, if not actually in pain, may find it difficult to assure the companion that he or she is not in pain. In medical case histories of people whose pain began with an accident, the sentences describing the accident (the moment when the hammer fell from the ladder onto the person’s

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<sup>2</sup> V.C. Medvei, *The Mental and Physical Effects of Pain* (Edinburgh: E. & S. Livingstone, 1949), 40.

<sup>3</sup> This paragraph and the three which follow originally appeared in *The Body in Pain* (New York: Oxford, 1985), 15, 16. The book attends to the perceptual complications that arise from the image of the weapon, whereas the present essay attempts to sort out the perceptual complications that arise from body damage. The complications of the weapon most often arise in political frameworks; and the complications of body damage, in medical frameworks.

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, even though the impact of the hammer (lasting one second) and the pain (lasting one year) are obviously not the same (and the patient, if asked whether she has the feeling of "hammering" pain might correct us and say, "No, it is knife-like").

The central point here is that insofar as an actual agent (a nail sticking into the bottom of the foot) and an imagined agent (a person's statement, "It feels as if there's a nail sticking into the bottom of my foot") both convey something of the felt experience of pain to someone outside the sufferer's body, they both do so for the same reason: in neither case is the nail identical with the sentient experience of pain; and yet because it has shape, length, and color, because it either exists (in the first case) or can be pictured as existing (in the second case) at the external boundary of the body, it begins to externalize, objectify and make sharable what is originally an interior and unsharable experience.

Both weapon (whether actual or imagined) and wound (whether actual or imagined) may be used associatively to express pain. To some extent the inner workings of the two metaphors, as well as the perceptual complication that attend their use, overlap because the second (bodily damage) sometimes occurs as a version of the first (agency). The feeling of pain entails the feeling of being acted upon, and the person may either express this in terms of the world acting on him ("It feels like a knife . . .") or in terms of his own body acting on him, "It feels like the bones are cutting through . . ."). Ordinarily, however, the metaphor of bodily damage entails a set of perceptual complications wholly distinct from those which characterize the language of agency.

*The Body in Pain* concentrates on the language of agency and shows the perceptual and political complications that accompany it. The problems it creates are grave. On the one hand, it is, as was noticed a moment ago, a potentially benign resource. If someone can say to a physician or a friend, it feels as though a huge beak is cutting open my breast, it may begin to confer some picturable features on the pain and assist the physician or friend in comprehending the immensity of the otherwise invisible experience. The virtue of the pictured beak is that it can be pushed outside the boundary of the body, carrying out there some of the attributes of the pain with it. Pain clinics sometimes invite a person in pain to confer an object form on the sensation of hurt and then push it outside the body.

But that objectification and separability from the body—though themselves great advantages—can also become great disadvantages: the knife that can be lifted away permits all the attributes of pain to be lifted away and bestowed on something else. The features of extreme pain, such as its totalizing, world-destroying power, can be lifted away from the person in pain and conferred on the regime that tortures, so that it is now not the person's pain, but the pathetic torturer, that appears to have world-destroying power.

The unanchoredness of the image of the weapon lets it be torn away from the referent: the cascades of weapons drifting across television and film images seldom work to direct thoughtful attention to people in pain. In those situations where a weapon *does* elicit compassionate attention, the weapon is usually yoked to the person in pain so that the referent of pain remains steadily visible. This yoking can take many different forms. Christian iconography, for example, makes it difficult to decouple the weapon (the cross) from the pain of Christ because the weapon and the body of Jesus are affixed to one another and do not easily undergo any spatial separation, as they might if the story centered on a different kind of weapon.

The problems that come from the language of agency, then, come from the ease with which it can be separated from the sufferer; and the benign potential comes by holding the referent steady and not letting the spatial separation take place. The problems that come from the language of body damage are exactly the opposite: the image of the body damage often sits on top of and blocks our access to the person in pain. The benign potential of the body damage metaphor requires a solution that is the precise opposite of the one needed in the case of agency: now it is spatial separation, or a willed act of doubling, that seems to assist us in carrying out an act of sympathetic attention.

It may be helpful to back up a step and begin by underscoring the association between the felt experience of pain and body damage. William Breitbart, citing the classic definition of pain from the International Association for the Study of Pain, described it as “an unpleasant sensory and emotional experience that we associate with tissue damage or describe in terms of tissue damage.”<sup>4</sup> Thomas Szasz reports that so much is physical pain felt as a mutilation that patients sometimes do physically mutilate their bodies in order to bring the actual body image “up to date” with the felt experience.<sup>5</sup> Paul Schilder stresses that pain is felt as a wound or opening into the body.<sup>6</sup> (This observation corresponds with the fact that pain is depicted in both medical advertisements and the visual arts as a turning of the body inside out). So associated are pain and damage that when H. K. Beecher published *Measurement of Subjective*

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<sup>4</sup> William Breitbart, “Pharmacological Approaches to Suffering in Cancer Pain,” paper delivered at conference, “Pain and Suffering: An Interdisciplinary Conversation,” The Pain Center and The Institute for Medicine in Contemporary Society, State University of New York, Stony Brook, April 24, 1992. The conflation of pain with body damage is not limited to the definition given by the International Association for the Study of Pain. According to Jean E. Jackson, “most definitions of pain take as a core meaning an association with body damage,” *Camp Pain: Talking with Chronic Pain Patients* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2000), 5.

<sup>5</sup> Thomas S. Szasz, *Pain and Pleasure: A Study of Bodily Feeling* (New York, Basic Books, 1957), 138.

<sup>6</sup> Paul Schilder, *The Image and Appearance of the Human Body: Studies in the Constructive Energies of the Psyche* (New York: International Universities Press, 1950), 89.

*Responses* in 1959, he felt it was necessary to state that in combat there is no coherent relation between the size of the wound and the amount of the pain, contrary to all intuition on this subject.<sup>7</sup>

The problem with expressing pain through the metaphor of body damage is the non-separability of the two: the body in pain is the same body whose surface is broken, and the overwhelming visual spectacle of that broken surface may either repel attention—causing the onlooker to wince, recoil and turn away—or, may instead be suggestive of the attributes of pain, but the obscenity of the hurt may drown out our apprehension of the nonobscenity of the person beyond.

This phenomenon is familiar in the need for the continual reminder (in both the medical and everyday world) that it is the disease, not the person, that is the enemy. As it is the work of the disease to annihilate the person, so it is the work of the disease to eclipse the person in our field of vision so that the person disappears. Odysseus abandoned Philoctetes because the grotesque features emanating from the wound—the pus, the smell, the vocalized shrieks—were to him obscene: Odysseus believed no prayers could be directed to heaven on their ship with Philoctetes aboard.

The perceptual path along which body damage eclipses our recognition of the person-in-pain is something like this: the graphic characteristics of the wound may transcribe the felt experience of the pain but may give a misleading account of the person-in-pain; the red rawness of the sore may correctly suggest the felt-red rawness of the pain beneath, but it simultaneously and wrongly makes the person-in-pain seem red and raw. Like Philoctetes, the person himself now smells and is pus-filled. It is as though the person is a template of pain, rather than a person-in-pain. The bodily mutilations presented in the rapid fire of media images are no more invitations to sympathetic identification than are the weapons streaming past our eyes. The person—the potential object of our attention and concern—has been buried beneath the overlay of wounds.

Virginia Woolf complained about the absence of a language for physical pain and observed that, if there were such a language, it would have to be obscene. The metaphor of body damage provides the missing form of expression but one that, as Woolf predicted, is often obscene. I have so far argued that the obscenity of body damage correctly expresses the obscenity of pain but wrongly makes the person-in-pain seem obscene; or, alternatively, creates a surface to which we have such a strong visceral aversion, we do not even notice that there is a person back in behind that flamboyantly broken skin.

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<sup>7</sup> Henry Knowles Beecher, *Measurement of Subjective Responses: Quantitative Effects of Drugs* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959), 165, cited in Ronald Melzack, *The Puzzle of Pain* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 30.

Someone at this point in the argument might complain that while it is brutal to perceive a person as obscene, it is also brutal to perceive body damage as obscene. But the word is being used here descriptively, not normatively. The visceral aversion we have to seeing the inside of the body, or things coming out of the body (or to quote the *Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language*, “substances exuded by the body”<sup>8</sup>) is what the word “obscene” means. The word registers the objection, the swift swerving away of the self, from any uninvited display of the interior of another person’s body—whether it is the tip of the liver erupting out through a slash or everyday “substances exuded,” like saliva, urine, ear wax or shit. There is a small subset of places or substances inside the body whose display we simultaneously desire (and they may elicit a powerful conflation of attraction and aversion) but most interior bodily facts are greeted with aversion—or more accurately, they are facts from which we withhold any greeting, not just with small clucking noises of disapproval, but with an overwhelming visceral “no”—as though one’s whole torso turned away to spare the senses that are located on the forward positions of face and form. What makes the medical profession, or any act of caretaking, remarkable is that its practitioners must override this visceral “no” and greet—place the face close to—the uninvited display of another person’s liver or excrement. The unfortunate way this generous confrontation with the interior of the body may work to eclipse the caretaker’s attention to the person who exists on the other side of that exposed interior is part of what we are trying to comprehend. And there are, of course, some wounds from which even highly practiced physicians pivot away. St. Christopher hospices are known to have originated to help people whose ghastly cancer tumors caused physicians to shun them.<sup>9</sup>

The way in which body damage correctly transcribes the obscenity of pain but, in doing so, repels humane attention to the person is illustrated by the paintings of Francis Bacon. His work is often identified as having physical pain for its subject but is not usually understood as inviting compassionate attention to pain, despite the frequency with which Bacon himself spoke of “the poignancy” of his paintings, of wanting to make a given image “more poignant, more near.”<sup>10</sup> Human figures and faces have been violently damaged in these paintings, as though flayed, their features

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<sup>8</sup> David Crystal, *Cambridge Encyclopedia of The English Language* (2nd ed., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 172.

<sup>9</sup> Susan Dermit (citing Mount et al.), Panel on “Chronic Pain Programs: Problems and Opportunities,” at “Pain and Suffering: An Interdisciplinary Conversation,” The Pain Center and The Institute for Medicine in Contemporary Society, State University of New York, Stony Brook, April 24, 1992.

<sup>10</sup> Francis Bacon, cited in David Sylvester, *The Brutality of Fact: Interviews with Francis Bacon*, 3rd ed. (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1988) 12, 72.

shoved out of symmetrical planes, or melted, or turned inside out. Bacon described himself as pushing “the figurative,” not in the direction of “damage,” but in the direction of “abstraction”- but in the living world, our bodies and faces acquire what he is identifying as the quality of abstraction only when they have suffered some terrible disease, accident or act of cruelty. Bacon’s vocabulary of “abstraction” implies a departure from the material plane whereas his announced intention (as well as the manifest quality of the canvases themselves) was to make unnegotiable the viewer’s commitment to the material plane-to “bring the figurative thing up into the nervous system more violently,” to “[come] across directly into the nervous system.”<sup>11</sup>

In Rubens’ *Prometheus Bound*, the uninvited tip of the organ, its hard-to-escape location at the center of the painting, is counterbalanced by the vast portion of the canvas in which the man and his world remain intact. The protruding liver, cut and beak together comprise approximately one-fiftieth of Prometheus’ body surface and less than one-two hundredth of the full canvas. Upside down, the man is in jeopardy but also intact. Even if, like the Philadelphia school children, one does not know that he stole fire from heaven on humanity’s behalf (memorialized at the bottom left corner of the painting in the torch that has dropped from his clenched hand-still clenched, but now in pain), one senses that he is self-evidently a large actor in a large conflict with a large opponent.

But what if we now reverse those proportions? Say the eagle were to keep pulling the entrails up through that small, neatly cut wound, eventually piling up stomach, pancreas, liver, intestines before us, until the space that could now be accorded to personhood were only as large as the tiny space that Rubens formerly accorded the wound. Then we would have arrived exactly at the central panel of Bacon’s *Three Studies for Figures at the Base of a Crucifixion* (Figure 3 on CD) in which a small residue of personhood, a recognizable human mouth (that may be smiling or speaking or screaming) is affixed to a naked, un-encased, free-standing intestine. Here body damage, as Bacon intended, acts directly on our nerves, delivers a blow-but, unlike the blow delivered to the children sitting beneath *Prometheus Bound* or the *Massacre of the Innocents*, there is no center of consciousness to hold on to.

Can one locate inside oneself, as one looks at this painting, a seed of compassion that, if nourished, might grow? Compassion toward what? toward whom? The world of the canvas has been emptied of almost any personhood that we can recognize or reach. Does not the mouth simply lead to more insides? Would one find in there a recognizable human face and limbs out of which one might begin to fashion a decent response?

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<sup>11</sup> Bacon in Sylvester, *The Brutality of Fact*:12, 18.

The reversal in the ratio of organ to person, when we go from Rubens to Bacon, is not just an exercise in the viewing of paintings.<sup>12</sup> The scale of the wound, as Beecher noticed, has no necessary relation to the scale of the person's pain; but the scale of the wound does have some coherent relation to the onlooker's capacity for sympathetic attention. So difficult is the act of nursing in burn clinics -where a vast portion of the outside covering skin has sometimes been taken away from the person and the inside exposed -nurses may elect to undergo a form of education called "Staying," in which they try to reverse the impulse to vacate their post, try to overcome their inability to make ongoing contact with the person who lives on the other side of a vast wound.<sup>13</sup>

The difficult labor of "staying" -the ease of vacating the canvas of personhood-is relevant to many parts of the medical profession, even where the visible harm is less totalizing than in a burn clinic. Even if only the tip of the liver has intruded itself into the physician's midst, the physician must, in order to treat the medical problem, bring his face so close to the organ that it may begin to take up as much visual space as that found in Bacon's rendering. How can a physician do what it is he or she must do if he or she pays attention to the full stature of the person-some parts of whom extend all the way up into the treetops, and other parts extend deep into the cliffs below? The edge of the canvas ceases to be the outermost inch of the painting and becomes instead any part of the painting not contained inside the narrow circumference of the wound.

The tendency of body damage to isolate attention has been further magnified by the shift from general practitioner (or family doctor) to specialist. The general practitioner used to know the patient's cliff-to-treetop stature, having routinely measured him each year, and know as well his antecedent life story, including the aspiration for firelight that preceded, and may have contributed to, his current liver trouble; the specialist, interested in the liver alone, does not even notice that the patient is upside down-or noticing that, thinks this must be the way Mr. (what was his name again?) Prometheus has all his life carried himself through the world. The physician can no more imagine that the liver, or the bearer of the liver, actually invented the lights under which he is now operating than we can suppose that Bacon's creature endowed us with some other widely shared gift.

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<sup>12</sup> The lineage from Rubens' *Prometheus Bound* to the paintings of Bacon can also be seen in *Painting 1946* in the Museum of Modern Art. This work, which Bacon tells us originated in his mind with the image of a black bird landing in a field (Sylvester, 11), depicts a buoyant black umbrella open in the presence of a huge hanging carcass of meat, as one might see in a meat-packing room.

<sup>13</sup> "Staying" was described by a nurse in a lecture to the "Research Group on Suffering," Hastings Center, New York, 1983.

The surprise is that, *if one can* suppose that *-if one can* imagine that this gaping, blindfolded intestine is the originator of, say, the art of painting -one then at once feels within the dawning recognition of the creature's physical pain, the immense sorrow of it and need immediately to eliminate it-not just the disgusting aversiveness of it. If, in other words, one can grasp a personhood as immense as the visible body damage is immense, the two together make the recognition of pain possible.<sup>14</sup> This doubling is, as has long been recognized,<sup>15</sup> the imaginative strategy at work in Sophocles' *Philoctetes* whose hero is endowed not only with an immense wound (which began in his foot and subsequently festered through the full canvas of his body, so that he now seems to onlookers a bundle of pus-filled rags), but also with an equally immense gift-the bow without which the Trojan War cannot be won. The Trojan War is interrupted while its participants stop to contemplate the nature of pain, but they can contemplate pain only by taking notice of both the monstrously aversive damage and the wound bearer's unique position in the line of transmission that carries forward the essential tools of civilization.<sup>16</sup> Most human beings have not stolen fire from heaven on behalf of humanity, have not invented the art of painting, and do not possess the key tool that will enable their civilization to survive: Do these absences place their pain beyond the reach of other human beings? Those immense gifts rather are simply a way of telegraphing, in condensed and rapidly comprehended signals, the density and immensity of personhood that every person has.

How close do we get to another person's pain when there is no visible body damage, no uninvited eruption of the person's interior into our midst? Edvard Munch's *The Sick Girl* (Figure 4 on CD) provides an occasion for contemplating this question, for in its comeliness, its seemliness, the

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<sup>14</sup> For some viewers, the title of the painting-*Three Studies for Figures at the Base of a Crucifixion*-may provide a location of personhood as large as the location of injury since it conjures up the story of Christ. (I argue below that when Kathe Kollwitz inscribes a title on one of her lithographs, it brings about just such an act of doubling.) But in Bacon's case, it is hard for the word "crucifixion" to work this way since, in his own paintings of the crucifixion, he subverts the external countenance of Jesus into an intestinal image. In his extended interviews with David Sylvester, Bacon tells us he thinks of Cimabue's *Crucifixion* as "a worm crawling down the cross," a conception that influences his own painting (right hand panel of 8 ) which, were it not for the rib cage and leering mouth, could indeed be accurately described as a worm, or an intestine, slithering down a cross or vertical surface.

<sup>15</sup> I am thinking here of Edmund Wilson's famous essay on the play, *The Wound and the Bow*.

<sup>16</sup> In terms of the storyline, the bow acts as the lure to bring Odysseus and Neoptolemos back to Philoctetes, whom they would otherwise leave unregarded on the island where Odysseus originally abandoned him. But this just means that unless one can see the features of personhood on the other side of the wound, one cannot hold onto why it is that one ought to care about his or her pain. When they are informed that they cannot win the Trojan War without Philoctetes' bow, they are also being informed that they cannot win the Trojan War without taking account of the nature of physical pain.

image exists at a far remove from the obscenity and unseemliness of Bacon's painting or of Sophocles' hero. What is "seemly" is not only what is seen (what, because it stands before us, "seems"), but what we have agreed to see, for the word is cognate with the Old English word "som" meaning "agreement" or "reconciliation."<sup>17</sup> What, in contrast, is unseemly is not, as we might at first suppose, what is unseen, but what we have not agreed to see, what has appeared before us without our consent. In this respect, the unseemly has a coercive presence that coincides with the coercive, or unconsented to, nature of pain and illness.

How then does a comely image -one to which we readily assent -communicate the coercive character of pain or illness? Unlike Prometheus, who is upside down, or the Smiling Intestine, who is inside out, the child in Munch's lithograph is outside-out and upside up: in fact, art critic Dieter Buckhart, noticing the stark uprightness of her head against an equally upright square pillow, observes that her verticality is at odds with any notion of illness.<sup>18</sup>

We might, as though looking at a succession of stills in a film, glance across many versions of *The Sick Girl*, for Munch returned many times to the image in paintings and lithographs made between 1886 and 1928. We might then glimpse the dire bodily events that imperil her, for she seems to toss and turn (her profile now to the right, now to the left), to alternate between chills and fever (the prints are sometimes tinted blue, sometimes red), (Figure 5 on CD)<sup>19</sup> to be vividly present, then to drift away (her profile sometimes strongly marked, and other times, as Buckhart observes, nearly erased). So, too, we might infer her jeopardy by the response of others: in the painted versions of the image (Figure 6 on CD), a woman sits beside her with head so bent over that her face is parallel to the floor, as though the girl's death is inevitable, so inevitable the woman has adopted the posture appropriate to its already having occurred. Or we might infer her jeopardy from Munch's own obsessive attention to her, the sheer number of times he returned to the image and his open statements about its origins in the

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<sup>17</sup> C.T. Onions, *Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), s.v. seemly; and Robert Barnhart, *Dictionary of Etymology* (H. W. Wilson, 1988), s.v. seem.

As the unseemly is that which comes into our presence *without* our consent, the obscene is that which comes into our presence *against* our consent. Most etymological dictionaries state that the etymology of "obscene" is unknown; the *Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology* specifies that it was "originally a term of augury" and meant "ill omened, abominable, disgusting."

<sup>18</sup> Dieter Buckhart, in *Edvard Munch*, ed. Klaus Albrecht Schröder and Antonia Hoerschelmann (Norway: Hatje Cantz, 2001), 249. Buckhart is here describing the 1886 painting *The Sick Girl*, but the verticality is equally descriptive of all the later paintings and lithographs of this image, many of which are reproduced in this book.

<sup>19</sup> The observation of chills and fever in the shifting colors is in Dieter Buckhart's, *Edvard Munch*, 50.

childhood years he and his sister shared until she died. In other words, if we cannot sense her jeopardy, we can -looking across multiple versions -sense that others sense it, and in this way see that it is so.

But the paintings and lithographs are not stills from a moving picture, and ordinarily we see only a single lithograph or single painting at a time. The one reproduced here is from the Fogg Museum-and resides there without any of its companions. Still, if we can sense her imperilment at all-and it is not clear to me that we can-it is because the motion that can be glimpsed across multiple versions (the motion of tossing, moving through different temperatures) is *almost* discernible in any one of the lithographs or paintings in isolation. Motion makes evident the fact of aliveness; minimal motion, the fact of being just barely alive, the hairline divide between being and no longer being. Munch believed he had registered this minimal motion, the motion of trembling:

I re-painted that image many times during the year -- erased it--let it emerge from the paint -- And tried time and time again to hold on to that first impression. The *trembling* mouth -- the transparent, pale skin --upon the canvas-that *trembling* mouth--those *trembling* hands.

Finally, I gave in --exhausted. I had retained much of that first impression. That *trembling* mouth --that transparent skin--those tired eyes. But the colors were not finished . . .<sup>20</sup>

Trembling is a dyadic motion (the lips or fingers flash rapidly back and forth between two nearly indistinguishable points); trembling re-enacts, within an exquisitely small radius, the right-left dyad of tossing and turning, the cold-hot dyad of fever and chills, the coming-in, going-out of now present, now almost gone. For Munch, trembling or quivering or wave lengths or wave lines were the condition of sentient aliveness: he saw it in the landscape (“earth vibrates”); in the air (“quivering in the air”); in colors (“the quivering on the yellow white facade, the colors dancing”); in flowers (“flowers whose character, type and vibration are determined by joy and pain”); in himself (“I hear the blood roaring in my ears . . . My skin tingles”); in vision (“what we see are light waves that affect the retina”); in audition (“what we hear are wavelengths, received by the eardrum”).<sup>21</sup> Most of all, he saw it in *The Sick Girl*,

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<sup>20</sup> Poul Erik Tøjner, *Munch: In His Own Words* (New York: Prestel, 2003),64,italics added. As one might expect of the artist of *The Scream*, Munch uses the word “pain” frequently throughout his written notes and sometimes one senses in Munch the same lineage from Rubens that one perceives in Bacon: “A bird of prey is clinging to my soul / Its claws have ripped into my heart/ Its beak has driven itself into my chest and / the beating of its wings has darkened my sanity;”71.

<sup>21</sup> Munch, in Tøjner, *In His Own Words*, 63, 91, 118, 136.

as the fourfold repetition of “trembling” suggests. Soon after the passage about his small sister’s hands and mouth, he directs our attention to his own quivering, waveline presence in the work:

I was also aware that my own eyelashes contributed to my impression of the image. I made reference to them as shadows over the painting. In some way the head became the image. Wavy lines appeared--peripheries with that head at the center. I came to use those wavy lines in many later pictures.<sup>22</sup>

In the Fogg lithograph, the shadowed upper and lower horizontal bars register the presence of his lashes, which open onto the horizontal corridor that contains her bright face. Munch wrote that painting was not a transcription of the world but a transcription of the brain: “Painting is the perception of the brain, filtered through the eye.”<sup>23</sup> Unlike the painting of Bacon or even of Rubens, *The Sick Girl* contains no transgressive display of the interior of the body, but it does carry us close to the interior, for we look from inside Munch’s eyes, through his eyelashes, up to, and even through, her thin hair and translucent skin.

Across the paintings and play we have so far been looking at, we can begin to see how our ability to make contact with another person’s pain is assisted by the fact of body damage, but only if there is simultaneously an act of doubling, so that body damage and personhood are given, as it were, two separate locations of equal magnitude. If only extreme damage is depicted, then we must imaginatively supply a separate narrative of personhood, as we did in the case of Bacon’s *Smiling Intestine* whom we credited with the invention of painting; if instead only extreme seemliness is depicted, then we must undergo the imaginative work of finding in the acuity of the lines the registration of the distress the painter’s title tells us is there. We could not, at first, carry out the labor of compassion toward the creature in the Bacon painting because there was no locus of personhood to which to attach any such feeling; and we could not, at first, carry out the work of compassion toward Munch’s sick girl because, though the image at once conveys personhood, and so at once inclines us toward sympathy, we are again stranded and puzzled: Sympathy about what? Is something wrong?

The insistent requirement for a double location is not, as was noticed earlier, a description of what happens to perception only in the presence of paintings or plays but what seems to take place widely in the living practice of medicine. As inadequate as our present culture may be in the treatment of pain, some advances over earlier eras have been made, and almost all of them entail accepting a separate platform of address—for the body that is hurt and the person who hurts. Childbirth often now involves

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<sup>22</sup> Munch, in Tøjner, *In His Own Words*, 64.

<sup>23</sup> Munch, in Tøjner, *In His own Words*, 136.

one person attending to the birth of the child, and another person explicitly dedicated to sitting face to face, meeting eyes with eyes, matching breath to breath with the person undergoing labor. So, too, many hospitals (such as Boston's Beth Israel) now have, in addition to and distinct from the physicians who attend the patient's organic disease or damage, pain teams who address the person's sentient distress. Star Bright, the program for hospitalized children in extreme and ongoing physical pain, is also structured on the principle that two separable forms of address must be made to the young person.

It may be that in a much earlier time, the two-part division of labor between physician and nurse provided such a double location, but unless nurses are given the power to prescribe pain killer, and are themselves accorded salaries and status equal to the physician who addresses the body damage, it seems implausible that the arrangement can solve the ongoing problem of untreated people-in-pain. The importance of doubling needs to be stressed because our intuitions tell us that medical practice should aspire to "wholeness", "oneness," "integrity," "integration"; whereas in the sphere of pain, the aspiration toward "oneness" has instead contributed to the failure to assist those in pain: the absence of visible body damage makes it hard for physicians or non-physicians to credit the reality of the patient's pain; the presence of visible body damage may either repel or receive the onlooker's attention, but, in either case, it sits on top of, and obscures, the person in pain.

The pronounced act of doubling in an array of other paintings and novels illustrates how consistently the principle operates across different artistic styles. Both visual artists and verbal artists interested in expressing physical pain spatially separate the person's wounded bodily surface from the depiction of a consciousness-in-pain.

Throughout her works, German graphic artist Käthe Kollwitz calls attention to the suffering of unrepresented people. In the lithograph, *O Nation, You Bleed from Many Wounds*, the suffering of the person in the center is in part conveyed by the triptych of bodies in postures suspended between pain and mourning (Figure 7 on CD). The alert, still alive sufferer on the left and the hovering protector figure, both direct our attention to the one in greatest peril at the center. This central sufferer has no wounds that mutilate the surface integrity of his body (though he is so emaciated that the interior of his body threatens to break through his skin in sharp cheek bones and a rib cage so protruding the protector can close her whole hand around it).<sup>24</sup> The title, however, inscribed directly onto the picture surface,

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<sup>24</sup> The thorns encircling the body and the sword near the groin work, in conjunction with the protruding bones, to remind us of how close we are to the ripping of skin and stark opening of the body. Kollwitz's weapons (thorns and sword) show the same thoughtful handling as her depiction of, or restraint from depicting, body damage: as stressed earlier, the problem with the weapon as an expression of pain is that it can be too easily severed from its referent in the body; here the weapons are held steadily adjacent. It is also the case that, like the sword held by the protector, the encircling thorns seem to keep away any who would violate the body.

and running the full length of the man, acts to register the unpictured fact of the wounding in its lament, “O nation, you bleed from many wounds.” The bodily image and the micro-narrative work side-by-side in an act of doubling. The written registration of the interior of the body is evocative of pain, and the unscathed surface of the man provides an unoccluded site for the reception of our concern.

*The Downtrodden* (Figure 8 on CD), made by Kollwitz four years later, is so intimately connected to *O Nation You Bleed from Many Wounds* that one might momentarily suppose it to be the same work. The pain and mourning co-present in the two lateral figures in the first print now reappear in more highly differentiated right and left panels: on the left, the open hand of the man and exposed face of the unconscious child make visible the vulnerability of the laboring poor; like the man on the left, the crucified woman on the right holds her eyes as though grief stricken, and the extended hand of her companion reiterates the man’s expression of frank need. The central figure, more rigid than the figure at the center of the earlier work (his sharp chin and illuminated feet spiking upward and outward), is more certainly dead than the earlier figure and—as though the painting were an official autopsy report—the cause is certainly hunger: now it is not face bones and ribs alone that threaten to break through the skin, but knees, knuckles, wrist bones and ulna. The guardian, who protects the corpse (but has not successfully protected the living person), is herself emaciated, as sharp shoulder blade, spine and forearms attest.

A crucial change in the transition from *O Nation, You Bleed from Many Wounds* to *The Downtrodden* is the removal of the wounds from the inscribed title and a positioning of them inside the picture image itself. But Kollwitz does not locate the wounds on the surface of the body where they might make the person what the poet Shelley called “a monstrous lump of ruin”; she instead places them on the cloth beside the body. The detail of the central panel (Figure 9 on CD) makes evident the wounds in the cloth that are like orifices into the body, outlined the way lips or nostrils sometimes are, and therefore expressive of sensory acuity as well as pain. An unfinished version of the panel (Figure 10 on CD) shows the centrality of wounds embedded in the sheet. Kollwitz, in the two triptychs, allies the pain of the poor with the tribulation of Christ, as the inclusion of cross and thorns suggest, and the way she has sorted out the perceptual complications of depicting pain recalls the strategy used in a particular painting of Christ by the Renaissance artist Mantegna, where the wounds, like lipped openings, are at the periphery of the body, hands and feet, about to cross over onto the draped cloth (Figure 11 on CD).

This perceptual strategy of doubling can be recognized in the visual arts even when it takes place in a radically different style. Aubrey Beardsley shares Kollwitz’s commitment to line over color

(he was himself an ardent devotee of Mantegna), as well as her astonishing ability to expose, through line, the inner life of the body. But he comes to the body through the fin-de-siècle decadence he helped to create rather than through her social conscience and religious compassion. His untitled poster (Figure 12 on CD) made to advertise Fisher Unwin books<sup>25</sup> might be titled, "Girl, Wounded Tree, and a Book Shop," for it is derived from an earlier drawing the publishers much admired that Beardsley had titled, "Girl and a Book Shop," and that had contained a wounded tree—an inclusion whose strangeness contemporaries both commented on and complained about.

The wound to the tree is perceptually attributable to the woman since the two are striking visual analogues. The young tree and young woman stand in the same visual space. Each is primarily characterized by the exaggerated rigidity of the spine, as well as by the shared flourish at the top: the outflowing hair and hat of the woman and the leafy boughs of the trees, which touch and penetrate one another. The base of the splint that supports the tree visually penetrates the base of her spine, even requiring that the lower part of her torso sway back to let this occur. Her body is stressed—made emphatic—by being stressed (put under some invisible pressure), as though it were, like the tree, encased. The pressure is also registered in the stiffness of her arms, palms turned back, rather than in toward the body. Although her own body surface is uninterrupted by any visible wound, the emphatic analogue heightens our sense of her discomfort until the pressure on her spine so turns her torso that one might come to believe her head is on backwards.

The colors of the poster magnify the kinship: the red-orange splint is the same color as the woman's vibrant dress, and like that dress, the splint is high-waisted. The trunk is black, as is her waistband; and the tree's bandage is white as are her undergarments and skin. Tree and woman rhyme: they are both red, black and white. The only non-shared color is her golden hair and the tree's green leafy top; thus analogous parts of them are alike in being given an exceptional color. Beardsley said he used the "flat tints" of his posters as if he "were colouring a map."<sup>26</sup>

Inside and outside change places in this map: in the center of the tree's bandage, white gives way to small spots of red as though the tree is bleeding—just as the woman's innermost slip is transparent, letting through small drops of red, but now the red belongs not to her blood but to her artful stocking. Yet even as we look at the stocking the sense of wounding reemerges since, like the tree, she stands on a single leg.

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<sup>25</sup> Specifically, their "Pseudonym and Autonym Libraries." See Matthew Sturgis, *Aubrey Beardsley: A Biography*, (New York: Overlook Press, 1999), 164, 212.

<sup>26</sup> Sturgis, *Aubrey Beardsley: A Biography*, 212.

Of central concern here is Beardsley's reliance on doubling, his way of getting us to perceive someone's extreme discomfort by a wound, but a wound that is spatially separated from the person. But what inside the sensation of distress struck Beardsley? Is the poster a structural pun? Was he, who so ardently loved books, thinking about the fact that trees, persons and books all have spines? Throughout the 1890s, until his death at the age of 25, he created lavish designs not just for the front covers of books but for their spines (Figure 13 on CD shows the cover and spine of his *Morte d'Arthur*; and, Figure 14 on CD, a letter in which he maps the placement of his picture of Balzac and a mask on a book's spine and cover). Books, trees and women all also have leaves: books and trees certainly—and the woman is, if not leafy, at least many layered in the breezy swirl of her skirt, slippers and stockings. The woman's erect hat, reaching into the treetop, also makes its way up the steps of the elegantly curved, two-dimensional book shop (itself as flat as the page of a book, or the paper of a poster). As the poster reverses in and out, so it toys with top and bottom. The two book covers at the bottom of the poster reproduce the color of her hair and hat, and there, in the lower corner, the flamboyant shape of her hat reappears around the title, "The Upper Berth."<sup>27</sup>

Beardsley's act of designing himself (or an elegant proxy) into the stiff-spined cover of a book—like Yeats' wish to leave behind the body and become a mechanical bird—is pulled forward by his adoration of books and pushed from behind by his own ever-intensifying illness. In his five-sentence-letter to book publisher Fisher Unwin, three sentences are about the poster, two are about his own bodily distress<sup>28</sup>—and this ratio often reappears in his quick, energetic letters. Indeed the letters, as though splashed with blood, record the pace of his constant hemorrhaging<sup>29</sup>:

Quite an exciting flow of blood on Tuesday night, I thought I was in for another bad illness. Luckily we had a splendid hemorrhage prescription at hand; and the bleeding was stopped in an hour. There has been no return, and I feel

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<sup>27</sup> As Matthew Sturgis observes, though Beardsley stressed the sexual power of women, he also always pictured them as "intelligent," repeatedly depicting them holding, or standing in close proximity to a book. *Aubrey Beardsley: A Biography*, 216. The association between the woman (or persons generally) and books or writing is also evident in one contemporary critic's complaint about the drawing, "Girl and a Book Shop": though the book store, in his view, is "well designed," the woman is too "calligraphic", 163.

<sup>28</sup> "Letter to Fisher Unwin, November 1894," in Henry Maas, J. L. Duncan, and W. G. Good, *The Letters of Aubrey Beardsley* (Oxford: Plantin Publishers, 1990), 78.

<sup>29</sup> Beardsley was first diagnosed with tuberculosis in 1879 when he was 7 years old; the t.b. bacterium was first identified in 1882, and until that point was thought to be hereditary (Sturgis, *Aubrey Beardsley: A Biography*, 15).

wonderfully well considering all things and in good spirits.<sup>30</sup>

On Friday afternoon I broke down again and have stained many a fair handkerchief red with blood. Perfectly beastly. I don't believe I shall pull through the winter.<sup>31</sup>

Words fail to describe the horrid state I have been in. Today is my first of any respite from blood spouting.<sup>32</sup>

Blood is better today, but still makes itself visible.<sup>33</sup>

New alarms! The blood having stopped coming from the lung begins to flow from the liver in considerable quantities via the bum. Perfectly beastly is it not?<sup>34</sup>

“Once out of nature, I will never take my shape from any natural thing . . . “The white sheets of Aubrey Beardsley’s correspondence with artists and publishers almost seem like the white pages displayed on the shelves of “A Book Shop” at the top of the poster. Perhaps with a magnifying glass large enough, one might see on them the same tiny drops of blood that show through the tree’s bandage and the woman’s slip.

But, of course, the white poster as a whole is the analogue for the handkerchief marked with red. Beardsley’s way of describing his drawings is not far from his way of describing his hemorrhages. Here is how, at the age of 20, he described his illness and his art to his former housemaster at Brighton Grammar School:

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<sup>30</sup> “Letter to Leonard Smithers, August 6, 1896,” in Maas, ed., *The Letters of Aubrey Beardsley*, 148. Beardsley is here twenty-four. All the quotations which follow are from his letters to Smithers (whom Sturgis describes as a classical scholar, book seller, art lover and collector of erotic materials). Beardsley also mentions his hemorrhages to other correspondents, but in a slightly more formal or medical language (See, for example, his letter to W. Palmer, p.76; and his letter to André Raffalovich, 150)

<sup>31</sup> “Letter to Leonard Smithers, August 31, 1896” in *The Letters of Aubrey Beardsley*, 157

<sup>32</sup> Letter to Leonard Smithers, November 5, 1896,” in *The Letters of Aubrey Beardsley*, 196.

<sup>33</sup> This is one of three sentences in his letter about placing the head of Balzac on the book’s spine, reproduced in Figure 11 on CD. “Letter to Leonard Smithers, 13 March 1897,” In *The Letters of Aubrey Beardsley*, p. 274. Beardsley is now twenty-five (the age at which he will die).

<sup>34</sup> “Letter to Leonard Smithers, March 16, 1897,” In *The Letters of Aubrey Beardsley*, 278.

My dear Mr. King, I've been horribly ill this year, and for the first few months of it I had to stop my drawing altogether. In the spring however I set to work again and struck out an entirely new method of drawing: Fantastic impressions treated in the finest possible outline with patches of "black blot."<sup>35</sup>

The letter anticipates the account he later gave to W. B. Yeats: "I make a blot on the paper, and I begin to shove the ink around and something comes."<sup>36</sup> Beardsley's biographer, Matthew Sturgis, questions the literal accuracy of this description, saying that there is little evidence that Beardsley worked directly with ink in this way. But that makes it seem all the more likely that there is a blurring in his mind between the marks he made on paper and the marks he made on the handkerchief into which he coughed. It is relevant to notice that reviews of his drawing style that were made in complete ignorance of his tuberculosis underscore structural features of the work that place it close to Beardsley's own private descriptions of coughing blood. Here is one parody of Aubrey Beardsley (sometimes called Awfully Weirdly by his contemporaries) in *Punch*:

Take a lot of black triangles,  
 Some amorphous blobs of red;  
 Just a sprinkling of queer spangles,  
 An ill drawn Medusa head,  
 Some red locks in Gorgon tangles,  
 And a scarlet sunshade spread:  
 Take a 'portière' quaint and spotty,  
 Take a turn-up nose or two;  
 The loose lips of one 'gone dotty',  
 A cheese-cutter chin, askew . . .  
 Take an hour-glass waist, in section,  
 Shoulders hunched up camel wise;  
 Give a look of introspection  
 (Or a squint) to two black eyes. . . .<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> "Letter to A.W. King, Midnight December 9,1892," in *The Letters of Aubrey Beardsley*, 37.

<sup>36</sup> Sturgis, *Aubrey Beardsley: A Biography*, p.121.

<sup>37</sup> "Art Recipe," in *Punch*, quoted in Sturgis, *Aubrey Beardsley: A Biography*, 226, 227. Satirists in American called him "Jim Smears" (227 note), a name presumably intended only to refer to the quality of his prints and containing no allusion to the blood smeared handkerchiefs, yet it evokes them for anyone familiar with the letters.

One may recall our earlier definition of “obscene” as the uninvited presentation of the interior of another person’s body, and our definition of “unseemliness” as that which comes before us without our consent. All the more striking, then, is the artful transformation that could make us willing and even admiring onlookers of his bleeding lungs—not that Beardsley ceases to be obscene, but that he teaches us something before we come to our senses and look the other way.

And Beardsley buys time, I have been arguing here, in part through the principle of doubling: by severing the obscene spectacle of body damage from the site of personhood, he steers us toward his heroine and persuades us to stay long enough to feel, if not compassion, then interest—or, if not interest, at least “sensation,” strong sensation. Though the poster “Girl, Wounded Tree, and a Book Shop” is not among the most frequently reproduced of his works, it was well known in his own day. Asked to provide a brief biography to W. Palmer, his former schoolmate and editor of *Havell’s Annual*, Beardsley wrote a dense paragraph mentioning positions (such as art editor of the *Yellow Book*) and major works (such as the 300 illustrations for *Morte d’Arthur*). But in the final sentence of the letter, he dashes off a final suggestion to W. Palmer: “You might just mention my posters that made rather a sensation. Avenue Theatre and Pseudonym Library . . .”<sup>38</sup> The poster for the Pseudonym Library is the one I have here been identifying by the pseudonym, “Girl, Wounded Tree, and a Book Shop.”

What social realist Kathe Kollwitz does by the spatial separation of body and cloth, what fin-de-siècle Aubrey Beardsley does by the spatial separation of body and tree, we again discover when we move from the visual arts to the verbal arts. Two instances are available in the magical-realist novelist Miguel Asturias and in the decadent, fin-de-siècle writer Joris-Karl Huysmans. (As in the visual arts, a deep commitment to the body can be arrived at by the path of realism or, instead, by the path of aestheticism).

The fact that we turn to the Guatemalan writer Asturias for an extraordinary account of pain is not accidental, for Asturias (and, more generally, the 20<sup>th</sup> century Central and South American novel) attends to the body not only in the dimension of sexual desire and mortality (subjects found in the Anglo-American and European novels) but also in hundreds of other dimensions: the weight of one’s own eyelids; the phenomenology of exhaustion; the felt experience of opening and closing the hinge joint at the elbow or the hinge formed by the back and upper legs; the feel of the moist earth beneath the feet; the state of having hiccups—what it feels like to place one’s hand on the part of an animal that is fat. Asturias’ *Men of Maize* is incantatory physical writing – even when the novel describes a relatively neutral somatic event, such as walking down a path in a forest; more so, when we enter, as we often do, the beauty or the aversiveness of human sentience.

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<sup>38</sup> “Letter to W. Palmer, 2-3 October 1894,” *The Letters of Aubrey Beardsley*, 76.

*Men of Maize* is about the resistance of Guatemalan Indians to Spanish colonists who cut down the forest and turn their sacred plant into a cash crop. It starts with the tale of Gaspar Ilóm, an Indian leader whose capacity to protect his people from injury is nearly absolute. Does his capacity to protect others come from his unusual size or muscular strength? Asturias never says so. Instead, Gaspar Ilóm's prowess is attributed to his perceptual acuity: he is a genius in the realm of sensory attention. He moves as a warrior and revolutionary through the forest, disguising himself in the scent of flowers, rosemary, heliotrope and gardenia—to bring his own scent to the precise point of neutrality where it disappears, just as his own eyelids become continuous with the leaves of the shade forest in sleep, and his ears with the magnified sensory surfaces of vegetable and animal realms, sunlit ears of rabbits, ears of corn.<sup>39</sup>

But in the early pages of the novel, the Spanish invaders do, in fact, distract Gaspar Ilóm from his guardianship over his people, and they do it in the only way a person with a genius for attention can possibly be distracted: they put him in excruciating physical pain. Pain is the only event in the world that could ever have distracted Gaspar Ilóm from his stewardship.

But how can Asturias convey the pain that Gaspar Ilóm is in? How can he convey it in all its totalizing obscenity so that we will understand not only why that pain constituted a diversion, but also why it could not possibly not have acted as a diversion? How, most important, can he do that without eclipsing the very ground of personhood that is the basis of our regard for Gaspar Ilóm as a sentient being? Asturias solves the problem by an act of doubling, by taking all the visible body damage that expresses the fact of pain and transferring it to another surface, the body of a dog. (“I have given a name to my pain,” says Nietzsche, “and call it ‘dog.’”<sup>40</sup>)

In the book's opening pages, a dog suddenly runs into the center of the town square, wheeling and howling, his penis erect, urinating, vomiting, hurling himself about; open red ringworm sores cover his hairless skin and anus. Here is unseemliness: the dog is revolting to himself and to us. Uninvited substances from his interior are placed in front of us, as well as the onlookers lounging in the public square. The horrifying description is elaborated and sustained over four pages. Even the agent of the dog's pain—ground glass laced with poison—is temporarily withheld from us so that no avenue of comprehension is afforded us; we have no way to distance ourselves, even one inch, from the second-

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<sup>39</sup> Miguel Angel Asturias, *Men of Maize*, trans. Gerald Martin (Dell, Delacorte Press, 1975), 10 and *passim*.

<sup>40</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. and introd. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1974), 249.

by-second unfolding display<sup>41</sup>.<sup>42</sup> The dog is a wildly mobile form of Bacon's blindfolded Smiling Intestine, something dreadfully alive yet having no location free of obscenity that might enable us to feel compassion for him, let alone devise a strategy to assist him. "Life," Asturias writes, "clings hardest to the basest parts of the body."<sup>43</sup>

But the baseness of pain is not permitted to cling to Gaspar Ilóm's body because when, a short time later, the Indian hero is himself subjected to the same pharmacological mix of glass and poison, Asturias – having already conveyed the obscene, reeling horror of pain – need give us only one terse paragraph: Gaspar Ilóm dives down to the bottom of a lake, swallowing all its water as he descends. Drowning in pain, he willfully drowns himself to rinse out the poison, then emerges, still alive.<sup>44</sup> The vision of a human being triumphing over pain lasts only a moment, for pain is now, as always, the winner: The Spanish have taken advantage of his absence, his profound inattention, to slaughter his village. That slaughter makes visible the true work of pain. Gaspar Ilóm a second time drowns himself, this time without re-emerging.

Our compassion – or simply, our regard – does not go to the dog who disappears in the thick matter of his own display, a creature hurled across the pages of the book. The immensity of what is suffered carries over to the stately portrait of Gaspar Ilóm and the annihilation of first, his mental world (his capacity to have any object of perception present to his mind other than the felt fact of pain), then his material world (his family, his village, the ground of his being). Pain decontextualizes: it breaks the sufferer away from all other dimensions of his world, including his own body. This is what makes the dog's pain obscene: there is no context for any of the events transcribing themselves on the surface of his body (his erection, for example, has nothing to do with desire) nor any context between himself and the outer world (he zooms through the public square carrying the intimate interior facts that have

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<sup>42</sup> Anna Henchman has examined Thomas Hardy's way of giving us the sensory features of an event before identifying it in order to let us feel the full impact of the sensory. She calls this process "Deferred Identification." (Anna Henchman, "Deferred Identification in Thomas Hardy," unpublished paper).

<sup>43</sup> Asturias, *Men of Maize*, 12.

<sup>44</sup> Asturias does, immediately prior to this event, ask us to imagine an unspecified human being suffering body damage by including a terse account of a prophetic dream: the mother of Gaspar Ilóm's infant dreams that an unidentified man drinks amber liquid containing the reflection of two white roots; then he "fell writhing to the ground, feeling as though his intestines were ripping him open, his mouth foaming, his tongue purple, his eyes staring, his nails almost black against his fingers yellow in the moonlight" (*Men of Maize*, 20). The brief passage reanimates the extended account of the dog without requiring the recitation of its many horrifying details.

no place, not the smallest accommodating corner, in the public world). The swift power of pain to decontextualize – to make a fatal break between the sufferer and his world—is what we again witness in the case of Gaspar Ilóm.

Our inability to attend compassionately to the dog and our ability to attend compassionately to the man do not turn on the fact that one is a dog and the other is a human being. Asturias could have reversed this outcome by making the human being act as the porter of horrifying body damage and the animal the location of living embodied consciousness. Nor does the difference turn on a discrepancy in the degree to which the two are embodied: Gaspar Ilóm’s body is described as fully as the dog’s, but we see him in the exquisite precision of his sensory acuity and the delicacy of human tissue that precision implies. Asturias provides an extraordinary instance of the way the phenomenon of doubling and spatial separation can be used to coax the reader’s consciousness into a deepening comprehension of pain. But the phenomenon is visible in other books as well, and one, in particular—Huysmans’ fin-de-siècle masterpiece, *Against Nature*.

It is not surprising that when an artist uses the technique of doubling –spatially separating the site of body damage and the locus of suffering – the artist usually chooses to make a human being the locus of suffering and to make some nonhuman creature or thing the surface on which body damage is displayed. Most of us sympathize with the man, not the wounded cloth, in Kathe Kollwitz’s *The Downtrodden*; the girl, not the bandaged tree in “Girl, Wounded Tree, and a Book Shop,” and with Gaspar Ilóm, not the damaged dog in *Men of Maize*.<sup>45</sup> But, as was noticed a moment ago, it is just as possible for human and nonhuman to reverse locations in this structure of perception: *Against Nature* provides an instance, for here the human being carries out the loud display of body damage, and a giant tortoise acts as the unlikely recipient of our sympathetic attention.

This is a small point, but a point worth noticing. Otherwise, we might mistakenly believe that the reason the human being is usually our locus of sympathy is that we have a natural concern for human beings in pain. But in fact the record over many centuries suggests that the opposite is the case: we have as a species an astonishingly consistent record of ignoring other people’s pain if there is no body damage or no weapon to make it visible. By watching Huysmans toy with the direction of our sympathies, we see how plastic and versatile this structure of doubling is, and (most important) we recognize the crucial role it is playing in eliciting our concern for human beings in those cases where we do manage to care for human beings.

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<sup>45</sup> Needless to say, we are not limited in the number of objects with which we may sympathize (and people may feel sympathy toward both cloth and man, tree and woman, dog and man). If we only sympathize with a single site, it is because, as reiterated at many points, visible body damage repels or eclipses sympathetic attention.

Chapter 4 of *Against Nature* folds together two stories—the story of a man’s toothache and the story of a reptile’s death.<sup>46</sup> The chapter ends with the account of an excruciating toothache that sends our hero and narrator, DesEsseintes, fleeing from his body, pacing up and down his room, “blundering into the furniture in his pain.” Yearning to have the offending source of his pain pulled out, he sets aside his usual obsession with class, runs to a semi-trained puller of teeth whose staircase and doorway are covered with “great splashes of blood and spittle.” The excruciating removal of the tooth is built up out of four elements: a rapid conflation of pain, fear and shame; a description of sensory details inside the head (“cold metal against his cheek . . . a whole galaxy of stars . . . the loud crack of the molar”); a high-handed registration of the patient’s ungainly, pre-linguistic noises (“stamping his feet and squealing like a stuck pig”); and, comic exaggeration that accurately records the way events inside the body seem vastly magnified (the dentist “bore down on him as if he wanted to plunge his arm into the depths of his belly”). Finally, the dentist grasps his pliers around the tooth, lifting DesEsseintes up in the air; gravity pulls the patient’s body back down into the chair, and, as his body drops, the “blue tooth tipped with red” tears away from his mouth and looms in the air.

The tooth that looms in the air looms large in our imaginations in part because the shrieking pain it caused was large and, in part, because DesEsseintes, before beginning the tale of the toothache, has given us an elaborate synaesthetic account of the mouth as a musical instrument—a pipe organ—on which a symphony of the tastes of liqueurs can be played: “. . . dry curaçao, for instance, was like the clarinet with its piercing, velvety note; kummel like the oboe with its sonorous, nasal timbre; crème de menthe and anisette like the flute, at once sweet and tart soft and shrill.” Trombones, trumpets, cornets, tubas, cymbals, violins, violas, violoncello and harps are all discovered to reside there, until the open mouth acquires the scale of a yawning [concert shell], open to the air. It is this big thing that is put in pain when the pain comes.

Moving quietly across the story of the tooth—coming before it and coming after it—is the second tale that dominates the chapter, that of a giant tortoise. The tooth has a hard enamel shell and soft tissue inside, full of bright pain. The tortoise also has a hard outer shell and soft tissue inside, though not until the last split second of the story does it occur to DesEsseintes that the soft interior of the turtle might, like his own, be in jeopardy. The tortoise has been purchased by DesEsseintes for his aesthetic amusement, or more precisely, to display and validate his exquisite aesthetic refinement, for he possesses an “oriental carpet aglow with iridescent colors,” and he imagines that a dark object lumbering back and forth across its silvery surface will “set off these gleaming tints.” When the dark

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<sup>46</sup> J. K. Huysmans, *Against Nature*, trans. Robert Baldick (Baltimore: Penguin, 1959), Chapter 4, 53-61.

lumbering object fails in its aesthetic mission, Des Esseintes has its shell “glazed with gold” until “the reptile blazed as brightly as any sun.” When even that fails to bring out the tints of the carpet, he has the tortoise “encrusted with precious stones” – after first sorting through the flashing colors of cymophanes and sapphirines, opals and hydrophanes, aquamarines and rubies. But the tortoise, suffocating under the weight of this artifice, stops moving, and only after DesEsseintes finishes with the story of his tooth does it occur to him that the dark object in the corner of the room is dead.

The striking juxtaposition of tortoise and tooth subverts DesEsseintes’ theoretical position. He believes nature (like the tortoise) is dark and dull, and artifice (like the oriental carpet and the reptile’s flashing carapace) is dazzling and bright. But the recollection of his tooth pain and tooth extraction is the reminder that the blue-and-red-tipped interior of the body is unsurpassed in its terrible vivacity. The dental assistant offers to wrap his extracted body part in a newspaper – suggesting that all the artifice we wrap around nature (including carpets and encrusted jewels) is merely black and white and smudged by comparison with the bright fact of aliveness at the center.

But this feat of theoretical repositioning is secondary to the sheer feat of sensory cross-referencing that occurs between the primeval tortoise and our late flower of civilization, Des Esseintes; for the elaborately transcribed interior sensitivity of our hero is repositioned onto the tortoise—despite the fact that we are never, until the last second, invited to speculate about the interior of the tortoise’s own body and barely see even its exterior, since it is dark and shadowy at the outset, and increasingly obscured by layers of gold and stones as the story progresses. Like the other visual and verbal works looked at here, *Against Nature* reverses inside and outside, while also reversing figure and ground. It was not the carpet but the tortoise that was secretly “aglow,” and whose “silvery glints” at last reach our eyes.

I have tried to suggest across painting, lithographs, posters, plays and novels how often a compassionate insight into the pure fact of another’s pain, or into some previously underappreciated aspect of that pain, relies on the visible presence of body damage, but body damage that is then distinctly separated from the site of sympathy—either because personhood and wound vary greatly in the ratio of space dedicated to them (Rubens’ *Prometheus Bound*); or because the two are given two obsessively distinct locations on a single person (Sophocles’ *Philoctetes*); or because one of the two is located in a space distinct from the person (the inscription and the person in *O Nation You Bleed from Many Wounds*; the wounded cloth and the person in *The Downtrodden*); or because, the two may actually be located in different sentient beings (the tree and the woman in Beardsley’s poster, the poisoned dog and the poisoned man in Asturias’ *Men of Maize*, the blundering man and the lumbering tortoise in Huysmans’ *Against Nature*).

And this perceptual structure of emphatic separation, I have argued, helps us understand why it is that in medicine, where repairing body damage and diminishing the pain are both goals, these aims are better achieved where arrangements permit a deliberate doubling of address by two sets of caretakers. The solution may be the Rubens' ratio solution, as when a general practitioner knows his patient many years before the ghastly wound appears and therefore can hold the spectacle of the wound within the large frame of richly understood personhood—the inspired cancer doctor who meets the patient for the first time once the cancer is underway but who, in addition to chemotherapy and surgery, dedicates hours each week to learning the patient's psychic interior is also following the Rubens' solution.<sup>47</sup> The Sophoclean model of a double location (one address to what is borne on the sufferer's foot, another to what is carried in his hand) is emulated in childbirth practices where one person stands near the mother's womb to assist the potentially perilous passage of the child into the world, and another person sits with his or her face close to the mother, sharing the work of breathing exercises. The unusual hospital that tries to have “a resident humanist in the emergency room”<sup>48</sup> is also following the Sophoclean model. The Kollwitz-Beardsley-Asturias-Huysman model of two separate sentient surfaces is visible in those hospitals that have a pain team distinct from the medical team that addresses the patient's body damage: though there is a single patient, the two teams routinely carry out their work during two distinct visits at two distinct hours of the day, as though there were two distinct patients time-sharing a single bed.

So much do we value a vocabulary of “unity” and “oneness” that the vocabulary or practice of intentional doubling may (as noticed earlier) at first seem strange, but its efficacy is repeatedly validated both in art and in medicine, not only in the pockets of medicine already cited but in others that appear more odd or anomalous. Children who, in response to physical brutality, create multiple personalities sometimes assign one specific personality the task of feeling the physical pain, thereby

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<sup>47</sup> Cancer physician Eric J. Cassell speaks at length and over time with patients about their dreams, work, aspirations, family and their illness during the period when he is also giving them, for example, chemotherapy. See *Talking with Patients*: Vol. 1, *The Theory of Doctor-Patient Communication*, and Vol. 2, *Clinical Technique* (Cambridge, Mass: M.I.T. Press, 1985). Cassell comments on his own “surprising” insistence on doubling but explains: “This is a medical story, an illness story, and illness stories are different from other stories because they almost always have at least *two* characters to whom things happen. They always have at least a *person* and that person's *body*” (Vol. 2, 15).

<sup>48</sup> I was myself once invited to occupy this newly created position by a physician at the Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania. Philip Roth, to whom I described the incident, includes in *Anatomy Lesson* an invitation to Zuckerman to become a resident humanist in the emergency room. Despite the fact that Zuckerman and I both declined the invitations, the aspiration for such an arrangement seems an inspired one.

relieving the other personalities from having to feel, or even know about, it: one child, when asked who Molly was, replied, “She feels pain for us.”<sup>49</sup> In such a case, the child herself (rather than the medical community) initiates the Kollwitz-Beardsley-Asturias-Huysman model of a double location. The principle of doubling may also help us to understand why victims of terrible physical brutality – such as the Jews in World War II –sometimes delay the period of beginning to speak about the event: scholars have recently shown that the holocaust begins to be persistently mentioned in Jewish-American literature only in 1957, 1958 and 1959.<sup>50</sup> The delay may be explained in part by the need to wait until survivors have collectively had time to create a tangible, visible site of personhood separate from the injury, so that they can speak about the obscene body damage without themselves feeling in danger of being once more eclipsed by it.

It is part of the argument here that we do not at present have enough instances of deliberate acts of doubling in medical contexts where people with visible body damage are being cared for. Increasing their number might lead to a more successful elimination of physical suffering, the standard by which the practice of medicine must always be judged.<sup>51</sup> Doubling and spatial separation need to be more widely present not only in the treatment of individual sufferers, but in medical education more generally. If humanities courses were given a place in the curricula of medical schools (distinct from, but as emphatic as, courses on the treatment of body damage), would the ability of physicians to see and comprehend pain grow more acute and more capacious? At the very least it would give physicians time to walk through art galleries, and stop and stand among school children.

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<sup>49</sup> Patricia Jones, “She Feels Pain for Us: the Relationship between Multiple Personality and Child Abuse,” 1985, unpublished manuscript, citing cases in R. Lasky, “The Psychoanalytic Treatment of a Case of Multiple Personality,” *Psychoanalytic Review*, 65, 355-80; R. P. Kluff, “Multiple Personality in Childhood,” *Psychiatric Clinics of North America*, 7, 121-34; and E. L. Bliss, “Multiple Personalities: A Report of 14 Cases with Implications for Schizophrenia and Hysteria,” *Archive of General Psychiatry*, 37, 1388-1397. The last of these articles describes a child one of whose personalities was assigned the chore of “crying” for the others, since the act of crying tended to result in swift punishment by a parent (1389).

<sup>50</sup> See Mark Greif, “The American Transformation of the Holocaust, 1945-65,” Honors Thesis, Harvard University, 1997; and Peter Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life* (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1999).

<sup>51</sup> Eric Cassell identifies the diminution of suffering as the act by which medicine stands or falls.