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theory and practice. In Rancière’s reading of Freud, the salience of affects is admitted, only to be held fast to the rationality of Oedipal logic. Rather than slotting affect back into some predetermined narrative, according to which one analyzes the logic of the defenses that are thrown up by the analyst, one hopes that the analyst works with the emotions that give rise to defensive structures specific to individual histories, an example of which might be understood to be Freud’s own attachment to Oedipus, as the one who knows even as he fails to know. Rather than reining in emotions by circumscribing them within a conventional morality, affects can be read as expressions of discontent or affirmation, which might signal the need for political action just as much as they indicate the need for personal revolution. That this call can fall on deaf ears is as it should be, if art is to remain art, and politics is to remain politics, since once art’s effect becomes predictable, it stops being art. This is not to say that art is apolitical, only that its way of being political is not to assimilate itself to politics, but rather, to open up the possibility of seeing things differently by making an intervention into the apparent self-evidence with which the world presents itself to us.

FOUR

Writing Trauma
Narrative Catharsis in Homer, Shakespeare, and Joyce

RICHARD KEARNEY

"Myself unto myself do give
This name Katharsis-Purgative."
—James Joyce, “The Holy Office"

James Joyce, in a letter to his brother Stanislaus on November 13, 1906, announces that he has just started a new “short story” called Ulysses. He came up with the idea, he explains, because of a memory triggered by a recent mugging in Rome. He had just been fired from his job at the bank and drunk away all of his severance pay, which should have been used to pay the rent and provide for his one-year-old son, Giorgio. On his way home, Joyce was robbed and left lying in the gutter, destitute, despontent, and bleeding. And it was at that very moment that he suddenly remembered being assaulted two years previously (June 22, 1904) in Dublin. After the attack, Joyce had been rescued from the gutter by a man named Hunter, “a cuckolded Jew,” who dusted him down and took him home for a cup of cocoa, “in true Samaritan fashion,” as Joyce put it. This repetition of woundings triggered a lost memory where an immigrant Jew came to the rescue of a wounded Dubliner and planted a seed of caritas in his imagination.

Several weeks after the Rome mugging, Joyce and his wife Nora were given tickets to an opera whose librettist was called Blum. This second moment of happenstance, after his humiliating fall in a Roman side street, furnished the name of his paternal protagonist, Leopold Bloom. Thus was
born the longest short story ever told, the tale of a father and a son traversing wounds on the way to healing. I

My subject is the writing cure. My questions are the following: How might literature help us “work through” trauma? How far can narrative catharsis go and what are its limits? And finally, how might narrative healing differ in the case of little trauma (the existential wounds of birth, loss, and death) and big trauma (war, torture, catastrophe)? My chosen example is Joyce’s Ulysses — itself a story that rewrites two other stories: Shakespeare’s Hamlet and Homer’s Odyssey. All three are stories of fathers and sons, stories of transgenerational trauma, which I suggest, are transmitted and somehow transfigured in the writing of the stories themselves.

Hamlet: An Example of Transgenerational Trauma

In the opening of Joyce’s Ulysses, we are told by Haines that it’s all about “the Father and the Son idea. The son striving to be atoned with the father.” It doesn’t take long for us to realize that the son is Stephen (Telemachus) and the father is Bloom (Ulysses) whose paths cross in the middle of the book as Stephen exits and Bloom enters the National Library in Dublin. It is a pivotal scene in which Stephen expounds his central theory of the father-son dynamic in Hamlet. His thesis is that Shakespeare wrote Hamlet the year his son (Hamnet) died and his own father (John Shakespeare) was dying. The play is about the transmission of mortal trauma between fathers and sons. In short, according to Stephen, Shakespeare wrote “the book of himself” in order to avoid the madness of melancholy and to properly mourn his father and his son in a way that he was unable to do in life. Thus, the play itself serves as a symbolic and psychological working through of an otherwise irresoluble crisis in which a father (King Hamlet) commands his son (Prince Hamlet) to do something impossible: that is, to remember what cannot be remembered and to tell something that cannot be told. It is a double injunction, an unbearable burden, and an impossible story; it is the double bind of trauma. As Weitz puts it, “To speak is impossible, not to speak is impossible.” “Remember me…remember me,” says the ghostly father to his son in Hamlet, while at the same time adding: “But that I am forbid to tell the secrets of my

prison house; I could a tale unfold whose lightest word would harrow up thy soul.” The ghost’s unspeakable secrets — for which he is condemned to the latency of purgatory, those “sulfurous and tormenting flames” — are precisely what remain secret. The secret “crimes committed in his days of nature” (1.5.12) (youth) are, King Hamlet tells us, forbidden tales. In short, the things to be remembered cannot be told in the first place.

I am concerned here with traumas, with unspeakable things that we do not possess but which possess us, like specters. Traumas, as Cathy Caruth writes, are “overwhelming experiences of sudden, or catastrophic events, in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, and uncontrolled repetitive occurrence of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena.” I think Hamlet qualifies perfectly.

Joyce: Seeing Himself in Freud

This reading of Ulysses is clearly psychoanalytic. Joyce himself admitted to being deeply interested in Jung and Freud when he was “yung and easily freudened”; the story is well known of him bringing his daughter, Lucia, to visit Jung in Zurich only to be told by Jung that he would be as incurably psychotic as his daughter if he had not penned Ulysses. Writing his book of transgenerational trauma — of Ulysses and Telemachus, of King Hamlet and Prince Hamlet, of Stephen and Bloom — was, it seemed, the “writing cure” for Joyce’s own trauma. It was a book about himself. Joyce concedes the creative liaison between literature and life when he confesses that it would be a brave man who would invent something that never happened. What happens in Ulysses happened to Joyce. He was the manic magpie who, by his own admission, gleaned every word of his story from the stories of history, personal or collective. His fiction is haunted by what he called the “nightmare” of history (24), or the mute “daughters of memory” (24) that cry out to be heard, spoken, and written. Phantasmal hauntings torment the young Stephen with “agenbite of inwit” (16). They revisit him obsessively, guiltily, ineluctably. Both Hamlet and Ulysses relate such ghostings of narrative memory.

As for Freud, no such meeting took place; however, I sometimes imagine Joyce reading Freud’s seminal theory of trauma in Beyond the
Ending the Cycle and Escaping the Trauma

I return to Ulysses. When Stephen tells us that Hamlet is the story of Shakespeare’s father-son relationship, he is echoing his relationship with his own fathers, Mr. Dedalus and Bloom. This story within a story is itself a parody of Homer’s original story of Ulysses and Telemachus. In other words, we are dealing with stories within stories within stories; they are stories of fathers and sons repeating, reliving, and, perhaps to some significant extent, reliving trauma. This is narrative as catharsis, but not narrative catharsis understood as closure or completion. Rather, it is narrative as impossible story, storytelling that forever fails to cure trauma but never fails to try to heal it. In this very effort itself there is the pleasurable purgation of pity and fear.10

Returning to the beginning, to Homer’s Ulysses, it is a standard motif of Greek myth that sons act like their fathers before them — like father, like son, and so on ad infinitum — until someone says, “Stop!” That someone is the true storyteller who transposes the regressive repetition of trauma in life into a cathartic repetition in narrative. Think of the great cyclical myths, such as Zeus castrating Saturn castrating Ouranos, or of Orestes reiterating the curse of the house of Atreus. Or, perhaps most famously, think of Oedipus repeating the deeds of his father Laios, who raped the son of his host Pelops, thereby committing the equivalent of incest and the betrayal of hospitality. Laios’s double transgression replicates the curse of his own father Labdacos, which is repeated by Oedipus in the next generation. The continuing narrative lineage involves a recurring acting out of unspoken trauama (wounds).

Lévi-Strauss has remarked how the three names of patrilineal descent in the story — Labdacos (lame), Laios (left-sided), Oedipus (swollen footed) — all refer to wounds that cause difficulties in walking.11 This fact, he suggests, is symptomatic of a transfer of trauma over three generations — and four if one includes Antigone and wishes to open the discussion to fathers and daughters and, by extension, to contemporary feminist readings.12 The only solution to this curse of cyclical repetition is the conversion of the untold wound into some form of telling, in this
case, the symbolic employment of Oedipus’s tragic narrative. According to Lévi-Strauss, after Aristotle, only this can bring some sort of catharsis that suspends, through the purging of pity and fear, the compulsive acting out of mute trauma. The basic thesis, in sum, is that myths are machines for the purging of wounds. Myths are strategies for resolving at a symbolic level what remains irresolvable at the level of lived, empirical experience.

Human existence is cursed by a tragic, albeit impossible, desire to escape the trauma of our autochthonous origins and the desire to buck our finitude, to deny death. In the Oedipus cycle, this tragic curse is epitomized, as noted, by the patrilineal names for wounds that bind us to the earth. And the poetic role of muthos-mimesis that comprises tragic drama, as Aristotle reminds us in the Poetics, is to narrate our heroic desires to transcend our terrestrial nature. This is why Cadmos kills the dragon and Oedipus defeats the sphinx. But, our desires are ultimately impossible: we are scarred by contrary and irreconcilable fidelities—to earth and sky, immanence and transcendence, finitude and infinity, matter and spirit, nature and culture. For Lévi-Strauss, great mythic narratives, beginning with the synchronic myths of la pensée sauvage, are attempts to procure cathartic relief by balancing these binary opposites in symbolic constellations or "mythemes." In a word: what is impossible in reality becomes possible in fiction.

Wounds, Scars, and Healing: Recognizing and Working through Trauma

How might this reading relate to the father-son story of Ulysses and Telemachus? I will say a word about Homer’s version and then proceed to Joyce’s. Ulysses is condemned to act out the wound of his own failure and of his own existential finitude time and time again. He has absented himself from the wounds of his birth and upbringing, his autochthonous origins in Ithaca, sailing off to heroic glory. But his attempts to become an immortal warrior are constantly countered by reminders of mortality, the brutal carnage of Troy, and subsequent calamities. The breaking of the lure of Calypso is also central to his disillusionment. Originally leaving Ithaca as an aspirant hero, Ulysses returns as a beggar, as a lowly outcast who is only recognized by the smell of his flesh (by his dog, Argos) and the scar on his thigh (by his nurse, Euryclea). It is significant that Euryclea only touches her master’s scar after a detailed narrative about how Ulysses received the original wound in a childhood hunting incident with his grandfather, Autolycus. This is yet another example of transgenerational trauma. The narrative working through of this story leading up to the final, healing touch, takes all of 77 lines.14

Telemachus, expecting a triumphant victor to return, does not at first recognize Ulysses. He is so fixated on his great expectations of the father that he does not see the scar on his body. As he is blinded by illusory imago, delusions abound. When he finally acknowledges that the mortified stranger before him is in fact his real father, they sit down together and eat. Sharing simple food of the earth, squatting in a swineherd’s den, they finally come together as host and guest, demonstrating hospitality as antidote to the hostile curse of fate.

The word Homer uses for “scar” here is oulen.15 This is a term often associated in Greek literature with “trauma,” as in Plato’s Gorgias, “oulas en to somati...hypo traumaton,” where oulen means both “trace” and “scar.”16 While the wound is timeless, the scar appears in time; it is a carnal trace that can change and alter over time, though it never disappears. Scars are written on the body; they are forms of protowriting. And narrative catharsi is a process of working through such carnal traces. Put simply, while the wounds remain timeless and unrepresentable, scars are the marks left on the flesh to be seen, touched, told, and read. Scars are engraved wounds that may, or may not, be healed.17

Writing Trauma: Creating a New Story for the Future

Quite apart from the fact that we have leaped three thousand years, from Homer’s “cold,” synchronic literature to Joyce’s “hot,” diachronic one, the father-son idea repeats itself. But, the repetition is forward not backward; writing is giving a future to the past. Joyce’s narrative invites a release from the haunting cycle of trauma. The stories of Stephen and Bloom recount their respective efforts to escape the loss of absent loved ones: Stephen’s mother and father and Bloom’s prematurely departed son, Rudy. They
both seek a new bond of spiritual paternity: filiality. However, they cannot find it as long as they remain captive to their illusions of what this should be: Stephen's fantasy of perfect fusion and Bloom's obsession with his lost son. Only when they accept their condition of wounded, finite beings can there arise a love beyond illusion. Stephen breaks with the literary elite of Dublin. Bloom returns home to Molly, with "less envy than equanimity, less jealousy than abnegation" (Ulysses, 685). Only then do surrogate father and surrogate son exchange stories of failure and mourn lost illusions.

Trauma in Absence and Remembering

To return one last time to Hamlet, we might ask why Stephen Dedalus chose this particular story to work out his theory of the father-son idea. The ghost of King Hamlet asks his son to remember something that cannot be remembered. The play begins with a tale that cannot be told, a testimony that cannot be transmitted. This breaks with the age-old sacred tradition of deathbed blessings passed from fathers to sons. This breakage is an example of what Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub call the "collapse of witnessing." Hamlet knows his father is condemned to flames for a secret sin committed in his youth. But his father is forbidden by this very same sin to share this secret, that is, he is prevented from telling his story. So Hamlet inherits a double injunction: remember, do not remember. This confusion is confounded by a supplementary injunction: intervene to stop your mother's incest, but do not do anything. "Let not thy soul contrive against thy mother aghast" (1.5.85-86). No wonder the Dane is confused!

Here, as in many ancient narratives of trauma, blind acts of murder and incest are encrypted rather than confessed. The inheritance of the wound is like a mark in one's flesh, what Hamlet famously calls "the mole of nature" (1.4.24), which one inherits with one's birth. Hamlet spends the entire play trying to "catch the conscience of the King" (2.2.581), deploying the "antic disposition" (1.5.72) of mask and subterfuge, pun and quip, play and wit, so that he might "by indirection find direction out" (2.1.66). But working through takes time and patience, which is played out in five full acts. Truth only ultimately reveals itself when Hamlet succeeds in abandoning his illusions about a perfect father: "Look here upon this picture and on this" (3.4.53). Hamlet finally accepts that he, no less than his father before him, is a failed, forked, mortal, finite thing.

This surrender of idealized imagos reaches its climax in the famous graveyard scene when Hamlet comes to realize that the father who loved him as a child and bore him daily on his shoulders was not, as he had imagined, his natural father, King Hamlet, but the long-buried court jester, "poor Yorick" (5.1.173-74). Only then is Hamlet the son ready to act according to something beyond himself, "a divinity that shapes [his] ends" (5.2.10) — acknowledging his own mortal condition. Now the "readiness is all" (5.2.210). And here, as in King Lear, wisdom comes from the lowliest of creatures. Hamlet the son dies, the play hinting that he was poisoned by the same sword that King Hamlet used to poison King Fortinbras on the day Hamlet was born. And, to follow this hint of the grave scene, it was this secret poisoning that led to the cycle of further killings of Kings by Kings (Fortinbras, Hamlet, Claudius) and sons by sons (Hamlet, Laertes and, nearly, Fortinbras). Inhumations and exhumations, cryptings and decryptions. Secrets of the grave whisper through the mouths of fools.

This fatal circle of repetition only comes to an end when Hamlet himself becomes the sacrificial symptom of cyclical acting out and exposes the wound in his own body where the sword entered. Note that the fatal wounds of King Hamlet's body were never seen or touched by his son as scars, for the poisoned King's prematurely decomposing body was interred without ceremony. Hamlet never saw the corpse of his father, just as Shakespeare himself, as Stephen reminds us, never saw the corpse of his son, Hamnet. The wounds were never witnessed as scars. Once again, we find the "collapse of witnessing" that makes for traumatic delay. Traumas are revisited as ghosts, coming back again and again, after the event, revenants après coup, or like Freud's Nachträglichkeit.

This phenomenon of delay is extremely relevant, I think, for understanding our own contemporary culture's fear around dying and death. In former times, mourners were encouraged to have direct and sustained funereal witness of dead bodies before burial, as in the Irish wake. This
culture of death-denial is manifest today in all kinds of symptomatic avoidance behavior when faced with the wounds of disabled and otherwise scarred persons. To take just one example: might not a mass social media phenomenon like Facebook — where we "prepare a face to meet the faces that we meet"9 in a virtual climate of mandatory cheer — also prove to be, deep down, a book of ghosts?

To summarize: because the son did not witness the father going down into his grave, this absence was engraved in his flesh. The loss, the lack, and the gap of the empty grave were all encrypted as a suppressed "right of memory" waiting five full acts of procrastination to be retrieved (5.2.376). This is, perhaps, the reason T. S. Eliot described Hamlet as an "artistic failure," if also the most written about drama in Western culture. And it is also the reason why André Green describes Hamlet as the greatest literary performance of unconscious trauma and recovery to which psychoanalysts have been endlessly drawn like kittens to a ball of wool.20

Eventually it is Hamlet's own sacrificial surrender that enables the play's other fatherless son, Prince Fortinbras, to live on. Fortinbras survives the fatal curse that ghosted the whole revenge cycle for generations. Hamlet's dying words to Horatio say it all: "Absent thee from felicity awhile / to tell my story" (5.2.334). The story that could not be told is finally told, even though it took five acts, and the closing words are delivered by Fortinbras himself. He is finally set free, by Hamlet's sacrifice, to recover the crypted memory of his father: "I have certain rights of memory to this kingdom, which now to claim advantage doth invite me" (5.2.376-77) Memory and story cross in mourning, and if there is catharsis for us the audience, it is indeed a purging of pity and fear.

The Cathartic Role of Writing Trauma

Much more could be said here about narrative catharsis. There is Aristotle's theory of cathartic affect in the Poetics and Joyce's rewriting of it in A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man (and the difference between catharsis as it affects the author and the audience). Where Aristotle focuses on the purgation of the spectators' emotions, Joyce also applies it to narrators, real or implied. His own poetic persona included: "Myself unto myself do give / This name Katharsis-Purgative... / Bringing to Tavern and to Brothel / The mind of witry Aristotle."

Then there is the question of the respective therapeutic roles of imagination, cognition, and emotion. Paul Ricoeur, for example, has much to say on this in his rereading of Aristotelian catharsis in Time and Narrative. And there is, crucially, the difference between catharsis in little trauma, the "originary traumas" of birth, loss, and death, and in big trauma such as torture, rape, abuse, catastrophe, and genocide. These latter examples of big trauma often involve such appalling terror (Schreck) that several experts claim, among them Judith Herman, Berel Lang, and Claude Lanzmann, that no catharsis is possible at all. This last point raises the critical question of the ultimate limits of catharsis: what traumas may, or may not, be subject to narrative healing?

We need to think about the genuinely cathartic role of trauma stories in requiring open narratives that never end, rather than closed narratives that presume to wish away wounds rather than working through scars. Trauma narratives are, by their very nature, truncated, gapped, fractured, and inconclusive. They may be great stories, but they can never offer terminal solutions; there are no total cures. Writings can only work through traumas as traces and revisit them as hauntings; they can never fully retrieve such experiences or tell the full story. In the transposition from inexpressible wound to written scar, there is something invariably lost in translation because the wound is precisely that which could never be properly registered or recorded in the first place. It is precisely because the wound is too much that trauma repeats itself as lack. Trauma narratives are scabs over the cavities left by inexperienced experience.

Recall again the three stories. The trauma inherited by Hamlet — namely, his father's murder by Claudius on top of his father's sin committed on Hamlet's birthday — is something hinted at in the play; it is never openly stated. Moreover, the fact that his father's death and burial are missed by Hamlet, who was absent in Wittenberg, is a further token of inexperienced experience. This is linked in its own murky way with Hamlet's mother's incest with Claudius. There are secrets everywhere, plays within plays, ciphers and decipherings. This is surely why André Green, Nicolas Abraham, and other psychoanalysts have tried obsessively to untangle the
mystery, and without success. Shakespeare’s drama engraves traces of buried trauma, which Hamlet resolves to exhume, as in the gravediggers’ scene, but never finally exposes. Many bodies are rotten and rotting in the state of Denmark, from its eponymous king to the disappeared Polonius, but they are all hidden away. Behind walls and wainscoting, lies and disguise, screens and seems. All we have are odors, ashes, and allusions. We have only oblique ciphers less deciphered than played with, like cotton reels or gallows wit, and played out in imitated suffering and action.

In this sense, the play’s very success is its failure. Hamlet’s maniac-melancholic words swarm like bees over the black hole of an empty hive, but they can never fill in the gaping wound; they only, at best, conjure and confront the invisible ghosts within. The narrative catharsis ultimately comes not from the cognition of discovery — for we never know exactly what happened — but from the curiously liberating recognition of recovery. Failing to gain full knowledge of his father’s unspoken crime, laconically mentioned in act 1, Hamlet nonetheless comes to acknowledge the limits of his own finite, humble existence — his crucial lesson in the grave scene. King Hamlet’s hidden story, the real reason he is condemned to purgatory, remains buried throughout the play, only returning as spectral intimation. This fact is performed in Prince Hamlet’s inability to discover his own story and, by extension, our own inability as the audience to discover the unfathomable story of the play. Hamlet is a tragedy of trauma that recounts the impossibility of saying the unsayable.

Similar issues of unsayability surround the unspoken traumas of Stephen and Odysseus. There are signs here and there, but they too are equally crypted: Stephen’s overdetermined guilt, Odysseus’s occluded scar. We, as readers, may in turn hypothesize about the nature of the various authors’ own engraved wounds, wondering, for instance, what Homeric trauma, personal or collective, lies behind the long forgotten story of Odysseus’s infantile wound? Or how deep was Shakespeare’s shame at missing his own son’s funeral, while currywurfs favor with a barbarous queen and abandoning his father’s forbidden Catholicism? Or, to hypothesize about Joyce, what traumas, little or big, may have been reactivated by his incidental mugging in a Roman night street? Was it guilt at abandoning his mother and family, or the painful break with his city and culture?

Or even, further back still, was it the untold historical rupture inherited from the Great Irish Famine with its extinctions, evictions and exiles?

This last transgenerational wound is rarely acknowledged by Joyceans, itself arguably a symptom of elusiveness. For all its neglect it is, I suspect, a key aspect of Joyce’s native unconscious. Joyce himself was born in 1882, less than 30 years after the Great Hunger ended, a catastrophe that split Ireland into pre- and postfamine history, which witnessed a million dead and another million banished — almost a third of the population between 1847–1852. Joyce’s father and grandfather lived through this unspeakable horror, though, like most witnesses who survived at home or abroad, the pain of an Drochshaol (or “bad times” as they were elliptically known in Irish) went largely unwritten at the time. So, if Stephen vows at the end of A Portrait of the Artist to “forge in the smithy of his soul the uncreated conscience of his race,” is it not logical that this massive gash in the national psyche would return in his next novel, Ulysses, as an irrepressible haunting and a stammering tale demanding to be heard?

This is, I submit, what happens. The references are oblique, but they are pervasive, as Luke Gibbons and other critics have recently shown: references from Stephen’s dead mother’s phantasmal returns to Bloom’s frequent allusions to hunger, soup kitchens, and potatoes. (He even carries one in his pocket as talisman!) “You don’t know whose thoughts you’re chewing on,” muses Bloom, “Famished ghosts. Ah I’m hungry” (163). Or as the Daughters of Erin, also called the “daughters of memory,” sing in the Circe episode: “Potato, Preservative against Plague and Pestilence, Pray for us” (470). The allusions are multiple, if characteristically muted. Much hermeneutic digging is required here, as in Hamlet’s graveyard or Odysseus’s childhood. Throughout, wounded authors call for readers, traces for interpretations, hints for guesses, and ciphers for thoughts.

Joyce’s narrative of his native psyche shows that past wounds are never completely past, no matter how much one prays. The psychic palimpsest of personal and historical abandonment finds expression in the ineradicable wounds of what Stephen calls “banishment from the heart, banishment from the home.” Joyce identified similar experiences of “sundering” in both Shakespeare and Homer, whose traumatized heroes also carry indelible scars of exile and injury. Like his literary predecessors before
him, Joyce grafted stories onto histories, whether forgotten, repressed, occulted, or stolen. His narratives were secreted from those “nightmares of history,” which, by Joyce’s own admission, made his writing “the last word in stollentelling.”29 Ulysses is, I wager, a tireless literary effort to awaken cathartically from such historic nightmares by restoring forfeited stories and bringing ghosts back to life. It is, in short, a work of mourning and recovery. It is a writing that translates wounds into scars, flesh into fiction. Ulysses is a working through of trauma.

Richard Kearney offers an erudite, poetic, and richly articulated meditation on the use of narrative to heal trauma, both personal and societal. Kearney focuses on Aristotle’s theory of catharsis in the Poetics, masterfully bridging epic-drama-novel, linking them to psychoanalytic understandings of trauma and healing, and speculating cogently about the healing process for the authors of great narrative, including Homer, Shakespeare, Freud, and Joyce.

Using the metaphors of wounds and scars as tropes, Kearney proposes that narrative helps to knit together a wound — a gap in psychic, existential, or cultural integrity — which yields a scar — a mark or marker, an emergent shape that serves as a sign or signifier. In my response, I will add how, through the construction of narrative, timelessness, and meaninglessness, the obliterated self may be returned to some connection with the onflow of time, including the possibility of meaningfulness and the agency and continuity of the self as narrator, witness, or member of a community with some expectable order.

Hans Loewald viewed psychoanalysis as a process that seeks to turn our ghosts into ancestors; pursuers that haunt may become historical references that populate the mind.1 As Kearney points out, Stephen
Dedalus is haunted repeatedly by the ghost of his mother; his guilt over refusing to observe the Catholic rites at her deathbed — his failure to grieve — becomes his mother’s spirit walking. Similarly, the ghost of Hamlet’s father walks into Hamlet’s life, and “remember me” becomes the injunction to reveal untold horrors. “The time is out of joint” (1.5.190), and Hamlet faces the fact that he was “born to set it right,” an intergenerational transmission (2.1.190). Odysseus, too, voluntarily visits ghosts in the Underworld, heeding the advice of Circe to consult the spirit of the blind seer, Tiresias, who saw the tragic blindness of Oedipus, and now tells Odysseus the story of how he will manage to make his way home to Ithaca. The ghost of Odysseus’s mother informs him of Penelope’s patient faithfulness. The ghosts Odysseus seeks out are ancestors, sources of guidance.

But, as Kearney emphasizes, unspoken and unspeakable narratives — unformed experiences — become wounds and scars. I think of Gillian Straker’s essay, “Signing with a Scar,” in which she describes self-cutters, for whom words hold no trustworthy meaning and whose unmentalized and wordless horrors become evidenced to others. This evidence is “written on the body,” as Kearney says in this volume, a skin surfaced with scars that he aptly terms “proto-writing.”

Decades ago, I told a patient — I will call her Lily — who cut her arms that these cuts were hieroglyphs; they were her effort to communicate, but were thus far in an obscure code that we would need to translate. The painstaking translation of these scarring markers became the narrative of Lily’s childhood trauma that emerged and came into increasing focus through the process of therapy. As her therapy progressed, the real, physical scars from cutting evolved into an illusionary image of a man with a knife; he was there but not there. I became for her a man with a knife. I was required to sit very still in my chair because any movement startled her. Soon, seductive gestures emerged, her body still actively representing trauma, but now more iconically. These gestures abated after I assured her she already had my attention and care without her adding any further entreaty. Several years into her treatment, Lily requested a pad of paper and silently drew an unlabeled timeline with age markers. Thus, she now made marks along a line on paper instead of tracks along her arms. Over time, this skeletal narrative acquired descriptive labels — when it began and when, years later, it stopped. Next, Lily reported to me what she called “fantasy” images of her father sexually abusing her; they were fantasy because she did not ascribe any truth value to these mental pictures. After further months of our work together, Lily arrived at a narrative, a coherent memory. As she spoke this to me — haltingly at first, but becoming more nuanced with iterations — her story became a textured account of her alcoholic father’s repeated sexual abuse of her between ages six and nine, and her belief that she was protecting her younger sister by complying. She narrated these incomprehensible wounds — these tears in the fabric of her bodily integrity, her private selfhood, her childhood security, her family relationships (both external and internal), and her experience of what Bruner might call “the ordinariness” of life — and these became real scarifications that declared the prenarrative of trauma. Soon after constructing the horror story of her childhood, Lily announced to me that I no longer had to be the one responsible for keeping her alive by blocking the door to her compulsive suicidality. Now, she said, she would be responsible to remain alive. And Lily gave me a present: a book about hope, longevity, and maternal love.

In his essay in this volume, Kearney asks, "How might literature help us 'work through' trauma?" Lily’s story is an illustrative story, not a complete answer. Kearney further asks, "How far can narrative catharsis go and what are its limits?" Narrative catharsis is, in a sense, tantamount to Freud’s notion of remembering with feeling, and the alternative to catharsis is the repetition compulsion, or intergenerational transmission. The story never changes, like the ancient mariner’s. Or, as Jim Tyrone says in O’Neill’s play Moon for the Misbegotten: “There’s no such thing as the present. Only the past, happening again and again, now.”

Paul Russell called the repetition compulsion “the scar tissue of an injury to the capacity to feel.” Something that cannot be felt cannot be grieved, and therefore, cannot be represented in a negotiated narrative that contains the injury and allows for felt experience. This can be seen in Hamlet: King Hamlet’s injunction to Hamlet (“remember what cannot
be told, cannot be remembered”) underlines the cycles of repetition, the poisonings that beget poisonings, until Hamlet breaks the cycle and can finally entrust Horatio to “tell my story” (5.2.336).

The injury to the capacity to feel that becomes the scar tissue of repetition is trauma. Kearney quotes Cathy Caruth on trauma, suggesting that trauma is the “overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events.” For Russell, the catastrophic event is always in a relationship, particularly in the interruption of a relationship that was necessary for the development of the capacity to feel. Kearney indicates as examples the missing fathers of Hamlet, Stephen Dedalus, and Telemachus, to whom I would add Leopold Bloom’s father, who committed suicide. Even Joyce himself was a missing father to Giorgio. Interruptions of essential relationship and shocking losses inflict what Winnicott calls an “interruption to the continuity of being.”

This interruption of continuity points us toward Aristotle’s other theory in the Poetics: the notion of peripeteia, on which Bruner compellingly elaborates in his explication of narrative as “acts of meaning.” Peripeteia is a rupture of the ordinary, “a sudden reversal in circumstances,” “some breach in the expected state of things.” It is therefore a violation of the canonical, the rules of order, whether familial, societal, or existential. This shock of reversal, according to Bruner, is what calls for narrative. Narrative is healing in that it helps us to contain, and somehow negotiate what is unruly and contingent that disorders our existence. Narrative corresponds to Hans Loewald’s concept of active and creative repetition, in contrast to passive reproduction or the repetition compulsion. The process of therapy, as Paul Russell frames it, is a relationally negotiated transformation of static, stereotyped “transference” repetitions, whereby the scar tissue of trauma transitions into a more nuanced and intimate sense of self and other; it is a restoration of the living present. Analogously, the process of the writing cure, according to Kearney, is a transfiguration of transgenerational trauma, a strategy for resolution at a symbolic level. As Kearney reminds us, James Joyce was told by Jung “that he would be as incurably psychotic as his daughter if he had not penned Ulysses.” Like his character Stephen Dedalus, Joyce needed to awaken from his “nightmare of history”: the grip of Catholicism, Ireland, English domination, canonical narrative form, advancing blindness, and, as Kearney speculates, perhaps even the ghosts of that massive reversal of circumstances experienced through the Irish Famine (represented, for example, in the form of a potato that the displaced Leopold Bloom carries in his pocket around Dublin all day). Ulysses can be regarded as Joyce’s healing through narrative of significant personal, societal, and intergenerational traumas.

Kearney applies the notion of a writing cure to the very author of the talking cure. In a brilliant analysis of Freud, Kearney, himself “a brave man who would invent something that never happened,” imagines for us a narrative of Freud’s transformation of his devastating grief over the loss of his daughter Sophie, a transformation that took the form of a fundamental advance in psychoanalytic theory: Freud’s interpretation of his grandson’s fort/da game as attempted mastery through repetition. What has not been worked through, or remembered with feeling, becomes the basis of self-defeating, compulsive repetitions “beyond the pleasure principle.” Thus, Freud’s personal trauma, the shocking reversal of actual unmournable loss, becomes transformed through narrative into a theory of loss, grief, and repetition—a possible world of psychic healing.

When the impact of trauma is a story that cannot be told—an inexplicable absence—we are left with what Felman and Laub (quoted by Kearney) calls a “collapse of witnessing.” I quote here from Ghislaine Boulanger, who makes a “plea for psychoanalysts working with adults who have survived catastrophic trauma to privilege narrative”:

> Narrative is transfigured memory that, in its turn, if it is a living narrative, further transfigures memory. The importance lies not in the memory itself but in the power to gather all the disparate impressions into a coherent whole, and in the rigorously intersubjective experience necessary to this process. In privileging narrative, we privilege the successive unfolding of increasingly complex experience. To privilege narrative is to understand that to relate a traumatic memory (or any memory) is to construct the memory, to formulate experience that has previously remained unformulated. That is, experience that may have been brought in bits and pieces into the margins of consciousness, only to be banished before it reached the level of coherent thought.
Boulanger's statement here eloquently captures the therapeutic process I described above in which Lily, gradually over time, gathered the "bits and pieces" of her skin mutilations and visual illusions into an emergent healing narrative of horrific childhood sexual abuse.

Through his examination of Hamlet, Kearney compellingly traces the impact of trauma in an untellable experience. At the play's tragic conclusion, Hamlet is able to importune Horatio "to tell my story," the story of trauma that ends with Hamlet's death. As Kearney writes in this volume, "memory and story cross in mourning." Kearney understandably emphasizes *catharsis*. Who could deny that, as young Fortinbras exclaims upon entering the stage strewn with bodies: "this quarry cries on havoc" (5.2.351). But, how does catharsis cross with *peripeteia*? Here I want to invoke another theme, one that pervades Shakespeare's tragedies and histories: the notion of "right rule."

Just as the Irish would remember the potato famine, Elizabethan England would remember a traumatic history of misrule and insurrection, the reigns of the reckless Richard II and the nefarious Richard III, and the bloody War of the Roses, with rebellions always looming. Recognizing the important Renaissance ideals of cosmic order and "the music of the spheres," an orderliness reflected in Elizabeth's earthly kingdom through right rule, we can return to Bruner's emphasis on the basis of narrative in "a sudden reversal of circumstances," "some breach in the expected state of things," and "expectation gone awry." Hamlet, then, becomes a story of unspeakable *peripeteia* that becomes speakable.

Uncanny violations of order pile on in a series of murderous usurpations. Hamlet, in dying, ends this traumatic cycle, restoring right rule to Denmark by his personal endorsement of young Fortinbras, who has returned to assume rights of governance, and who ends the play commanding the orderly rites of mourning (5.2.376–77). The story now can be told. The heart of Hamlet's story does not lie simply in a return to civil order. The importance of the story is, turning once again to Bruner, that it "leads not so much to restoration of the disrupted canonical state of things as to epistemic or moral insights into what is inherent in the quest for restoration."10

*Peripeteia* requires narrative so that "perturbed spirits" may rest and meaningful emotion can be contained and released through *catharsis* (remembering with feeling). The writing cure transforms the shock of the disruptive real into an entertainment of the possible. The creation of narrative, in literature or in life, is movement forward from the fractured to the concrete, then to the indicative and, finally, to the subjunctive: how might this be? What may yet happen? And, what if?

Trauma says, "No." It negates, nullifies, stops, interrupts, and violates; it is a tear in the real. Trauma cuts across hope, desire, expectation, attachment, security, and subjectivity. Narrative restores the possible to the world of the hero, the survivor, or the patient; it counteracts that "no," and says, in the indelible word of Molly Bloom that ends Ulysses: "Yes!"