Reflections on Contemporary Christian Theologies of Suffering and the Value of Trauma Literature

by

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Abstract

The reality of suffering and the need to discover something of its spiritual meaning has perennially engaged the study of religion and theological discourses. This thesis takes an interdisciplinary approach to its reflections on traumatic suffering by drawing on literature from the Caribbean and its diaspora as a primary resource. *Palace of the Peacock* by Wilson Harris and *Midnight Robber* by Nalo Hopkinson are closely discussed. Focus is given to the ways in which the victim may be impacted by trauma and the nature of the journey to healing and transformation. It is noted, however, that the perpetrator’s path to potential healing and transformation has traditionally been underrepresented. The study argues that both victims and their perpetrators have an important bearing on the theological engagement with suffering and transformation as well as on pastoral care. To this end, the insights of Cynthia Crysdale, Michael Stoeber, Dorothee Soelle and Gill Goulding are key theological resources.

Key words: suffering, redemption, transformation, trauma literature, pastoral care
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Introduction

No one can claim a monopoly on suffering. Each individual, and in many cases nations and groups, must make a response. This is so whether one confronts the mass casualties of atrocities like the trans-Atlantic slave trade, the Jewish Holocaust or the Rwandan genocide. It is so whether one faces individual situations of terminal illness, rape, domestic violence or mental anguish. All attest to the fact that suffering is a universal experience that levels and unites us in our shared human vulnerability across all categories of difference—race, ethnicity, gender, age, nationality and religion. Undoubtedly, historical and socio-cultural particularities shape all lived experiences. For human beings, however, there is literally no exemption from pain, physical or psychological, no matter what the causes. For this reason, the realities of suffering, and what it means to be spiritually transformed by experiences of intense pain, perennially engage theology and the study of religion.

The impact of suffering remains a significant challenge to the full embrace of the human condition. To suffer, according to John Paul II, “seems to be particularly essential to the nature of [humankind].” Consequently, the “discovery of the meaning of suffering” hinges on the experience of joy in this life and salvific redemption for the next. This hope of liberation from pain and, more fundamentally, in the promise of redemption, is the reason St Paul says, “the whole creation has been groaning [in travail] in labor pains until now” (Rom 8:22). The key to that door of hope, which the Apostle celebrates as being “now” with us, is Jesus Christ. As such, both the deep-seated need to “discover the meaning of suffering” and its relationship to the human desire for transcendence, have preoccupied not just Christianity, but a number of world religions for centuries.

This study, Reflections on Contemporary Christian Theologies of Suffering and the Value of Trauma Literature, is an exploration of ways in which the experience of suffering can affect the victim. In doing so, however, it recognizes that thought must be given to the perpetrator, who is often left out of discussions of suffering and transcendence. Both parties are participants in the cycle of violence. Both have a bearing on how individuals, groups, and particularly the ecclesial community may respond. In this regard, consideration is given to how literature aids in this process. How, then, is it possible for transcendence to be available to both

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victims and their perpetrators? Further, what is the role of the faith message communicated by the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ? What spiritual disposition is necessary for victims and/or victimizers to dispose themselves to possible healing and recovery? What are the attitudes, values and responses that hinder or enable the personal and spiritual growth that influence positive change for self and others? What is the role of the ecclesial community as a source of pastoral care?

All parties involved in the cycle of suffering and healing can benefit from Gill Goulding’s description of the inner work needed as an on-going process of conversion. This process “involves a gradual conformity to the kenosis of Christ,” that is, his “obedient self-emptying. . . .” The major concern then is with the psycho-spiritual and social dimensions of suffering. Questions about belief in a supernatural power and the nature of this power, essentially underpin responses to suffering, regardless of one’s faith perspective or even the refusal of one. The relevance of theodicy and the question of evil are not, however, primary concerns even as these are unavoidably implicated. Rather this thesis explores ways in which contemporary Christian theologies of suffering, with the aid of literary representations of selected contexts of injustice, can assist in elucidating the nature of suffering and recovery. Such reflections can offer effective help in the ministry to those caught in the cycle of suffering. To engage these concerns, significant themes in suffering and transformation are critically and creatively explored with reference to three relevant theological works. These include Cynthia Crysdale’s *Embracing Travail: Retrieving the Cross Today* (2001), Michael Stoeber’s *Reclaiming Theodicy: Reflections on Suffering, Compassion and Spiritual Transformation* (2005) and Gill Goulding’s *Creative Perseverance: Sustaining Life-Giving Ministry* (2003). It also references Dorothee Soelle’s *Suffering* (1975) and Walter Wink’s *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination* (1992). Further, given the broad and varied approaches to suffering, the perimeters of the study are defined in two significant ways. Firstly, attention is given to victims who experience traumatic suffering and perpetrators who seek change. Such victims are also acknowledged to be potential perpetrators. Secondly, it selectively draws on what will be defined as trauma literature from the Caribbean canon and its diaspora for its analysis.

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The Literature of Trauma as a Theological Resource

Literature, which imaginatively represents experience, is a valuable theological and pastoral resource for better comprehending the psycho-spiritual dynamics of trauma. It can assist in elucidating how trauma’s deeply damaging effects can be effectively ministered to and, with time, hopefully healed. The ability to tell stories is a timeless vehicle for representing every aspect of the human condition—joys and sorrows, hopes and aspirations. Richard Kearney, for instance, touches on the power of “telling” or “witnessing” when he says that narrative is both a “world-making and world-disclosing process.”\textsuperscript{3} Literature, in other words, provides a creative outlet for disclosing “unspeakable” experience and inaccessible content. Indeed, the capacity of literature to deal with the hard to bear experiences of life intersects with this study’s interest in traumatic suffering. It therefore draws on a relatively “new” marriage between academic and therapeutic enquiry, that is, trauma theory and literature.

Trauma narratives that evoke Caribbean and New World histories are given focus. They speak to themes relevant to what Stuart Hall describes as the “trauma of transportation”\textsuperscript{4} and that broadly typify the postcolonial experience of domination, resistance and transformation. Insights from contemporary theologies of suffering are brought to bear on these works. Two novels by authors from the Caribbean and its North American diaspora are the main literary resource. In \textit{Palace of the Peacock} (1960) by Guyanese writer Wilson Harris, consideration is given to his treatment of the possible transformative healing of the perpetrator in the context of a violent history of colonization. Harris sees the healing of the perpetrator as a necessity for the future, healthy development of the region. This choice participates in the expansion of the usual treatment of trauma literature beyond the focus on the victim. The futuristic novel, \textit{Midnight Robber} (2000), by the Canadian-Caribbean writer, Nalo Hopkinson, is the focus of an analysis of the acute interior rending suffered by the protagonist, Tan-Tan, and her journey to healing and renewal from multiple incest traumas.

More than the cultural and aesthetic debates relative to “postcoloniality” or trauma aesthetics evident in the chosen texts, the central concern is with the themes of suffering and renewal. Attention is given to the attitudes and patterns of behavior displayed by the identified characters. How might contemporary theologies of

suffering be brought to bear on representations of the personal and social histories of traumatic suffering reflected in the novels discussed? With reference to the Caribbean’s origins in the “cataclysmic encounter between worlds,” Paula Morgan invites consideration of the possibility that “legacies of that historical trauma [can] erupt in successive generations and retain significance for the descendants of all ethnicities – victims and perpetrators alike.” The connection between past and present worlds, and by extension future dispensations, is a reminder of both the historical and localized nature of trauma and recovery. Its cultural transmissibility, which can entrench races, ethnicities, genders, nations in stereotyped identities and roles, is also highlighted. Narratives of suffering therefore issue a call to responsibility that has implications for ecclesiial responses to the needs of the time, as well as to current and future development of the region and beyond.

A curious feature of studies in trauma is that its 1990s beginnings have a foundational relationship to literature and literary theory. Of note, among others, are groundbreaking books of the widely recognized trauma theory scholar, Cathy Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (1995) and *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (1996). Even prior to Caruth’s work, Shoshana Felman in collaboration with psychologist Dori Laub, produced *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (1992). The work of Judith Herman, Anne Whitehead, Dominick LaCapra and others all demonstrate how the field has expanded, as well as the close relationship literary studies and psychoanalysis have maintained in addressing traumatic suffering. It is no surprise, therefore, that psychologists and trauma therapists have identified storytelling or writing trauma’s difficult contents as an effective tool in recovery given narrative’s ability to allow people to objectify and communicate their lived histories.

Textual discourses, to which literature belongs, can pass on trauma by perpetuating stagnant nostalgia and stereotypes of victims and victimizers. Otherwise, stories can help to transform trauma. The novels under study are more interested in the latter, that is, how narration potentially serves as a powerful sensitization and curative tool, not just for victims and perpetrators but also for the society at large. They possess cathartic or therapeutic capability as witnessing agents. Dori Laub, with reference to the victims of the Jewish Holocaust, notes that “[t]he survivors did not only need to survive so that they could tell their stories; they also needed to

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tell their stories in order to survive."\(^6\) Further, Tiina Kirss, reflecting the views of Avery Gordon, argues that such “haunting stories” draw attention to “the unfinishable yet demanding quality of the past, and issues an imperative for close, persistent ethical attention.”\(^7\)

Yet one cannot forget that suffering always occurs in place and time. Dorothee Soelle, for instance, recognizes that suffering has a simultaneously “particular” and “universal” character.\(^8\) Consequently, it is useful to contextualize trauma lest its incidence remains an abstract reality. The same applies to any theologizing about its possible transcendence. The attention given to literary representations of trauma from the Caribbean diaspora provides a needed expansion of mainstream trauma theory to include the postcolonial experience. Stephen Craps sees this as necessary given the rather narrow Euro-American range of trauma theory and the popularized trauma canon. The tendency, he argues, has been to reference the Jewish Holocaust as a “universal moral norm . . . [to] help foster a human-rights culture and advance the cause of global justice.”\(^9\)

In the context of the Caribbean and its diaspora, Paula Morgan points to the poet, Derek Walcott, who describes its experience of colonialism and subsequent evolution as a “deep amnesiac blow” that “entraps colonizer and colonized in cycles of condemnation and justification as they grapple to bring to the surface the enormity of loss.”\(^10\) The acknowledgement of a double wounding intersects with this study’s interest in attending to the gap that has largely left the perpetrator out of the discourse of healing and recovery. The literary imagination has proven itself to be possibly more adept in navigating these uncomfortable waters of reconciliation than theories trauma and theologies of redemption and liberation. Moreover, the postcolonial condition, which the Caribbean situation not merely reflects but, according to Barbara Lalla, is also well placed to “mediate,”\(^11\) is characterized by the destabilizing of binary thought and border crossings. As such the cultural


material of the region offers, as Morgan discovers, no easy settlement with “binaries of colonizer/colonized, colonial/postcolonial, them/us, self/other, settler/nomad. . . .”  

In other words, the Caribbean’s cross-cultural “gift” has been its early civilizing lesson in the destabilization of polarized binaries. Wilson Harris, for instance, believes that cross-cultural dynamics hold the possibility for humanizing sensibilities by bridging the divides in Manichean paradigms of race and cultural superiority to enable an authentic “regeneration of the heart and mind.”  

Harris’s vision intersects with the observation Angie Pears makes about the usefulness postcolonial theologies have found in Edward Said’s notion of “contrapuntal readings.” Referring to the thought of R.S. Sugirtharajah, she notes that a “contrapuntal” practice of reading texts, and by extension identities, recognizes that the “[ex]colonizer and [ex]colonized are bound together. Therefore, “the process by which the colonized can throw off the imperialist bounds necessarily involves the colonizer as well.”  

Caribbean and New World histories and their resultant depolarized cultural identities provide a bridge of connection with the theological and pastoral concern of this study. The narratives selected for analysis complement the new theologies of suffering and transformation, especially via the attention they draw to the possibility of healing damaged selfhoods and distorted relationships. Such narratives of trauma, like those discussed in this thesis, offer the opportunity to consider the message the cross of Jesus Christ has for the transformation of not just the victim/oppressed but also perpetrator/oppressor. Interestingly, these texts intersect with the insights of theologians like Cynthia Crysdale, Michael Stoeber and Gill Goulding. In their imaginative investment in change and transformation, they lay bare the pain and potentially destructive outcome of abusive power and consider the possible reversibility of victim and perpetrator roles. Further, beyond the novels’ socio-historical differences, they connect with the theologians’ consistent affirmation of the universal, transcendental values perfected in Jesus Christ, such as, love, compassion, forgiveness, communion and dialogue that enable human beings to flourish together.

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12Morgan, The Terror and the Time, 18.
Renewed Approaches to Suffering and Transcendence

There is certainly some truth in the claim that, according to Cynthia Crysdale, traditional approaches to suffering and redemption, with their concentrations on sinfulness, have failed to effectively communicate a well-balanced theology of suffering. She argues that they have often contributed to perpetuating cycles of subjugation and low self-esteem by demanding repentance and patient acceptance of oppressive conditions in lieu of a heavenly reward.  

This study draws primarily on Crysdale’s insights in her book Embracing Travail: Retrieving the Cross Today (2001). It agrees with her that there is still need to focus on the spirituality of suffering from which to better understand the complex dynamics of the growth in transformative interiority. A renewed theology of the cross of Jesus Christ is an indispensable spiritual resource in this regard. “What is inward is superior,” St Augustine comes to discover in his Confessions. From the Christian perspective, there is no higher point of instruction than the story of redemption told by the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, which for St Augustine is the supreme “classroom.” Richard Rohr therefore says what the world needs most today is not people with answers but “transformed people.”

A holistic exploration of how authentic change occurs in victims and perpetrators alike is essential to those who seek to offer pastoral care and work for justice. This requires highlighting the distinction between destructive and transformative suffering. Consideration must also be given to the slow journey of ongoing conversion that, for the victim, means the uplifting of a wounded selfhood, the recovery of lost dignity and finding voice; for the perpetrator it means the descent of humility, acceptance of responsibility for pain caused and a commitment to genuine reconciliation. For both, these graced steps make it possible to actualize the experience of the “full” life the Gospels promise (Jn 10:10). The potential reversibility and subtle deceptions of victim/perpetrator or tyrant/savior dyads also need to be comprehended. So too is an understanding of the ways victims can internalize violence and then turn it against themselves or their loved ones.

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15 Cynthia Crysdale, Embracing Travail: Retrieving the Cross Today (New York: Continuum Press, 2001), 98. Crysdale’s Chapter 5 expands this discussion.
The church cannot deny its history of acting as a “counter-sign of grace” in ways that betray the Gospel’s message of love and equality before God. This is so particularly in its treatment of women, non-Christian and colonized peoples. Nevertheless, pinpointing the traditional overemphasis on the link between redemption and guilt, Crysdale offers a productive intervention that brings to the fore a deficit in the theologies of suffering, which have had little to say about how victims can sabotage their transformation or how they can also become perpetrators. She therefore argues that “a new version of the meaning of the cross” is needed, one that allows us to “discover our woundedness as well as our culpability.” With her focus primarily on the “wounded victims of the world,” she argues that “in contemplating Jesus on the cross” they need to “discover themselves not primarily as crucifiers of a sinless one but as victims who have been slain. Jesus the crucified becomes ally and friend . . . ; and the Risen Lord signifies healing and empowerment.”

The insights Crysdale offers invite focus on the psycho-emotional and spiritual impact of suffering on victims and the inherent instability of flattened or polarized identity markers like victim and victimizer, a slippage already acknowledged by postcolonial writers in the context of the colonizer and colonized. Her decentered or reversible victim/perpetrator paradigm of the human person is a strong incentive to actually embrace the healing of the perpetrator. What she leaves somewhat underexplored is the case of the victimizer who is not necessarily so because he or she is an unhealed victim. Nonetheless these crossings do not merely complicate subjectivity, they implicate the spiritual quest and so enrich and deepen the transaction-oriented theology of “sin” and “guilt” that is too limiting given the complex process of transformation. Further, the intergenerational nature of traumatic experience impacts how persons think and act, especially groups that have extended histories of debasement and marginalization. The negative impact of racism and anti-Semitism, for instance, can have long lasting effects on subsequent generations. Theologies of suffering have to be attentive to how past and current manifestations of traumatic violence can intersect and complicate how individuals and groups self-identify in ways that can compound their sense of unworthiness.

The movement to transformation is not automatic and can be either enabled or sabotaged by an individual or community. Some persons are just not spiritually prepared to respond in a transformative manner, and in some cases, suffering appears to be too destructively overwhelming. This study therefore utilizes

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20 Crysdale, *Embracing Travail*, 123.
21 Ibid., 8.
Michael Stoeber’s deployment of the term “redemptive” to distinguish between destructive and transformative suffering offered in his book, *Reclaiming Theodicy: Reflections on Suffering, Compassion and Spiritual Transformation*. The latter is “suffering which is spiritually transformative to the person. It contributes positively to a person’s spiritual growth toward the religious ideal,” which means “a permanent shifting of one’s narcissistic self-centeredness to an intimate condition of graced and selfless love with God and others.”

While there is no attempt to glorify suffering as a vehicle for spiritual growth, Stoeber’s defense of theodicy is critical to a Christian response because it prioritizes the evangelical call of the Gospel (Lk4:18-19). He holds out the possibility that even those who carry the burden of “affliction,” that crude irrationality of unwarranted trauma, might also find healing and redemption:

One of the hopes of Christian theodicy is that all people might be healed from their destructive suffering. It is the hope that one can be rescued from destructive suffering by God or other people, to experience healing and continue a spiritual journey to which such destructive suffering contributed nothing positive whatsoever or perhaps even hindered. However, more than this recovery from destructive suffering, there is the additional hope in Christian theology for the redemption of all people.

Stoeber’s mention of “all people,” would necessarily include the perpetrators of suffering, an omission in contemporary reflections on suffering that perhaps springs from the unconscious desire for their punishment, even in the name of justice. This recalls Henry Wink’s argument about the pervasive influence of the myth of redemptive violence. It is reminiscent of the Old Testament “eye for an eye and tooth for a tooth” (Matt 5:38) logic of divine justice that simply perpetuates violence. Jesus, of course, rejects this approach for a practice of non-violent, forgiving love. What is not to be compromised, however, is the requirement of perpetrators to freely take reconciliatory responsibility for their actions.

Since the freedom to choose is central to human dignity, this study recognizes that willingness to take responsibility for one’s healing and transformation is essential. Ultimately, however, divine grace alone moves individuals and communities to liberation. No theology of suffering and redemption or transformation can exclude divine grace, which involves openness to a positive outcome as opposed to trying to control one, even at times violently. In this regard, Crysdale’s investment in Wink’s work on redemptive violence and Sharon Welch’s insights on the ethic of control versus risk prove to be useful. The characteristic attitude of the former,

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21Ibid.
for instance, “presumes that human ideas and actions can fix the ills of the world,” whereas “risk” is the ethic that chooses and acts with the hope of increasing the “probability of authenticity and healing.”

Cynthia Hess’s encouragement of an awareness of the dynamics of trauma itself, which means giving attention to the workings of “externalized” and “internalized” violence, is also useful. As opposed to the outer origins of external violence, she defines the “internal” type as “violence that has assaulted people from without and then become embodied within their bodies, minds and souls.” These perspectives provide insight into how some victims may become perpetrators of violence. Their misdirected advocacy for positive change may simply repeat cycles of dehumanization.

The faith claim, therefore, that informs these reflections is that every experience of liberation and redemption is initiated by God’s grace, made possible for humanity and all creation by the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Pope John Paul II in his first encyclical writes emphatically that, “Redemption was accomplished in the paschal mystery, leading through the Cross and death to Resurrection.” Admittedly, all major faith traditions have proven spiritual resources and rituals with the capacity to theologize suffering and to practically impart the means of healing and recovery. A Christian perspective, however, is adopted in the consideration of how persons may experience transformation through suffering. The study nevertheless agrees with Crysdale that traditional approaches to the cross of Jesus Christ and his resurrection may have overemphasized the “sin” of pride and guilt. The implication is that humankind has to be redeemed primarily from “arrogant ambition.” From this perspective, “[r]edemption involves a transaction whereby Jesus died for us, standing in our place to pay the penalty that we owe to God for sin.”

There is no doubt that the Christian tradition remains a profound, and for many believers, the only source of hope for a violent world in need of salvation. Such a model, however, concentrates on a truant and sinful humanity that has had little to say to the countless wounded victims who are crushed by suffering and in need of restored selfhood and dignity. Redemption in this frame is all about forgiveness for transgressions. How can the cross of Jesus Christ speak to their needs without imposing a further burden by demanding only repentance? Crysdale’s inquiry is directed to those “with an already beleaguered sense of self” or those who

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25 Crysdale, Embracing Travail, 134-35.
28 Crysdale, Embracing Travail, 7.
find themselves on the “underside” of history\textsuperscript{29} like much of the postcolonial world today, and so need uplifting and liberation.

The commitment of this study to the Gospel’s missionary mandate to “go into the world” (Mk16:15) is expressed in the consideration given to the role of pastoral caregivers. How then can literary reflections on suffering assist theology in the formation of those called to bring relief, support and guidance to those impacted by suffering? In many ways, violent attitudes, relational patterns and structures are entrenched as a feature of cultural life that supports oppressive systems, relational patterns and attitudes. These, such as, gender, class, racial and ethnic prejudices may be deeply rooted in the collective consciousness and infect national, group and family histories. In this way, the intergenerational transmission of traumatic suffering perpetuates oppressive structural arrangements and their supportive stereotypes and discourses. From the perspective of interpersonal suffering, therefore, violence is possibly the expression of trauma’s transmissibility from past contexts. Sin, then, implicates more than the individual act. It has a sociality that the individual’s attitudes and actions filter.

Insights on pastoral care are drawn mainly from the work of Gill Goulding’s, \textit{Creative Perseverance: Sustaining Life-Giving Ministry in Today’s Church} (2003). Reference is also made to Cynthia Hess’s, \textit{Sites of Violence, Sites of Grace: Christian Nonviolence and the Traumatised Self} (2009). The study holds that, like theological discussions on suffering and recovery, pastoral perspectives have understandably focused almost entirely on the healing of the victim and so neglected the condition of the perpetrators. The centrality given to the victim is a natural expression of compassion as well as a requirement of justice, which is the cornerstone of Christian living. At the same time, however, this focus leaves a critical, though difficult gap to attend to, particularly in Christian responses to suffering. While it is acknowledged that the victim is often the bearer of life-long traumatic wounds, the fact remains that, whether acknowledged or not, the perpetrator is also wounded, though not in the same way as the victim. Without at all attempting to exonerate persons who deliberately hurt others by their egocentric and selfish behavior, he or she offers a crucial window into an understanding of human behavior and structural evils related to how power and authority can be systematically misused and hopefully correctly addressed.

\footnotesize\textsuperscript{29} Ibid. 8.
Method and Organizational Development

In order to interrogate the human dynamics of trauma and the possibility of healing in light of new theologies of suffering, this study utilizes an interdisciplinary methodology. It combines systematic theological approaches to suffering and redemption with reference to representations of trauma victims and their perpetrators in selected literary texts. It also draws on selected postcolonial and feminist approaches to power and agency, as well as on the insights of trauma theories. Jennifer Jesse argues that theology can benefit richly from the disciplinary cross-confluences of current academia. She cautions, however, that a “healthy awareness of the problems” is necessary regardless of the advantages gained. In addition to the benefits of “freedom, creativity, and relevance to contemporary lived experience,”30 which Jesse cites, the main benefit, in my view, is deeper insight. I share her concern, however, that one of the key “risks” may well be when theology becomes “unglued from its spiritual resources.”31 These resources, from the perspective of this thesis, primarily include Scripture, particularly the witness of the Gospels to the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, the church he founded and its sacred traditions.

The study’s reflections on the theology of suffering and the value trauma literature are developed through three interdependent chapters. Chapter One, “Literature as a Theological Companion for Reading Trauma,” argues that the world of creative writing is never far from religious and theological concerns, primarily because it is deeply engaged with recurrent questions about what it means to be human. The role of narrative in healing the “irrepressible hauntings” of trauma, as suggested by Richard Kearney, Cathy Caruth, Anne Whitehead, Stef Craps and Michelle Balaev, is presented as a viable strategy for creatively theologizing and addressing the needs of a suffering humanity. Stories often illuminate the behavioral patterns and ambivalences of motive that mark the workings of the human psyche, making it difficult to simplistically spiritualize the suffering of victims, the motives of perpetrators and the nature of resistance to oppression in the interest of positive change. The chapter argues that the postcolonial issues raised by the texts selected for analysis also serve to expand theological dialogue on spirituality and suffering.

Chapter Two, “Towards the Healing of the Perpetrator—Redemption Renewed,” argues that it is necessary to incorporate the perpetrator into the circuit of healing. While victims are understandably given more

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31Ibid., 70.
attention, the exclusion of the victimizer only guarantees that the cycle of suffering will continue. Crysdale and Hess recognize that some perpetrators are also victims, making it necessary to deconstruct any rigid polarity in those roles. The chapter agrees with Crysdale that the healing of perpetrators involves an experience of humble descent from pride, exemplified by the Old Testament figure Cain. A detailed analysis of the story of Zacchaeus is presented in order to establish the role of Jesus in facilitating such a process of healing. The chapter then discusses Wilson Harris’s treatment in The Palace of the Peacock of the main character Donne, who journeys from an abusive history with the vulnerable Amerindians to a transformed state of enlightenment and rebirth.

Chapter Three, “The (Un)-healed Wound: Destructive and Transformative Suffering”, explores the journey to renewal of the protagonist, Tan-Tan, in Nalo Hopkinson’s Midnight Robber. This novel offers useful insights into the psycho-spiritual symptoms of trauma. This allows an exploration of the stumbling blocks to healing such as redemptive violence and redemptive suffering, as well as the journey to possible healing and renewal. It draws on Stoeber’s “destructive” and “transformative” distinctions and Crysdale’s interpretation of the “double-sided approach” to the dynamics of healing and elevation. Her Christ-oriented “third way” is discussed as a means of healing the victim-perpetrator.

Chapter Four, “Go into the World: A Theological/Spiritual Model for Ministry,” draws on the work of Gill Goulding, Cynthia Crysdale, Susan Coakely and others to first consider a “disposition” for ministry based on Goulding’s model of creative perseverance and its constituent virtues of vulnerability, humility and compassion. Secondly, it applies Goulding’s model, along with the relevant insights of Crysdale on the process of healing available to the victim and perpetrator, to some of the key issues raised in the novels studied. Both point to the cross of Jesus and his kenotic self-emptying and resurrection as the supreme model of redemption.

The study ends with “Making Things New: A Conclusion.” It consolidates the major findings and arguments, as well as considers the fruitfulness of an interdisciplinary approach to the theologizing of suffering and to pastoral care. The role of literature as a theological and pastoral resource for understanding and responding to suffering is reinforced, as well as the need to bring into the discussion other literary cultures such as the postcolonial. Also affirmed is Crysdale’s argument for the theological renewal of the cross of Jesus Christ as a spiritual resource available to victims and perpetrators alike, as well as Stoeber’s important distinction between destructive and transformative suffering. The benefits of Goulding’s concept, “creative perseverance”
are affirmed as a viable model for ministry to the suffering. Finally, important implications of the study are discussed in light of the issues raised.
Chapter One

Literature as a Theological Companion for Responding to Suffering

Introduction

“Telling stories is as basic to human beings as eating,” writes Richard Kearney. “More so, in fact, for while food makes us live,” he continues, “stories are what make our lives worth living.”\(^1\) Moreover, the capacity to tell our individual and collective stories, whatever they may be, is what distinguishes us as a species. According to Kearney: “Every life is in search of a narrative. We all seek, willy-nilly, to introduce some kind of concord into the everyday discord and dispersal we find about us.”\(^2\) Although a rather large claim for the role of narratives, it seems that human beings make sense of their experience by constructing stories. These provide windows for deepening self-understanding and bridges of compassionate connection with other people’s experiences. This chapter argues that literature, in particular the type of narrative recently dubbed “trauma fiction,” is an extremely useful theological companion for theology’s timeless engagement with suffering and ministerial responses to it. Story-telling, then, which is an act of creative remembering, serves a critical role in dealing with intense suffering, and it seems that suffering, as an indelible part of human history, makes stories necessary.

To probe this literary interdependence, which Kearney advocates, it is useful to first define suffering and its fundamental cause, evil. Suffice it to say, the focus of this study is on the suffering caused not by “natural” evil (natural disasters and so on), but by “human” or “moral” evil, the fallout of which is traumatic suffering. While it is recognized that such suffering impacts individuals as well as groups, as in the case of Trans-Atlantic slavery, the Jewish Holocaust and South African Apartheid, attention will be directed to the individual sufferer whose “story” has implications for the whole.

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\(^1\)Richard Kearney, *On Stories*, 3.
\(^2\)Ibid.
Suffering, Trauma and Human Experience

Scott Peck’s definition of evil as that which is “in opposition to life”\(^3\) may be rudimentary. Nonetheless it mobilizes three important interrelated trajectories that bear on this chapter’s concern with transformative suffering and the literary witness. The first is that evil is a form of moral injustice that is antagonistic to what is good—life. The second is that evil has an outcome: it causes other human beings to suffer. The third is that the experience of evil is an integral part of the human condition. These paths converge on a single question, bearing in mind Peck’s definition of evil in the world as an opposition to “life.” How can one respond to suffering in a way that yields greater life? The danger is always that suffering can be sadistically spiritualized as a way to holiness. It can be reproduced via violent resistance or simply be a force that overwhelms. Literature provides a medium for this outworking.

Michael Stoeber provides a useful working definition of suffering drawing from the thought of John Hick. He writes that it is “the experience of emotional pain—a mode of consciousness that can arise directly from the sensation of intense physical pain, but which need not at all be associated with it. Suffering is a painful state of consciousness that we wish we did not have to experience.”\(^4\) Two important aspects of this definition are worth highlighting. Stoeber indicates that suffering is not normally a chosen state, suggesting that it is neither desired nor idealized. He then focuses on the impact on “consciousness” or mind, thereby indicating that suffering is not isolated to the physical body. Pain in this sense is also psychological and emotional.

What then of the suffering caused by trauma? Trauma, whose Greek origin is from the word meaning “wound,” is a particular type of suffering, with specific effects. The theorizing of trauma emerged from the 1990s with scholars like Cathy Caruth, Shoshana Felman, Geoffrey Hartman and Dominick La Capra at the helm. Caruth utilizes a combined psychological and literary approach so it is appropriate to begin with her early definition. She writes that it is "an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other

intrusive phenomena." Psychatrist Judith Herman goes further to describe its impact on the relational
dimension of the individual’s life from the interpersonal to divine intimacy:

Traumatic events call into question basic human relationships. They breach the attachments of family,
friendship, love, and community. They shatter the construction of self that is formed and sustained in
relation to others. They undermine the belief systems that give meaning to human experience. They
violate the victim’s faith in a natural or divine order and cast the victim into a state of existential
crisis.

Human beings, Herman suggests, are made for relationship. Trauma, therefore, strikes at the very heart
of what enables people to experience the gift of their unique personhood at the individual and communal levels
of their emotional and spiritual lives. The fact that traumatized people are “suffering as the result of another’s
abuse of power,” in other words, because of an act of evil, makes it all the more difficult to rebuild healthy
relations.

Part of what it means to be human is certainly to discover how to negotiate the tension between states
of mind and the psychosocial realities that enable either the experience of wellbeing and belonging or their
absence. Later efforts to define trauma have reinforced the condition as having acute psychological effects.
Additionally, there are indicators that efforts are being made to shift from the thinking that sees traumatic
experience as caused by a single and exceptional event. Stef Craps, for instance, signals the need for the shift
when he writes that “current trauma discourse has difficulty recognizing that it is not just singular and
extraordinary events but also ‘normal’, everyday humiliations and abuses that can act as traumatic stressors.”
Regardless of the cause, trauma significantly interrupts the capacity to form a holistic sense of wellbeing.

Further, there are recognizable symptoms that show themselves to various degrees in victims. Post-traumatic
stress disorder (PTSD) refers to the physiological symptoms of trauma that include hyperarousal, re-
experiencing and numbing of dissociation. The victim must recover the shattered self so as to enable the
restoration of his or her capacity to be in touch with reality, to forgive, love and receive love from others. What
this means is that trauma disrupts the flow of right relations with self and others necessary for life to flourish.

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5Cathy Caruth, *The Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* (Baltimore: The Johns
6Judith Lewis Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence—from Domestic Abuse to
7Herman, “Crime and Memory,” in *Trauma and Self* eds. Charles B. Strozier and Michael Flynn
8Stef Craps, “Worlds of Grief: Traumatic Memory and Literary Witnessing in Cross Cultural
9Morgan and Youssef refer to Judith Herman’s “propensities” in *Writing Rage: Unmasking Violence
through Caribbean Discourse* (Mona, Jamaica: University of the West Indies Press, 2006), 8.
The Role of Literature

"Art," in the broadest sense of the term, Pope John Paul II admits, "remains a kind of bridge to religious experience . . . . Even when they explore the darkest depths of the soul or the most unsettling aspects of evil, artists give voice in a way to the universal desire for redemption."10 John Paul II provides the essential link this chapter seeks to make between the role of literature as an expression of the story-telling impulse in humans and the human desire for transformation and transcendence. In this regard, the world of creative writing is never far from religious and theological concerns, primarily because it is deeply engaged with the timeless questions about what it means to be human and how to live in a world of “others.” Literature in general allows us an imaginative window into the complex world of human experience. Barbadian novelist, George Lamming, elucidates the seminal role of “creators,” the writer being one type, in these terms: they “return the society to those areas of experience which remain largely invisible between citizen and citizen in the normal course of living together. They return the society to itself; to its past as well as to the visions of the future which constitutes its present.”11

This self-reflective capacity of narrative, together with its interest in future possibility, makes it a natural companion for theology. Christianity after all is grounded in stories of faith, compressed in the Gospels. Even more fundamental is the fact that experience itself has a “narrative quality” hence why stories have special resonance to human beings.12 American-Canadian novelist, Thomas King, seems to hit on the centrality of the human need to narrate when he writes, “The truth about stories is that that’s all we are.”13 Life is apparently not fully itself unless it is narrated, so much so Kearney claims that “the untold life is not worth living.”14 Moreover, in relation to the experience of suffering, Kearney finds an invaluable and necessary correlation since “. . . stories serve to address psychic as well as physical suffering. The pain of loss and confusion, of loved ones passing away, called out for stories . . . . From the word go, stories were invented to fill the gaping hole

14Richard Kearney, On Stories, 156.
within us, to assuage our fear and dread, to try to give answers to the great unanswerable questions of existence.”

When it comes to traumatic experience, narrative plays a critical role in re-membering the painful event or events and in giving witness to the crime, thereby opening up the victim to the possibility of healing. For this reason writers like Cathy Caruth, Anne Whitehead and Richard Kearney share the view that “narrative” has an important role in healing the psychic hauntings of trauma. While trauma theory emerged in the 1990s, fiction that deals with trauma is far older, since tragedy has always been a high theme of literary endeavor, as in the ancient Greek myths, such as *Oedipus Rex*. Stories provide a viable strategy for creatively addressing the needs of a suffering humanity. They are creative acts of un-silencing that save memory from deteriorating into un-exorcised “hauntings.” These merely lacerate the psyche and are devoid of any capacity to meaningfully instruct.

**Memory and Healing**

Since suffering is indelible to the human condition, it is futile to dream of a world free of pain. Rather, given the reality of suffering it is more productive, as Dorothee Soelle suggests, to discern how to confront it meaningfully. The choice one makes in this regard is the difference between an apathetic, destructive outcome and a transformative, redemptive one. Soelle’s Christological insights on suffering are invaluable in this regard, for she makes the distinction between destructive and transformative suffering, the latter becoming possible only when suffering is approached with a “learning” attitude though “the possibility also exists that suffering can make one callous, bitter, insensitive, and mute.” This may occur in some cases when the person is so overwhelmed by suffering—where suffering devastates to the degree that it serves no transformative role or meaningful purpose. Telling stories, as Soelle notes, can move the victim from accusation to the lament’s cry for justice. In this way, “[r]emembrance of what has been endured summons the future,” in other words transformative possibility. Indeed, creative writers confront the impulse in individuals and societies to repress horrific atrocities. In the process, their narratives validate the importance of remembrance. Morrison’s novel,

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16*Dorothee Soelle, Suffering*, 124.
Beloved, for instance, supplies the haunting line: “This is not a story to pass on” which affirms, by way of inversion, the necessity of remembering and telling to the healing process. She elaborates in an interview:

There is a necessity for remembering the horror, but of course there’s a necessity for remembering it in a manner in which it can be digested, in a manner in which the memory is not destructive. The act of writing of a book, in a way, is a way of confronting it and making it possible to remember.\(^\text{18}\)

The same claim can be made for Victor Wiesel’s story of the Holocaust in Night. In his Nobel lecture, Wiesel identifies memory as very characteristic of what it means to be Jewish:

The call of memory, the call to memory, reaches us from the very dawn of history. No commandment figures so frequently, so insistently, in the Bible. It is incumbent upon us to remember the good we have received, and the evil we have suffered. New Year’s Day, Rosh Hashana . . ., the day of memory. . . Thus the rejection of memory becomes a divine curse, one that would doom us to repeat past disasters, past wars.\(^\text{19}\)

Morrison and Wiesel produce narratives that witness to the “unspeakable” for the sake of the future. Trauma theorists agree that there is an inherent amnesiac and belated quality to traumatic experience that makes total recall impossible.\(^\text{20}\) Imaginative writing, however, is certainly one means of bearing witness to trauma. Such narratives stand in the gap between the inability of the victim to remember or tell all and the power of the creative imagination to traverse where verbal telling cannot go. Narrative therefore is a way of moving towards mending the fragments, but it is always in the final analysis a creative reconstruction of the writer. The notion therefore of achieving a comprehensive narrative memory of trauma is not wholly possible; yet this does not diminish the importance of giving testimony wherein exists the possibility of a cure for the survivor, perpetrator and larger community. There is an “imperative to tell” according to Dori Laub, even though the telling cannot be fully captured in “thought, memory, and speech.”\(^\text{21}\)

Nevertheless, the ethical imperative to disclose suffering is not solely the responsibility of the victim or victims. It is also that of the community and in particular the creative writer who weaves memory, no matter


how fragmentary, into fiction. “Memory is everything,” writes van der Kolk and van der Hart.22 The act of retelling or finding a narrative is invaluable not merely in the absolute recall of specific facts but in the exercise of imaginative flexibility in the process of remembering, particularly in relation to how the encounters with perpetrator/s are re-presented. “Once flexibility is introduced,” van der Kolk and van der Hart contend, “the traumatic memory starts losing its power over current experience. By imagining alternative scenarios, many patients are able to soften the intrusive power of the original, unmitigated horror.”23 Although spoken from the perspective of clinical intervention, their insight provides an appropriate bridge to consider the role of trauma fiction in witnessing to such catastrophic experiences, since creative narrative has the power to compensate for memory as well as to provide, at the level of story-telling, those re-membered, “alternative scenarios” that can benefit all parties implicated: survivors, perpetrators and witnesses.

The Therapeutic Potential of Narrative

Paul Ricoeur’s recall in “On Stories and Mourning” of the epigraph Hannah Arendt used for her book The Human Condition seems appropriate here: “All sorrows may be borne if you may put them into a story or tell a story about them.”24 Ricoeur agrees that the network of relationships narratives build, in which agents or characters are called upon to speak and act, has a useful role in the process of relieving the burden of sorrows. He asks the critical question: “what resources does the ‘story’ have to make sorrow bearable?”25 In effect, Kearney, from whom he draws the terms of his questioning, supplies much of the answer. In the chapter from On Stories entitled, “Narrative Matters,” Kearney identifies seminal features that make stories capable of, among other things, addressing “psychic as well as physical suffering.”26 The Aristotelian feature called catharsis is central in this regard. The “cathartic power” of stories, according to Kearney, can stimulate change by “transporting us to other times and places where we can experience things otherwise.”27 The main emphasis here is on the mimetic capacity of narration to fictionalize truths and alter worlds of imagination that nurture

22 Bessel A. Van Der Kolk and Onno Van Der Hart, “The Intrusive Past: The Flexibility of Memory and the Engraving of Trauma,” in Trauma: Explorations in Memory, 178.
23 Ibid.
25 Ibid.
26 Kearney, On Stories, 6.
27 Ibid., 137.
empathy or feeling for and with others, in those who encounter them. Stories, then, have a powerful ethical role in humanizing sensibility, thereby closing the gap between the self and the other. Kearney writes:

We might say, consequently, that catharsis affords a singular mix of pity and fear whereby we experience the suffering of other beings as if we were them. And it is precisely this double-take of difference and identity – experiencing oneself as another and the other as oneself – that provokes a reversal of our natural attitude to things and opens us to novel ways of seeing and being.²⁸

The contents of mind and memory are made present in narrative so empathy, that is, seeing and feeling with and for others, becomes possible. Herein lies the therapeutic potential of narrative. The impact of catharsis is then not limited to mere empathic recognition but potentially offers compassionate remedy for sorrow. Stoeber goes a step further in the distinction he makes between empathy as “feeling-along-with others” and compassion as “feeling-along-with the suffering of others through a framework of love.”²⁹ The difference is critical because the latter implies a positive participatory dimension. Because it is the place where story and history overlap, what Aristotle calls “phronesis,” narratives must translate to an ethical and moral responsibility. The process of remembering, Judith Herman makes clear, is integral to setting right breached relations. She writes: “when we bear witness to what victims remember, we are inevitably drawn into the conflict between victim and perpetrator . . . . [I]t is impossible to maintain moral neutrality.”³⁰ Kearney therefore argues that “stories alter our lives as we return from text to action.”³¹

Ricoeur’s engagement with Kearney’s text in “On Stories and Mourning” seeks to both affirm and fill the gap that he perceives is left in Kearney’s discussion of the movement from empathy to responsibility. As a way of enriching Kearney’s discussion, he draws attention to the importance of the “work of mourning” which he feels must join the modalities of “action and “acting.” Narration makes these available to the listener/reader who is already oriented in that direction given that “life itself is in search of narrative.”³² He claims, however, that Kearney’s pointing to narrative and its codes or patterns does not in itself convincingly demonstrate that stories make “sorrow bearable.” What is needed, Ricoeur argues, is a more direct recognition of the centrality of loss itself in human experience, since “[l]oss is the overarching pattern into which sorrow fits.” Narrative is not

²⁸Ibid., 140.
²⁹Stoeber, Reclaiming Theodicy, 29.
³¹Kearney, On Stories,156.
a magic balm for suffering. Rather it plays a role in “working through” pain in order to “appease the complaint,” with mourning being, for Ricoeur, the equivalent of coming to the “acceptance of the irreparable.”

The loaded turn of phrase, the “acceptance of the irreparable,” suggests that recovery from traumatic suffering is never instantaneous or complete. Rather suffering that becomes transformative is really a life-enhancing way of living with the irrevocable experience of loss that echoes Soelle’s “learning” attitude. Transformation, therefore, is a way of life or “praxis” that requires an exercise of one’s inner resources to creatively resist the disempowerment that suffering can sometimes cause. In other words, to allow our retelling be synonymous with an exercise in cooperation with the divine momentum of “life force.” From this perspective, Ricoeur agrees with Kearney’s investment in the “common function of narrative as poesis: that is, a way of making our lives into life-stories.” Kearney does in fact explore with more concentration the symbiotic relationship between narrative and wounded-ness and its implication—a loss of some kind of wholeness. In “Writing Trauma: Catharsis in Joyce, Shakespeare and Homer,” he offers some fruitful insights into the complex relationship between the wound and the act of writing. His focus is the father-son wound, manifested as a “curse of cyclical repetition” in literary works like Hamlet, Odyssey and Ulysses.

All these stories happen to be about trans-generational trauma, with healing understood as a process of “[w]orking through as writing through” the wound. Drawing on the impulse to transcend the tragic and the role of mythos-mimesis discussed by Aristotle in Poetics, Kearney makes a compelling connection between what he calls in Aristotelian fashion, “narrative catharsis,” and the relief that leads to transfiguration or transformation. He writes that narrative catharsis is not to be understood as “closure or completion. Rather as impossible story: story telling which forever fails to cure trauma but never fails to try to heal it, … [through] the purgation of pity and fear.” Applied to a broader context, it is arguable that not only can writing heal the writer or teller but also the audience or readers of such narratives. One can go even further to say that these can be teaching resources for creatively responding to suffering in the world.

The relationship between trauma and narrative is admittedly a problematic one. Narrative, however, is a powerful basis for healing of victims, perpetrators and bystanders alike primarily because it functions as an

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33 Ibid., 8.
34 M. Scott Peck, The People of the Lie, 42.
35 Kearney, On Stories, 129.
37 Ibid., 4.
instrument for witnessing. This is because trauma evokes the response of avoidance and silence, being too
terrible to even utter aloud, which Herman asserts, is the meaning of the word “unspeakable.”\(^{38}\) Anne
Whitehead admits that the recently bandied term “trauma fiction” represents a “paradox or contradiction”
precisely because it “overwhelms the individual and resists language or representation.”\(^{39}\) Whitehead draws on
Caruth’s work to explore the implications for narrative fiction, beginning with her understanding of trauma as a
crisis of historical experience wherein the linearity of time is interrupted by a condition of “deferred action” or
“belatedness.”\(^{40}\) Narrative structure and language, she recognizes, sometimes attempt to mimic traumatic
“forms and symptoms.”\(^{41}\) Ghost stories and fragmentary testimonials, experimentation with non-linearity,
fractured timelines and subjectivities, and multiple plots and voices are characteristic of trauma fiction.

The interpretive experience of trauma in fiction will continue to be elusive, as it is “suspended between
event and symptom,” suggesting, as already recognized, that such experiences rest in the depths of the
unconscious, which renders communicability difficult and the articulation of the healing process particularly
challenging. Yet, the memories of these atrocities continue to surface, hence the reason why telling begins a
potentially healing dialectic or conversation. Soelle is helpful in this regard. She links the movement from the
passive endurance of suffering to redemptive suffering, which can “humanize” in a “productive way,” to the
“need” for a “language” to express it. If “the lack of communication, the dissolution of meaningful and
productive ties” is what makes for suffering, then its alleviation requires speech.\(^{42}\) Apart from seeing silence as
analogous to the notion of a “mute God,” Soelle writes, that the “sufferer himself must find a way to express
and identify his suffering . . . . If people cannot speak about their affliction they will be destroyed by it or
swallowed up by apathy.”\(^{43}\) Trauma theorists corroborate this critical link between the power to articulate pain
and transformation. Herman writes “Remembering and telling truth about terrible events are essential tasks both
for the healing of individual victims, perpetrators, and families, and for the restoration of the social order.”\(^{44}\)

\(^{38}\) Herman, “Crime and Memory,” 4.
\(^{40}\) Ibid., 6.
\(^{41}\) Ibid., 3.
\(^{42}\) Soelle, *Suffering*, 75.
\(^{43}\) Ibid., 75.
\(^{44}\) Herman, “Crime and Memory,” 4-5.
Witnessing—Beyond the Wound

If as Kearney writes, “[m]emory and story cross in mourning,” then narrative can function in ways that have transformative possibilities. Whitehead, however, presents a more cautious intervention when she writes, “trauma, like fiction, occupies an uncertain, but nevertheless productive, site or place between content and form.” Kearney’s analysis of the wound and writing adds an invaluable insight from the perspective of the distinction he makes between the “wound” and the “scar.” Though the traumatic wound is “timeless” the scar “appears in time: it is the carnal trace which can change and alter over time though it never disappears. Scars are written on the body; they are forms of proto-writing. And narrative catharsis is the process of working through such carnal traces.” Trauma narratives like Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*, Sapphire’s *Precious*, Edwidge Dandicat’s *The Dew Breaker*, Weisel’s *Night*, Wilkomirski’s *Fragments*, and in the case of this study, Hopkinson’s *Midnight Robber* and Wilson Harris’s *Palace of the Peacock*, are preoccupied with the outworking of such crises of truth and dissociations from self and reality that negatively impact individuals and communities. These fictions are rich resources for understanding human suffering, its particularity and ultimate universality.

Moreover, such tales of suffering are witnessing mediums that establish an ethical bond between speaker and listener. The text in this sense creates a community of witnesses, “so that the very act of reading comprises a mode of bearing witness.” This link between the text as a witnessing medium and the pact of ethical responsibility developed by the reading community demonstrates not only the “transmissibility” of trauma via empathetic identification, but also allows insight into the psychological and emotional impact of the experience. The community is called to responsibility at two levels. Firstly to support the healing process and secondly to ensure it never recurs. So psychology and theology in particular can learn from the insights developed in the areas of trauma research and literary narratives. They powerfully bring to the fore one of the principal and recurrent concerns of these disciplines, that is, the nature of authentic redemptive suffering.

These fields of research hold the possibility of working through scars left by wounds that never quite disappear, but nevertheless become central to the process Kearney describes as “traversing wounds on the way...”

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46 Whitehead, *Trauma Fiction* 162.
to healing” when given witness to as story. 49 He writes that such stories are “somehow transfigured in the writing of the stories themselves.” 50 Kearney’s use of narrative as a hermeneutic for reading trauma is in itself a rich theological resource. Shelly Rambo picks up on the theological implications of his application of the word “transfigured.” She argues that it demonstrates he is primarily interested in the transformative capacity of what she calls “recognition-resurrection texts,” with the Thomas story, for instance, being a Gospel prototype. Thomas receives illumination through the scarred flesh of the resurrected Christ in a way that aligns with Kearney’s suggestion that “the scars write the past forward; they can become a site for healing.” 51

Further, Rambo makes an important theological connection between the “cross” Kearney discerns between “memory and story” and the experience of loss and mourning. This intersection has direct bearing on the healing capacity of narrative trauma available even in the reading of the Gospels’ post Passion stories. In St John’s gospel (21.24-25), for instance, she considers “the figure of remaining” in the aftermath of Jesus’s death and contends that “[a] traumatic reading of St. John’s text opens up the theological language to imagine a haunted existence for those who walk in the aftermath of the Gospel.” Through the literary trope of “ghosts,” she contends, what the text hands over to the reader is “the survivor, the remaining one indirectly named love.” What Rambo provocatively invites is the possibility for considering how “[t]his question of remaining resonates across theological and literary texts, speaking to the power of [literature and] literary criticism in the twenty-first century to testify to and beyond [italics mine] the haunting truths of history.” 52 That “beyond” is theology’s persistent preoccupation both with life in this present world of travail and the New Testament hope in Christ’s eschatological promise. (1Peter 1:3-6).

Conclusion

Narrative trauma intersects with theology’s concern with establishing “Kingdom” values and living as an earthly and not just eschatological reality. Such stories provide a literary geography for tracing and understanding the ways in which sufferers discover the way to transformed lives in spite or perhaps because of

49 Kearney, “Writing Trauma,” 1.
50 Ibid.
52 Shelly Rambo, “Haunted (by the) Gospel: Theology, Trauma, and Literary Theory in the Twentieth-First Century PMLA 125, no. 4 (October, 2101): 940.
their personal or group crises. Theology can therefore find in literature a tried and living terrain for comprehending the often hidden recesses of suffering and renewal. Stories are particularly valuable resources for articulating a spirituality of suffering as they often illuminate the behavioral patterns and ambivalences of motive that mark the workings of the human psyche, making it difficult to simplistically spiritualize the suffering of victims, the motives of perpetrators and the nature of resistance to oppression in the interest of change. More so, by seeking to consciously expand the literary geography occupied by trauma theory, literary criticism and theological discourse on suffering and transcendence to include postcolonial contexts, the universality which the church of Christ St Paul proclaims (Gal. 3: 28) is more concretely realized.
Chapter Two

Healing the Perpetrator—Redemption Renewed

Introduction

If remembering is a significant part of healing trauma, psychiatrist Judith Lewis Herman asks the pertinent question, “What do perpetrators remember?” Her inquiry is made in the context of a noted “professional ignorance” on the matter:

We know so very little about the inner lives of people who commit atrocities . . . . We know so little about perpetrators, first of all, because they have no desire for the truth to be known; on the contrary, all observers agree on their deep commitment to silence and deception . . . . In general, we have wanted to know very little.  

This chapter seeks to contribute to breaking the “silence” that has surrounded the perpetrator. To adequately address the problem of traumatic suffering, it is necessary to incorporate, more consciously, that half of the story into the redemptive process. Theological and psycho-spiritual discourses on suffering, and by extension on pastoral care, like Herman’s discipline, have generally paid little attention to this dimension perhaps for reasons Herman states. Victims have generally been the primary concern, and rightly so. They are, after all, the disadvantaged who require healing, justice and compassionate support. Scripture presents God as being especially caring to the oppressed (1Samuel 2:8). Jesus radically demonstrated compassion for his society’s outcasts and the voiceless ones: lepers, widows, strangers, the poor, the disabled and marginalized in every sphere (Luke 6:20-21).

The Christian message, however, is fundamentally for “all creation,” all people (Mk 16: 15). The problem of suffering and the call to interior transformation, therefore, is only partially addressed if perpetrators are not drawn into the circle of healing. A difficult task, admittedly, since free will grants one the choice to refuse self-honesty, contrition and change. Nevertheless, a holistic theological reading of the cross of Jesus Christ necessitates an approach that figures not only the downtrodden or the wounded ones. It is for this reason that Cynthia Crysdale advocates a new theology of suffering for all persons, whether victim or victimizer,

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1Judith Lewis Herman, “Crime and Memory,” 5.
particularly since “everyone is both a perpetrator and a victim of sin” at one point or another. Cynthia Hess articulates a similar insight. She writes: “All human beings can embody both violence and nonviolence . . . . [H]uman beings need not be traumatized to be constructed as sites of violence . . . . To put it in language that the Christian traditions have used, human beings are profoundly broken, even as they are regenerated by God’s grace.”

Crysdale’s insight that the perpetrator is never entirely a stranger to any person, and Hess’s argument that no one can really escape embodying violence in some form or fashion, suggest that the generally hidden stories of those who harm others will reveal their own wounded-ness. Stoeber draws attention to this inherent brokenness when he writes, “Suffering can be triggered by an extremely wide range of phenomena and contexts . . . .” These include “guilty feelings over the abuse of power . . . .” The comment is not to be taken lightly as it assists in opening a trajectory towards the necessary consideration of perpetrators’ inner lives and their possible conversion and healing. In the context of Caribbean and postcolonial histories of conquest and colonization, the figure of the perpetrator has all but haunted the cultural discourses that give consideration to the movement of its peoples through forgiveness and reconciliation from the atrocities of colonialism.

In his essay, “The Muse of History” (1970), Derek Walcott intuits a shared anguish and need for reconciliatory release when he writes, “But who in the New World does not have a horror of the past, whether his ancestor was torturer or victim? Who, in the depth of conscience, is not silently screaming for pardon or revenge?” The sense of contrition implied here on the part of perpetrators suggests that they too share, albeit differently, in the pain of abuse and desire relief. Conversely, the victim is not removed from engaging in retaliatory violence, which will be explored in Chapter Three. Healing is necessary so that the restoration of right relations can take place on both sides. This, however, depends on the vision of God as fully accessible to all peoples and that conversion is possible. The Caribbean’s originating cross-cultural ethic provided, as gift and possibility, the challenge of growing together beyond the hierarchical social conventions instituted by colonialism. Yet the continued engagement with the perpetrator, especially in literary expression, suggests that “haunted” history is still in some ways unresolved.

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This chapter therefore draws attention to the repeated thematic of breached relations in the context of colonialism as a necessary starting point. Chapter Three, however, will significantly expand the discussion to address post-Empire trajectories of domination, against the error of stereotyping of the perpetrator.

Nevertheless, in relation to Wilson Harris’s focus on the perpetrator in *Palace of the Peacock*, the relevance remains of Stuart Hall’s call for deeper authenticity in the incorporation of the once historically dominant “Présence Européenne” into the character of what it means to be Caribbean. One of his probing questions is as follows: how can we “recognize its [Europe’s] irreversible influence, whilst resisting its imperializing eye . . . .”6 One cannot simply presume that such an impulse still persists in all persons. Nonetheless, the reconstitution of relations based on a reciprocated “look” of acceptance hints at the need, not completely outdated in the view of some, for a deeper reconciliatory conversation. Such a dialogue goes even beyond the European presence in multicultural Trinidad. In this regard, Trinidadian novelist, Earl Lovelace, for instance, sees the role of artists as bridge forming, “They will have to take up the challenge to shorten the distance between the sides, between self and what is perceived as “Other.””7

As this chapter will show, creative expression, like literature, takes greater risks in imaginatively bridging these uncomfortable gaps, as well as in providing insight into difficult to access areas of silence in relation to suffering, including that of the victimizer noted by Herman. Crysdale references the Biblical Cain to make her case for the inherent wounded-ness of all perpetrators. This will be discussed in more detail later in the chapter. Although the perpetrator is a wounded individual, Crysdale argues this “is not to say that every person of dominating power ought to be exonerated for his [or her] sins because he [or she] is in fact a victim.” The greater issue is knowing that the cycle of violence can only be terminated and “true transformation” realized by both “victims discovering responsibility and perpetrators embracing wounds.”8

Albeit, Crysdale’s model seems to work best for wounded-perpetrators and so does not adequately address those unrepentant, egocentrically absorbed individuals who have the propensity for horrendous evil, and who are not easily seen first as “victims.” One may well wonder about the redemption possibilities for such persons. Further, not every victim will deliberately or consciously pass on his or her pain. Yet, it remains highly

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likely that unless pain is healed and transformed, at some point or the other, it will be transmitted in behaviors, of whatever magnitude, that sabotage the full flourishing of the self and others. It is helpful therefore to distinguish between perpetrators who are not easily identified as acting out of some unhealed hurt and the more obvious wounded-perpetrator. This study, however, rests on the solidity of Crysdales’s Christological view that transformation involves a process of coming to understand that “discovering oneself in Jesus involves grasping very completely the experience of being crucified and of crucifying.”

This approach to the Christian redemptive journey realistically reveals the inherent instability of polarities as victim/victimizer. To maintain them too rigidly would be to risk being reductive.

The general trend, according to Dorothee Soelle, seems to be that “[o]nly those who themselves are suffering will work for the abolition of conditions under which people are exposed to senseless, patently unnecessary suffering.”

For the purposes of this chapter, however, it is helpful to recognize with her the possibility that a person can “turn” or be converted in a way that he or she is “able to suffer with those who are suffering and to participate in their struggle.”

The movement towards authentic reconciliation is possible for the offender who desires transformation. This chapter is concerned with such a probability. Caution, however, needs to be exercised against the temptation to adopt flattened, stereotypical categories such as victim and victimizer. Focus is therefore given to perpetrator figures in two narratives to demonstrate this complexity. The first is the Gospel story of Zacchaeus, the tax collector, told in Luke 19:1-10. This text provides an opportunity to consider Jesus’s role as a healing catalyst for those who harm others, as well as the tendency to want to deny them mercy. From the Christian perspective, Jesus is the source of transformative grace needed to make that “turn” of conversion Soelle mentions. The second figure comes from the novel, Palace of the Peacock, by Guyanese-born writer, Wilson Harris. Attention will be given to the main character, Donne, who represents the typical oppressor in the context of New World colonization. Harris’s treatment of Donne’s up-river journey provides a revealing intersection with the movement towards right relations one sees played out in the conversion story of Zacchaeus.

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9Ibid.154.
10Dorothee Soelle, Suffering, 2-3.
11Ibid., 3.
The Christian path to authentic conversion requires the willingness to be sensitive, according to Crysdale, to "wounds as well as sins, healing as well as forgiveness." Redemption from such a perspective implies that the victim has to become a responsible agent in his or her healing. Perpetrators also have to recognize they are wounded individuals and so need healing and forgiveness for the ways in which they harm those who happen to be weaker than they are. From this theological perspective Crysdale articulates the need for a "double-sided approach to redemption," which embraces both victim and victimizer:

Turning the cycle around involves one person, at least, refusing to perpetuate it. The wounded person, rather than passing on the pain, embraces the pain and seeks healing. Such healing enables him to forgive, and such forgiveness frees his perpetrator from defensive living. This person, in turn, is free to face her own pain and seek forgiveness for her harmful actions. So the cycle becomes not victim-perpetrator-victim, but healed-forgiven-healed. Though not all persons consciously pass on their pain, this liberation formula encapsulates a holistic approach that considers pain from two sides of the equation. On the part of the victimizer, Crysdale's approach addresses the failure to call him or her to responsibility, and so, from experiencing the freedom of having received forgiveness and having worked through the often slow process of reconciliation. One essential lesson can be drawn from Crysdale's effort to articulate a renewed cycle of liberation—all persons are inherently wounded no matter what side of the dyad they happen to occupy at any given point in time. Her liberation circuit as "healed-forgiven-healed" remains true, therefore, to the basic "creatureliness" of all persons in the context of a simultaneously graced and disgraced world.

The Cain and Abel story is Crysdale’s theological model for engaging the wounded nature of the perpetrator, which proves applicable to this chapter’s focus. As will be discussed later, Cain, in her reading, is the prototypical perpetrator who operates from an inherent self-dissatisfaction and lack that fuel his act of biocide. The human condition is understood as a kind of exile or alienation from the true self in God, referred to as “original sin,” out of which Cain and his parents acted. The separated, wounded Self yearns for (re)union with the Divine and because of that alienation, humanity is a race that simultaneously wounds and is wounded. What is more, social convention can act as a strong reinforcement for attitudes of privilege or entitlement, or rejection and disenfranchisement that can fuel violence. Cain, for instance, also carried the grouse of being an overlooked first born because God’s favor was directed to Abel. This Old Testament template provides a useful

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12 Crysdale, Embracing Travail, 25.
13 Ibid.
means of looking at the perpetrator and its thematic development in one New Testament case. The chapter looks first at the story of Zacchaeus, which recounts his healing as a result of an encounter with Jesus. Secondly, the story of Donne’s rather tumultuous journey to conversion in Harris’s Palace of the Peacock is discussed.

“Zacchaeus Hurry and Come Down:” Descending the Tree of Pride

Scripture offers an irreplaceable resource for addressing the perpetrator’s predicament and need for transformative change, beyond the spontaneous attention given to the healing of the victim’s wounds. Luke’s gospel, 19: 1-10 (NRSV), tells the story of Zacchaeus, the chief tax collector, who climbed a sycamore tree in order to get a glimpse of Jesus as he passed by. The text describes him as being “short in stature” (v. 3.) According to Mikeal Parsons, this particular detail is significant because “physical description of a character in the NT is rare.”

In Jewish culture at the time of Jesus, there existed a widespread “‘physiognomic consciousness’” that linked physical attributes and inner qualities or character traits. Zacchaeus’s conversion therefore works symbolically with culturally developed identity markers. He is, as Parsons argues, condemned by his own people on two scores, his “congenital defect” and his “dishonesty” as chief tax collector. Shortness is an external sign of Zacchaeus’s “small-mindedness,” manifested in his dishonest materialism that betrayed the meaning of his name, that is, innocent or pure.

As far as the crowd is concerned, the tax collector is beneath Jesus’s attention because he colludes with the ruling Roman colonizers in their victimization. They therefore brand him a spiritual outcast, a “sinner” unworthy of redemption, and so grumble when Jesus indicates his intention to stay at his house (Lk 19: 7). Jesus, however, models for them a different way. While redemptive punishment may be an attractive option for the crowd, the Christian chooses the nonviolent route of mercy. So although the members of the crowd feel morally superior because they enjoy favor as “children of Abraham” (v.9), Jesus challenges their retaliatory and exclusionary attitude by extending him welcome. A remarkable openness to change emerges in the tax collector that makes it impossible to simply condemn him. He is the despised “sinner” who also suffers their rejection of

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16Ibid., 52.
17Ibid., 55.
18Ibid., 54. See also page 53 where the physical “smallness is argued to be associated with a disposition that is “small-minded” or greedy.
him. Jesus intervenes, offering Zacchaeus a moment of grace by announcing his intention to “stay” at his house (v. 5). Yet, it cannot be overlooked that Jesus risks, in accordance with Jewish law, ritual contamination by being in the presence of a public sinner. His act of mercy is critical as it provides an opening for repentance. Zacchaeus feels undeservedly elevated by the gesture and promptly promises to make good with all those he had cheated. Forgiveness and compassion are established as superior values. The tax collector is publicly declared by Jesus to be also a “son of Abraham” and so deserving of “salvation” (v. 9). Moreover, Jesus overturns the simplistic sinner/virtuous binary from which the crowd viewed the conflict.

Jesus is the redeeming presence that invites the embrace of one’s best self. The invitation he issues to Zacchaeus to “come down” is a call to leave his damaged selfhood behind and to move towards greater authenticity. Relevant to the tax-collector’s predicament is Crysdale’s contention that

. . . while communities are structured in a way that socializes some to have a sense of power and pride while others consider themselves meek and malleable, both sides of sin must be discerned and repudiated. . . . For those reared to expect choice and success, facing the demise of Self by others may mean seeing how they are boxed in and unable to flourish by the very power they have inherited.19

The insight dovetails with Zacchaeus’ situation. As the enemy of the people, in league with the oppressive state, his privileged social status imprisons him in an identity that is a millstone around his neck. Unburdening himself of his pride and guilt as the perpetrator of his own people’s suffering must involve a “descent” from his inauthenticity. He must responsibly embrace both his personal wounds and those he has caused others.

The movement to change obviously depends on the perpetrator’s openness to a life-changing conversion experience. The catalyst in his conversion is of course Jesus. Crysdale makes an interesting point, following the work of Sharon Welch, that operating from an “ethic of risk” rather than an “ethic of control” is far more effective in increasing the probability that transformative grace can work for a positive, life-giving result. In the case of the latter, one is more focused on controlling the outcome. The former aims at the “creation of new conditions whereby transformation may take place.”20

Jesus, then, is the risk-taker who issues an invitation to Zacchaeus to free himself from his deceptive lifestyle by admitting his guilt and seeking to make amends. Of course, grace offers no guarantees. It however enhances the possibility for change. So Crysdale is

20Ibid., 42.
therefore not claiming that every perpetrator will respond. Grace, however, gives them an opportunity to embrace their pain that wounds others and so resolve to change.

How then to theologize the condition of the perpetrator? Utilizing the Cain and Abel story to unpack the process by which Cain becomes the murderer of his brother, Crysdale contends that perpetrators are inherently motivated by a sense of inadequacy or misconceived ambition (pride), as in the case of Cain. She writes that in the story of the brothers “sin” snowballs from the “misbegotten ambition” of Adam and Eve to usurp God. “Cain is not only angry at God but hates Abel himself, hates him for having entered the kind of relationship that Cain wished he himself might have.”\(^{21}\) In other words, the divine favor and capacity for intimacy Cain thinks he lacks in himself, but sees in Abel, results in biocide, perhaps out of jealousy. For Crysdale, that inner “lack” penetrates even deeper to Cain’s inherent refusal to accept his identity as created creature and not Creator. So “[r]ather than face the ambiguity of being both finite and oriented toward the infinite, the Cains of the world . . . ‘murder’ anyone who is ‘other,’ hoping to protect themselves from both the vicissitudes of being a creature and the awesomeness of facing the divine. In the process, they murder their own Selves.”\(^{22}\) Of course, such “murders” have many faces: race and ethnic prejudice, religious bigotry, sexism, classism and homophobia. At the heart of this violence is the twisted refusal to allow the “others” of this world their full dignity as persons in equal communion with others. They must therefore be systematically oppressed, even annihilated.

Crysdale reminds us that the initial breach of relationship with the Divine originates with Adam and Eve. It is therefore a manifestation of the human self-alienating “propensity to not become our true Selves,” which she sees as being the very “essence of sin.”\(^{23}\) She draws on Sebastian Moore’s definition of sin as the “alienation between the conscious ego of man and a total self in which he has his place in God’s world.”\(^{24}\) Salvation, then, is the ability, through grace, to overcome this alienation. This crisis of Self is resolved by the crucifixion of Jesus, the one who “represents for us our own potential Self—the deep and hidden person we are before God—which we crucify rather than allow to live.”\(^{25}\) One can therefore say that Zacchaeus suffers from that inherent self-alienation and tendency to sabotage the expression of his deepest identity as a son of God by

\(^{21}\)Ibid., 14.
\(^{22}\)Ibid.
\(^{23}\)Ibid., 13.
\(^{24}\)Ibid., 9.
\(^{25}\)Ibid., 8.
preying on his people. In Jesus, he intuits the possibility of encountering that Self he “murdered” by his
exploitative lifestyle. He pledges to “repay” half his possessions to the poor, and to those he cheated to “pay
back four times the amount” (Lk19:8). In so doing, the cycle of abuse is broken. He too becomes, in this
instance, a participant in the “ethic of risk” as his decision to make amends seeks, without full certitude, to
create the “new conditions” that can restore the broken relationship with his people. They are free to refuse him
if they so choose, just as he could have refused to cooperate with Jesus’s offer of salvation.

Very useful for framing the needs of the perpetrator is Crysdale’s identification of the distinct but not
unrelated categories of “healing” and “elevating” grace.\textsuperscript{26} Grace is not merely therapeutic for the one who
needs elevation. It can also be healing through the experience of forgiveness for transgression, needed
especially by perpetrators. Both aspects can operate simultaneously in the person. She notes, however, that “the
challenge of human authenticity is to discern and live within the creative tension of limitation and
transcendence.” Pride is the “sin” of “too much transcendence,”\textsuperscript{27} one might add false transcendence, motivated
by an interior, perhaps even unconscious sense of fear or dissatisfaction with one’s limitations and finiteness.
The remedy for the perpetrator is, paradoxically, to descend in order to rise up. Critical in this regard is the
healing of self-alienating pride that feeds on authoritative power and is sustained by exploitative greed in order
to escape the fear of vulnerability.

In terms of the symbolic framework of the Zacchaeus story, the sycamore tree he climbs to “see” Jesus
evokes the redemptive experience he perhaps subconsciously seeks. The movement to conversion for Zacchaeus
begins when he is able to confront his longing for authenticity. He is therefore open to Jesus’s invitation to
“come down” from his self-sabotaging tree of false pride and greed, in order that he might begin the graced
ascent of the real tree of his salvation, Jesus Christ. The “law” of the cross of Jesus and dynamic of recovery
illuminated by the Zacchaeus story is reinforced by Crysdale’s insistence that since we are “socialized into an
entire nexus of distorted assumptions about what it means to be human (the privileged as well as the
oppressed),” there needs to be “an intervention into the distorted cycles of alienation.”\textsuperscript{28} That intervention into
human history is divine “grace” and its materialization is the person of Jesus. Divine grace, which is always
God’s initiative, facilitates conversion. Bernard Lonergan aptly describes conversion as a “change of course and

\textsuperscript{26}Ibid., 133.
\textsuperscript{27}Ibid., 144.
\textsuperscript{28}Ibid., 130 and 134 respectively.
direction.”

Its impact, Crysdale adds, is manifested as a “process of growth” that “involves an about-face, a dramatic reversal of previously known meanings and values.”

**Palace of the Peacock—Plotting Harris’s Interior Journey**

In his novel, *Palace of the Peacock*, Wilson Harris provides a useful literary parallel to the Zacchaeus story. The novel is set on the South American continent, in the author’s Guyanese homeland. Its main character, a conquistador-type figure named, Donne, is this chapter’s primary focus. He is the descendant of European colonizers and carries the “rich first name” of privilege and abusive power. In the context of the novel, he represents the unbroken link with that history of exploitation. The plot, which tracks a surreal and perilous upriver trip through the South American interior, functions as an allegory for the interior journey of soul. Each of its four books relates to a different stage of that journey and each marks a deeper paring away towards the unencumbered, spiritual Self. Further, the fragmentated stories and memories that comprise the narrative defy any possibility to map a linear plot. Their seemingly haphazard and web-like arrangement mirror the traumatized consciousness of the inheritors of the landscape. Events are more circular than linear, and describe a rending process of losing false identities and the stripping of deceptions based on abusive power and material possession.

The novel’s first book, “Horseman, Pass By,” introduces Donne’s exploitative and violent rule over the indigenous peoples. He rules with a “dead seeing material eye.” His opposite, is his twin brother called, “Dreamer,” who represents Donne’s underdeveloped spiritual self, hence, he sees with a “living closed spiritual eye.” Donne’s self-absorbed ego is challenged by his presence. Dreamer is the text’s partial I-narrator. There is also a third person narrator. Next the crew, led by Donne, is introduced. The members are a compression of the region’s wounded and fractured histories, as well as its cross-cultural diversity and latent psycho-spiritual possibility. In addition to their leader, the boat carries the da Silva twins, Schomburgh, the bowman, Vigilance, his cousin, Carroll, the nephew or son of Schomburgh and half-brother of Vigilance. There is also Cameron, Jennings, the mechanic, Wishrop, the steersman and captain’s understudy.

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31 Wilson Harris, *Palace of the Peacock* (London: Faber and Faber, 1960), 84.
32 Ibid., 14.
33 Ibid.
Beyond their superficial differences, however, all the crew members are presented as one interconnected body of new and old occupants who seek, even if unconsciously, a transformed mode of being and belonging to the landscape. All are “dead” like their leader in one way or another. They each carry the shameful ghosts and wounds of individual and collective histories, inclusive of murder, unintended incestuous relationships and the abandonment of familial responsibility. All deeply desire to pass through the illusory spiritual “door” to inner freedom.\(^\text{34}\) Their initial destination is an Amerindian settlement called Mariella where Donne hopes to capture a fugitive tribe. Mariella is also the name of his much abused but defiant concubine. She is Donne’s murderer in the “dream” his twin brother has at the opening of the novel. The second book entitled, “The Mission of Mariella,” evokes the intersection between the colonized mission site and the native woman who represents the oppressive plight of her people. They are tied by Donne’s oppressive rule to an economic system that reduces them to mere labor capital. He represents the soul-killing, imperialist and materialistic drive of that violent age.

When the crew actually arrives at the Mariella Mission, for instance, they discover that the indigenous tribe had already relocated, except for an old Arawak woman. They are required to go further into the forest and, to do so, force the “Arawak” woman to be their guide into the unknown territory beyond the mission settlement. This leg of the journey, told in the third book, is significantly called “The Second Death.” It takes a symbolic seven days and so evokes the transitory movement to a new creation or selfhood. Many members of the crew die mostly by drowning as they struggle to navigate the turbulent “War Office” rapids. The battle, however, is also with the inner self as personal ghosts emerge, seeking forgiveness and reconciliation. In the end, only Donne and two others arrive at a massive waterfall after losing the boat. The pursued tribe is never reencountered, though there is the suggestion that roles are reversed—the Amerindians become their pursuers. Except for the cryptic Arawak woman, the tribe remains illusive but present.

The final leg of the expedition, “Paling of Ancestors,” is marked by the remnant crew’s difficult climb up the face of a steep waterfall. The ascent represents the final stripping of all illusions and masks of identity before entry into the mystical realm of the “peacock,” Harris’s symbol for a heavenly state of consciousness and Divine union. Donne begins to climb the falls as if it were a “ladder.”\(^\text{35}\) The allusion to Jacob’s ladder is unmistakable (Gen 28:10-19). At this point, empty of all their possessions, material and psychological, the inner

\(^{34}\)Ibid., 119.
\(^{35}\)Ibid., 129.
growth that facilitates a glimpse of the unmasked, inner Self becomes possible. Harris imagines this state as an encounter with an original innocence and beauty that the native peoples embody, but that Donne ironically seeks to destroy, reminiscent of the Abel-Cain conflict discussed earlier. As Donne ascends, he gazes longingly into “windows” in the face of the rock, evidence of the access he gains to his interior life. The eyes of his “soul” as opposed to his “dead” material eye begin to grow stronger. Each window allows him a transformative engagement with the unhealed aspects of his self.

Like the seven Biblical days of the Judeo-Christian creation story, Donne comes via a mystical encounter with a Christ-like carpenter figure and a Madonna and child to a new vision of himself. He recognizes that he is but a participant in a cosmic unity where there is no place for the hierarchical, violent, material ethic of his old life. His journey ends or rather begins anew when he crosses over, significantly on the seventh day, into a transcendent realm of being called the “palace of the peacock.” At this point, Donne mystically merges with his twin brother as the I-narrator, who describes the “palace” as a return to an Edenic state where the tree of life flourishes. That living tree evokes the crucified but resurrected Christ whose cosmic body is the enigmatic peacock’s.

The Perpetrator’s Conversion: The Journey Down is Up

Donne’s journey of conversion recalls Zacchaeus’s own re-creative movement, imaged in the Gospel text as a descent from the sycamore. It is a movement that strips him of his self-alienated pride and greed. So the downward movement to ground level is really Zacchaeus’s spiritual ascent to his more authentic self, made possible by his encounter with Jesus. The arrogant and abusive landowner of Harris’s novel shares the tax collector’s association with oppressive power and greed. Parallel to the tax collector’s conversion is the dramatic scene of Donne’s violent death. His brother dreams he is shot as he rides his horse:

A horseman appeared on the road coming at a breakneck stride. A shot rang out suddenly, near and far as if the wind had been stretched and torn and had started coiling and running in an instant. The horseman stiffened with a devil’s smile, and the horse reared, grinning fiendishly and snapping at the reins. The horseman gave a bow to heaven like a hanging man to his executioner, and rolled from his saddle on to the ground.36

His demise from the symbolic seat of his power and authority, at the opening of the novel, is a premonition of the spiritual conversion he must undergo, that is, the necessary death of his domineering pride.
and materialistic greed. These have transformed him into an almost diabolical presence in his abuse and pillage of the native peoples and their lands. The crass motivation for his relationship with them is pure self-interest. Called collectively, “the folk,” the people’s sudden and apparently unexpected disappearance is for him an inconvenient interruption of the plans he has for his estate. He therefore says in anger to Schomburgh: “Why the drought nearly done, and I got to have labor for my estate, my new rice planting, my cattle, everything. The folk just all can’t bloody well run away.” 

Donne’s language is absolutely self-referential, indicative of an extreme narcissistic ego. He has no real relationship with either the people or the land, and describes himself as “the last landlord” whose dominion is over “everything.”

Harris’ style typically employs a non-dualistic approach to character in order to avoid simplistic reductions and binaries in relation to personality. The plot therefore comprises complementary character types. The “Dreamer,” for instance, is the main counterpoint to Donne’s personality. He says of Donne: “he was myself standing outside of me while I stood inside of him.” Discussing the text’s complication of personality in this way, Hena Maes-Jelinek writes that,

The dual personality of Donne is presented both objectively and subjectively by a third-person and a first-person narrator. From the outset the horseman and his inseparable double, who, we realize later, is also his visionary self, are represented as the contrasting and divided parts of one being, who is both dead and alive. At this early stage, the I-narrator is eclipsed by the powerful deadness of Donne . . . .

As the novel develops, Donne is rather painfully stripped of his dominant “dead” or illusory “false self,” by which he actually feels burdened. A similar duality is established between Donne and Wishrop, his steersman and understudy. As names like Dreamer and Wishrop suggest, they represent the transcendent aspect of self that is subdued by Donne’s more aggressive, destructive side. He is actually haunted by a desire to change his behavior towards the native people and bears an awful weight of guilt and self-loathing. Donne articulates his desire for transformation in a conversation with his brother as follows:

“Changing my ways,” he spoke mildly and indifferently. “Not being so beastly and involved in my own devil’s schemes any more. Perhaps there’s a ghost of a chance that I can find a different relationship with the folk, who knows? Nothing to lose in trying. I suppose it’s what I’ve always really wanted.”

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37 Harris, Palace of the Peacock, 61.
38 Ibid., 17.
39 Ibid., 23.
42 Harris, Palace of the Peacock, 23.
43 Ibid., 57.
Similar to Zacchaeus, this desire for conversion complicates any reductive or stereotypical approach to the perpetrator. Though Donne is initially not fully aware of his deeper yearning for change, the inadequacy of his destructive way of life gradually comes to the surface during the ordeals of the river journey. He is brought closer to his own smallness and vulnerability by several factors. These include the crew’s vulnerability to the power of the wilderness and the rapids, the evasiveness of the Amerindians who were thought mere simpletons to be used, and the inability of the man-made boat to endure the river’s power. The futile investment he had made in authoritarian power and materialism gradually surfaces the further into the interior he journeys. Maes-Jelinek connects these many losses with a kind of redemptive divestment as he is “reduced to the nothingness before resurrection. . . .”

Crysdale’s interpretation of grace as a “general stirring up of Desire that grants us an “antecedent willingness” that “can carry us beyond ourselves, to horizons we would never have otherwise imagined,” resonates with Zacchaeus’s desire “to see who Jesus was” (Lk 19:3). There is a similar impulse in Donne’s wish to “change” his ways. He recognizes, for instance, that the Dreamer, his alter ego, has a certain capacity to take the personal responsibility necessary to realize the transformation he so deeply desires:

“I have treated the folk badly,” he admitted. . . . “I do wish,” he spoke musingly, “someone would lift it from my shoulders. Maybe who knows – he was joking – “you can. Your faith and intuition may be better than mine. I am beginning to lose all my imagination save that sometimes I feel I’m involved in the most frightful material slavery. I hate myself sometimes, hate myself for being the most violent taskmaster – I drive myself with no hope of redemption whatsoever and I lash the folk. If they do murder me I’ve earned it I suppose, and I don’t see sometimes how I can escape it unless a different person steps into my shoes and accepts my confounded shadow.”

This confession of gross error and recognition of the need to take responsibility to change his ways opens a window into Donne’s suppressed, spiritual side, which in the language of Thomas Merton can be called his “true self,” mirrored for him in the Dreamer, his visionary twin brother who he intuits is better equipped with the higher faculties of “faith and intuition.” It is a rudimentary beginning on the road of graced

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45Crysdale, Embracing Travail, 132.
46Harris, Palace of the Peacock, 56-57.
47Merton, Seeds of Contemplation, 31. Merton used this term to refer to self whose identity rests in the divine as opposed to the ego-centered “false self.” He also calls this self the “contingent ego” or “smoke-self,” 38.
transformation, but as Crysdale notes that as “mere insights or simple feelings these are only nascent hints, ones that need to be further understood, examined, confirmed, acted on.”

The seven-day journey that comprises Book III, *The Second Death*, functions as a transition phase to the new selfhood Donne desires but is yet buried beneath his violent lifestyle. The slow shattering of his false self is treated as an ordeal of purification. This process intensifies when they discover that the Amerindian settlement called Mariella had also been abandoned and the crew must accept to journey further on in search of the native people. It is not clear where they are going because only the Arawak guide knows where the “folk” might settle until the end of the drought. So it is truly an expedition into the unknown of landscape as well as consciousness, which serves to unmask the false self. His coerced guide, the old Amerindian woman, is also mysteriously an evocation of his lover and murderer, Mariella. She is the enigmatic embodiment of the primordial innocence of the landscape and its native peoples. The I-narrator describes the woman as having “the unfathomable patience of a god in whom all is changed into wisdom, all experience and all life when the grandiloquence of history and civilization was past.” Harris, in fact, links her with the sleeping Christ (Matt 8: 23-27) as she too sleeps through the turbulence of the rapids. Hers is the presence of absolute detachment and freedom from the burden of possessions and power. Although not at all romantically represented, for she is as complex as Donne himself, Harris does imbue her with transformative presence and power. The entire crew experiences her as simultaneously the elemental river, the ancient presence of wisdom and eternal youthfulness on which the foundation of all renewal rests:

The ruffles of the water were her dress rolling and rising to embrace the crew. This sudden insolence of soul rose and caught them from the power of her eyes and the age of her smile and the dust in her hair all flowing back upon them with silent streaming majesty and abnormal youth and in a wave of freedom and strength.

As a representative of the undaunted spirit of her people, she images for Donne, and the crew, the latent or dominant aspect of personality that needs to be awakened. The third-person narrator, for instance, points to this sleeping, dormant side of Donne. He is identified with a “nameless kinship of spirit older (though he did not yet apprehend it) than every material mask and label and economic form and solipsism.” The tables are turned rather ironically, as the guide to transformation and change is a member of the very people Donne

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49Harris, *Palace of the Peacock*, 72.
50Ibid., 102.
51Ibid., 73.
52Ibid., 85.
abuses, and a woman at that. Harris overturns the negative male power Donne represents and serves, thereby suggesting the need for a new rebalance. Like Jesus’s invitation to Zacchaeus to “come down,” Donne as he travels inland, undergoes a severe but transformative descent.

The passage through the War Office rapids is therefore a purgative stripping for all the crew. Various members drown, beginning with the youngest Carroll. Each loss and death, each exposure of hidden histories and personality, represents a little death, or shedding of masks of the false self. The loss of life therefore coincides with the death of the unhealthy, self-referential ego and material clinging as Donne and the crew transition to an awakened sense of their inherent sacred interconnectedness. In the process all false barriers of status and difference break down: “It was a partial rehabilitation of themselves, the partial rehabilitation of empty names and dead letters, dead as the buttons on their shirts.”

So when the boat strikes a “rock” and their hold on all that validated them begins to slip away, each felt that the “life they had clung to and known was turning into a backward incoherent dream . . . .”

The coming to consciousness that Harris visualizes, however, is never merely an individual or personal conversion. It involves coming to recognize the inherent community of all life and the unification of the material and immaterial worlds, matter and spirit. Personality is also not singular or individualistic but communal, so conversion is always towards a more life-giving reconciliation with and integration into the entire body of existence. So more than mere physical dying, Harris envisions the possible conversion of consciousness towards an embrace of the oneness of being. This radical interconnectivity is reflected in the author’s treatment of character and the fulfillment towards which each journeys. Maes-Jelinek writes, “the characters . . . do not embody one given personality but, rather, series of personalities born out of ‘one complex womb.’”

Immediately it becomes obvious that in Harris’s vision innocent/guilty binaries collapse as all are part of one body and are capable of switching roles at different periods and stages. All in all, it is a collective movement towards the closing of gaps and healing of divisions.

Then commences the move towards the final leg of the journey—Donne’s arrival at the majestic waterfall with the remaining two of his crew. Like the up-river journey, the ascent of the waterfall’s face, which begins in the final section of the novel, “Paling Ancestors,” is a descent from the perspective of it being a

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53Ibid, 100.
54Ibid., 100-101.
55Maes-Jelinek, “‘Numinous Proportions:’” Wilson Harris’s Alternative to All ‘Posts,’” in The Labyrinth of Universality, 536.
movement towards the unburdening of pride, aggression, self-illusion and appetite. Each makes his journey in a different way after multiple “deaths,” but the entire experience is filtered through Donne as he climbs the face of the waterfall to the mystical space or level of awareness called the “palace of the peacock.” The peacock is symbolic of the re-created and transformed/conscious selfhood. The many windows of the palace are really portals to the depths of soul and spiritual perception. Donne actually begins to see differently even as he loses his physical sight. The novel then comes full circle with its beginning where his need for conversion is imaged almost as a Pauline-like “fall” from his wild horse of brutal pride in the dream of his twin brother.

One can say that the ordeal and demise Donne suffers is in part a type of redemptive punishment for his behavior. Harris uses the term “nemesis” to evoke the occurrence of the consequential Divine judgment within the fabric of the natural world and human action. In his essay “Living Landscapes,” for instance, he writes, “Nature is not passive. Nature erupts into orchestras of Nemesis.”56 The turbulent river the crew navigates and the resultant loss of life, signify such an outcome. Donne’s violent relationship with the land and people is the primary but not the only cause. The river’s anger, as it were, is incidentally linked to the Amerindian woman and her people’s cry for justice. The narrator reveals that “every fear and inhibition and outcry” united with the “ruffles of the water [which] were her dress rolling and rising to embrace the crew.”57 In perhaps a similar vein, the dream or reality of Donne’s demise at the hands of Mariella, his ill-treated lover, is also a nemetic outcome. Harris is far from advocating violence as a solution to injustice. He does however see the possibility that unjust acts reap consequences.

The link may be difficult for some to forge. The Gospels, however, point to the “punishment” of those who have been given great responsibility, such as Donne, based on his resources and gifts, but have failed to live compassionately (Lk 12:47). This punishment is redemptive from the perspective that it offers the invitation to change and to live more fully from God’s compassionate mercy. The interior transformation Donne begins to experience as he is emptied, almost kenotically of his violent pride is made evident in the motif of blindness and sight first introduced at the opening of the novel, but returns at the end when he literally loses his ability to see. A significant look is exchanged between the dead Donne and his living, dreaming twin brother. It points to the birth of a more authentic interiority from which the former must begin to live in order to leave his dead, materialistic sight behind: “Watching me as I bent down and looked at the man whose open eyes stared at the

56 Harris, “Living Landscapes,” in Selected Essays of Wilson Harris, 43.
57 Harris, Palace of the Peacock, 73.
sky through his long hair. The sun blinded and ruled my living sight but the dead man’s eye remained open and obstinate and clear.\textsuperscript{58}

The mystical ascent, therefore, to a place of enlightenment and unity brings Donne into the awareness that aggressive pride and domineering habit will not allow him to achieve his deepest longing for spiritual union with the land, the people and the Divine. His greatest desire is to gain the “intimate attention” of the young carpenter he sees through a window in the face of the waterfall as he works away at a piece of wood with hammer and chisel. The figure evokes a transformative Christ-like presence that attracts him. He soon realizes, however, that his violent pounding at the pane to be let in, reminiscent of how he treated the original native peoples, keeps him alienated. Union is only possible on non-aggressive, non-selfish terms, which requires conversion. He needs to be further refashioned by the “craftsman of God,”\textsuperscript{59} represented in the text by the young carpenter. So like Zacchaeus, Donne must descend his tree of pride and material obsession, as well as relinquish operating from his authoritative attitude.

Significantly, Donne’s renewal involves a new encounter with the vulnerable but “eternal feminine,” imaged as a mother and child who occupy a room where he senses there is no “match” for “the spirit of warmth and existence.” Seeing them there, “he suddenly knew what he had missed before.”\textsuperscript{60} Inner transformation is evident from his experience of feeling somehow “free from the chains of illusion”\textsuperscript{61} that validated domination. Importantly, he is also privy to a vision of healed human relations and an original cosmic reordering disrupted by the economy of greed and exploitation he participated in. Zacchaeus interestingly sought to correct the damage his greed had done by promising to pay back double those he had robbed as a sign of his contrition and desire for reconciliation with the community.

A similar shift in Donne’s desiring is evident at this stage. He exhibits an insatiable yearning for a real expression of community and simplicity he never allowed himself. As his interior, spiritual eye opens he realizes that “all his life he had loved no one but himself.”\textsuperscript{62} His longing for union with the woman and child is simultaneously the desire to mend his relationship with this lover and her people so that it may truly bring forth life, a future. So only then, unburdened of all his illusions of power and privilege, he experiences that he is no

\textsuperscript{58}Ibid., 13.
\textsuperscript{59}Ibid., 132.
\textsuperscript{60}Ibid., 139.
\textsuperscript{61}Ibid., 151.
\textsuperscript{62}Ibid., 140.
longer a brutal alien. He comes to a powerful vision of reconciliation between himself, the members of his crew and the indigenous peoples he had so long abused. The novel’s plot, however, does not engage with the concrete expression of his transformation. He knew, nonetheless, that “they all had come home at last to the compassion of the nameless unflinching folk.”

The crew Donne leads up river enacts what Harris calls a “drama of living consciousness,” most easily described as the quest for psycho-spiritual wholeness. This is envisioned by the author as a slow process of purgation from destructive power to the greater consciousness of the interconnectedness of all life across time and space. In fact, a kind of mystical oneness unites the diverse members of the crew. Harris describes them as belonging to “one spiritual family living and dying together in a common grave out of which they had sprung again from the same soul and womb as it were.” It is possible to see a link with the end to which *Palace of the Peacock* moves and Stoeber’s comments about the “Resurrection experience” articulated by the character, Zosima, from Dostoevsky’s *The Brothers Karamazov*. He writes that the mystical dimension of reconciliation in the Christian context has two key dimensions of “sacred interconnectedness,” the individual and the cosmic, which implies “a connection between one’s own redemption and that of the rest of the world, including non-human elements.”

Donne’s redemption is characterized by an ordeal that strips him of everything that hinders that interconnection. In Crysdale’s terms, Donne experiences the grace of a “dramatic reversal of previously known meanings and values. Such a reversal is what conversion is all about.” His alter ego, the Dreamer, whose voice ends the narrative, and with whom Donne is finally connected, articulates the path to reconciliation as a return to a primal vision of oneness. The sign of this sacred communion is a mystical music by which he feels engulfed but not annihilated. It is a song, rendered by Carroll, of an original unity with all others and all creation: “Each of us now held in his arms what he had been forever seeking and what he had eternally possessed.” This unity is the aim of Zacchaeus’s reconciliatory effort. It is also a movement towards an embrace of the true self that Christ compassionately calls forth.

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63Ibid., 143.  
65Harris, *Palace of the Peacock*, 40.  
68Harris, *Palace of the Peacock*, 152.
Conclusion

Crysdale’s “double-sided” cycle of redemption no doubt shies away from addressing the hardened, ever-resistant perpetrator. Donne is one such, but he at least comes to transformation after intense losses over a long period, inclusive of his life. Harris does not treat time as linear or personality as singular so it is possible that Donne’s process takes several lifetimes. Nevertheless, as a descendant of the colonizing class, he perpetuated his forefathers’ “sin” of entitlement and privilege. This is his particular wounded-ness, which is admittedly difficult to engage compassionately, given the history of oppression it evokes. Yet like Zacchaeus, he too is a “son of Abraham” or a child of God, and has the capacity to respond to grace, which is not denied him. Both men come in their own way and own time to the realization of a new way of life defined by an inherent connectedness or Divine kinship that requires respect for the other. The Christ principle is that which calls forth in both men the desire to right their relationships. Donne’s moment comes when he realizes his desire for intimacy with the Divine carpenter as he ascends the waterfall. Zacchaeus’s moment arrives when he climbs the sycamore tree. In order to share that sacred space means crossing over, by the grace of conversion, from the old to the new Self. So even from the abyss of the perpetrator’s woundedness and pride, grace penetrates so that the Donnes of the world can also experience being “free from the chains of illusion.”

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69 Ibid.
Chapter Three

The (Un)-healed Wound: Destructive and Transformative Suffering

Introduction

Victims of the unjust actions of individuals and social systems are in their own right the “poor” of the earth whose innocent “blood” cries out like Abel’s for a compassionate response that will bring them healing and liberation. One of the most easily overlooked realities about victims of suffering, however, is that they too have to accept responsibility for the ways they can foster self-sabotaging patterns that hinder growth and transformation. To acknowledge this possible participation in enabling their oppression or pain is not necessarily a callous response. It is to admit a truth that victims are not always readily able to recognize or accept even as they may cry out for justice. Undoubtedly, such admission demands inner resources that may not be available to victims who need to express their anger and grief or those severely depersonalized by long periods of oppression. They may be spiritually or physically incapable of maturely working through a positive outcome to their suffering. Abused children or people living under dictatorial rule are a case in point. Moreover, some experiences of suffering simply yield no positive or transformative result.

Chapter Three, “The Un-healed Wound: Destructive and Transformative Suffering,” is particularly interested in how suffering can be experienced as destructive in contrast to suffering that can have a transformative impact. The intensity of traumatic suffering is unquestionable. Additionally, its psychic repeatability and other PTSD symptoms are manifestations of its unhealed persistence. The chapter holds that in certain cases the healing of trauma is possible for victims although scars may persist. Undeniably, how suffering affects people cannot be reductively approached. Individuals respond differently. Nevertheless, while such experiences may not always be life threatening or paralyzing, the destructive dimension remains a reality. One therefore cannot romanticize the impact of the “evil” actions of people on their victims. Further, such occasions are not necessarily prerequisites for spiritual transformation.
Scott Peck’s sober insight is useful in this regard. He writes, “The problem of evil is a very big mystery indeed. It does not submit itself easily to reductionism.”\(^1\) Elie Wiesel’s gallows scene in the novel *Night*, for instance, captures Eliezer’s absolute disillusionment with the wanton suffering he witnesses at Auschwitz. The utter powerlessness he feels strikes at the heart of his faith in a masterful God and so he sees that failed God mirrored in the child that hangs helplessly from the gallows.\(^2\) It is no wonder that theodicy’s aesthetic theme, as John Hick argues, invites a holistic perspective of reality rather than a focus on the destructive dimension of it, which succeeds in doing nothing but distorting one’s vision of the world and nurtures despondency and paralysis. Hick therefore writes: “We are like people ignorant of painting who complain that the colours are not beautiful everywhere in the picture: but the Artist has laid on the appropriate tint to every spot.”\(^3\)

This chapter, with reference to Nalo Hopkinson’s novel, *Midnight Robber*, considers how suffering can be “redemptive,” that is, as Stoeber suggests, “in terms of some good it might serve to achieve.”\(^4\) Constitutive of this “good” is an ongoing experience of spiritual growth and transformation. It therefore recruits his distinction between transformative and destructive suffering. In view of the possibility that there can be a positive outcome to suffering, reference is drawn to Crysdale’s emphasis on victims’ “resistance” as an essential aspect of meaningfully addressing situations of domination and injustice that cause suffering. She writes convincingly that “[e]mbracing travail must include resistance to evil. But the nature of this resistance remains to be explored.”\(^5\) The implication is that not all forms of resistance facilitate genuine transformative change of either individuals or social systems. Victims in particular are susceptible to the adoption of unhelpful responses. This is also true of individuals and movements who seek to advocate on their behalf. The limitations of unhelpful responses to suffering in view of the alternative transformative possibility will be explored. It does so bearing in mind Crysdale’s emphasis on a “double-sided approach” to redemption or transformation, which decenters the victim/victimizer binary by seeing them as sometimes reversible.

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\(^1\)M. Scott Peck, *The People of the Lie*, 41.
\(^5\)Cynthia Crysdale, *Embracing Travail*, 41.
Destructive and Transformative Suffering

Michael Stoeber makes the important point that not all suffering is redemptive. He writes, “We have all experienced destructive evil of some sort or another, suffering which served no purpose, suffering from which we learned or gained nothing positive, suffering within which we could only persevere and hope for distraction or release, and from which we could only pray for healing and recovery.”\(^6\) Such experiences may derail any possibility of transformation. In this they resemble what Simone Weil calls “affliction” because they remain “non-redemptive for the person.”\(^7\) Traumatic suffering fits well into this category since its belatedness makes it as Shelly Rambo argues, “not integrated into time; it is the difference between a closed and an open wound. Trauma is an open wound.”\(^8\) Destructive suffering therefore “remains non-redemptive and meaningless for the person. Some suffering is simply experienced as cruel, irrational and from all appearances devoid of transformative possibility. It contributes nothing to a person’s spiritual growth and can even inhibit it.”\(^9\)

In fact, as Stoeber contends, suffering need not be beneficial to a person’s development or spiritual growth. This view draws attention to Soelle who, in her critique of Christian masochism, argues that when a person is robbed of all self-esteem, there is the likelihood that their oppression is simply seen as a “natural part of life.” Suffering is simply their lot that, in a false Christian interpretation, is regarded as spiritually meritorious.\(^10\) Further, Soelle’s elucidation of Weil’s work on “affliction” is invaluable for understanding this condition as an acute form of self-alienation. It impacts the “physical, psychological and social” dimensions of a person’s life, rendering them “powerless” to resist or seek to change their circumstances.\(^11\) The possibility certainly exists that one can capitulate, as in affliction, to the circumstances that produce suffering. Alternatively, there is the response that resists in a manner that allows suffering to become “redemptive,” that is, according to Stoeber’s definition, “suffering which is spiritually transformative to the person.”\(^12\) He does, however, offer a differently nuanced insight when he recognizes that in certain cases “destructive suffering

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\(^6\)Stoeber, *Reclaiming Theodicy*, 60.  
\(^7\)Ibid., 61.  
\(^11\)Ibid.  
\(^12\)Stoeber, *Reclaiming Theodicy*, 61.
turns out not to have been destructive [italics mine]—it is eventually transformed in positive ways. Moreover, Christians are called to attempt to transform all apparently destructive suffering.”

The personal transformation that can potentially come from certain experiences of extreme suffering are linked, Stoeber argues, to two areas of integration and growth—the emotional and the moral. One must first be healed from the negative emotional impact of very legitimate responses such as “resentment, hatred, and fear” since these “inhibit positive spiritual change.” These, he argues, are “self-isolating modes of consciousness which restrict one’s openness to the realities conducive to spiritual change.” Transformative change, however, requires a personal choice to participate in the long and often painful process. One has to want to grow out of debilitating attitudes and paralyzing feelings that burden and stunt self-development. Suffering, however, can introduce an unsettling learning curve into a person’s life that, if accepted and endured well, can become an invaluable teacher.

Soelle sees a relationship between the mature acceptance of suffering and the capacity to become more deeply inserted into reality. “Every acceptance of suffering,” she writes, “is an acceptance of that which exists.” The possible “gift” of suffering, therefore, is that one can become “more sensitive to the pain of the world,” which is inherently part of its reality as much as joy. Moreover, suffering can “teach us to put forth a greater love for everything that exists.” Stoeber agrees with this view when he writes that “[s]uffering is a crucial feature of emotional and spiritual transformation” since “[c]ompassion, love and courage promote spiritual growth . . .” The capacity to be compassionate develops, then, from learning to love more deeply and selflessly, primarily because personal pain gradually opens one to the pain of others. He stresses that this empathetic and selfless loving is what authentic compassion means, that is, the “feeling-along-with the suffering of others through a framework of love.”

Yet there are no guarantees. Our “hopes can die or they can grow in suffering.” The point of deep human challenge, given the reality of suffering in the world, is to discern how to confront it meaningfully. Soelle therefore argues that transformation is possible only when suffering is approached with an attitude to

13Ibid., 62.
14Ibid., 21-22.
15Soelle, Suffering, 125.
16Ibid.
17Stoeber, Reclaiming Theodicy, 22.
18Cf., Chapter One, note 29.
19Ibid., 125.
learn. The arrival at the ability to stimulate liberating responses to suffering is critical for her. She holds with Simone Weil that the Christian response strives for a "'supernatural use of suffering,'" that is, "an act that goes beyond all that has been experienced."\(^{20}\) Suffering, then, is not merely to be eradicated or consoled, since it possesses the potential to transform. A remarkable scene in Toni Morrison’s novel *Beloved* captures this mystery. Sethe, the pregnant and recently whipped fugitive-slave from the Sweet Home plantation, is helped by Amy Denver, a traumatized white woman also on her own journey of escape to Boston. On seeing her flayed back, Amy offers this interpretation of the wound that Sethe cannot herself see although she embodies its lacerations:

> “It’s a tree, Lu. A chokecherry tree. See, here’s the trunk – it’s red and split wide open, full of sap, and this here’s the parting for the branches. You got a mighty lot of branches. Leaves, too, look like, and darn if these ain’t blossoms. Tiny little cherry blossoms, just as white. Your back got a whole tree on it. In bloom. What God have in mind, I wonder.”\(^{21}\)

The Christological allusions in the image are startling. In her afflicted condition, however, Sethe is unable to experience the transcendent possibilities that Amy, herself familiar with suffering, almost mystically perceives. Persons are not always ready or capable of participation in the interior demands of that flourishing. Paradoxically, the high price of avoiding suffering is “ceasing to love.”\(^{22}\) The opposite response is to become apathetic and indifferently distant. One can also acquiesce to the conditions of suffering and/or their effects as in affliction. In Soelle’s interpretation, this choice can be fed either by a masochistic Christianity or “theological sadism.” In the first instance, suffering is theologized as a spiritual test that the righteous pass, so it is to be endured and even considered pleasurable. The second instance constructs a tyrannical, sadistic God who punishes base humanity. Such a God is mute and nurtures apathy since the sufferer cannot envisage or seek change because there is no possibility to relate dynamically or interpersonally with a divinity.\(^{23}\)

This centrality of the divine-relationship reinforces the fact that the capacity to move from death-like experiences of suffering to the hope in new horizons is ultimately the work of divine love, and the experience of that love through others and all creation. Cynthia Crysdale is emphatic that faith, like compassionate support, is among the conditions that can provide “resurrection power.”\(^{24}\) If embraced in faith, therefore, suffering can

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\(^{20}\) Ibid., 155 and 156.


\(^{22}\) Soelle, *Suffering*, 170.

\(^{23}\) Ibid., 20-24.

\(^{24}\) Crysdale, *Embracing Travail*, 27.
enable a life-giving movement through whatever “travail” might befall a person or group. The comment draws attention to the Christian ideal to facilitate the means by which suffering can possibly become transformative for some persons. Even if certain types of involuntary suffering appear to be “utterly non-transformative for its victims” in this life-context, one needs to hope for the eventual healing of these victims of their afflictions, and future opportunities for redemptive transformation. In certain cases, the consideration of an afterlife dynamic or even rebirth is therefore necessary for the completion of healing from destructive suffering and the continuation of the transformative process. While an exploration of afterlife possibilities is outside the perimeters of this study, Stoeber’s warning against what is essentially misplaced optimism within the context of earthly existence is helpful.

This leads one to Crysdale’s identification of two possible destructive responses—redemptive violence and redemptive suffering. These stand in contrast to her Christ-oriented “third way,” which invites the discovery of the self as both victim and victimizer in instances where relevant. Victims who are absolutely powerless in conditions of involuntary suffering would obviously be excluded because they lack the capacity. Ordinarily, however, the double reality of the story of the Crucifixion needs to be engaged for the persons who can embrace themselves both in the wounded, innocent Jesus, and in the crucifiers, those who cause pain to others. In such cases, Crysdale identifies a spiritual path patterned after the kenotic “surrender” of Jesus. She argues that four transformative qualities are evident in the process: 1) the “reconstruction of meaning,” 2) the acceptance of oneself as “an agent of action,” 3) “recognizing the limitations and risks of moral action” and 4) “reclaiming the liberating elements of the communal past.” Although she does not mention it, these are not necessarily isolated. They can be interdependent qualities. The section below outlines the plot of Hopkinson’s novel.

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25Stoeber, Reclaiming Theodicy, 15.
26Ibid, 93.
27Crysdale, Embracing Travail, 46-47.
**Midnight Robber and the Culture of Violence**

*Midnight Robber* is written in a futuristic style called “speculative fiction” which Hopkinson defines as a “fusion” of genres.\(^28\) In Hopkinson’s representation, the Caribbean is a planet named after the Haitian liberator Toussaint evoking, as Barbara Lalla argues, “black statehood.”\(^29\) The historical axes of power and domination by which the region was first geopolitically controlled by Europe are therefore remodeled to reflect that liberation. Toussaint, along with its twin or “shadow” planet, New Half-Way Tree, is the new oppressor. Hopkinson therefore imagines the unimaginable, the once victim of colonial history is now the victimizer. Lalla argues that this re-visioning “challenges our moral complacency in portraying Caribbean colonizers exploiting indigenous species in a new New World.”\(^30\) In the new dispensation, the central government, that is, the Marryshow Corporation, punitively controls its population via an inherently benign but manipulated computerized data-gathering system referred to as the “Granny Nansi Web.”\(^31\) Citizens are linked via chips called “nanomites” which are implanted at birth. There is therefore no privacy and persons deemed criminals and infidels suffer forced exile to the underdeveloped, New Half-Way Tree, which functions as a prison.

The citizens of Toussaint are basically the descendants of an ex-colonized people who now form a capital-driven, colonizing, technologically savvy civilization with its own discriminatory and oppressive practices. The new “slave” class consists of machines like the house robot, marginalized poor classes like Tan-Tan’s caregiver, “Nursie,” and a group called “runners” who are basically self-employed transportation providers to the elite. Liberation is ironically not a prominent aspect of Toussaint’s social code. The society is informed by an ethic of violence, domination and materialism. It takes pride in its technological advancement and infrastructural development. Even Toussaint’s immediate underprivileged Other-world, its “dark” underdeveloped twin side, New Half Way Tree, mirrors, but in a far more intensified way, a culture of violence most blatantly manifested in its oppressive laws and the enslavement of a non-human species called “douens.”

*Midnight Robber* is essentially about the painful recovery of a young woman called Tan-Tan from paternal rape. It is important to note the culture of domination and violence into which she is born since it

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\(^{28}\) Alondra Nelson, “‘Making the Impossible Possible,’” An Interview with Nalo Hopkinson,” *Social Text* 71, Vol. 20, No. 2 (Summer 2002): 99.


\(^{30}\) Ibid.

almost predicts her experience of violation. Her trauma begins when her father Antonio, the powerful, arrogant Mayor of Toussaint, turns fugitive for murdering his wife’s lover, Quashee. He tricks his young daughter into accompanying him into a self-imposed exile to New Half-Way Tree. A family of the douens takes them to the safety of their home and assists in their initial integration into the prison planet. Nevertheless, Tan-Tan’s life escalates into a living nightmare when, added to being exiled from her home and mother, her father develops an incestuous attraction to her. He eventually rapes her at the age of nine, making her a surrogate for his lost wife, Ione. Although Antonio finds a new partner, Janisette, his sexual attraction to his daughter persists. As a coping strategy, Tan-Tan develops a split personality with a Carnival character, the Midnight Robber, whom she appropriates as the Robber Queen. She eventually becomes a fugitive when she stabs her father to death after being brutally raped by him at age sixteen.32

The entire plot draws attention to the tragic, snowballing effect of rape and patricide. The ensuing pregnancy, which Tan-Tan desires to terminate, and her unhealed shame and guilt, are compounded by her subsequent vigilante acts on behalf of the unjustly treated. Additionally, she flees her vengeful stepmother. Again Tan-Tan is rescued by the douens; but her journey to healing involves the combined process of facing her interior demons of self-hate and guilt. This evolution is captured in two significant encounters with creatures derived from Caribbean folklore called “Dry Bones” and “Rolling Calf.” These episodes can be read as psychospiritual growing points for the protagonist. In the end, the unconditional love of a young man, unappealingly called Melonhead, and the friendship she develops with the douens enable her to eventually find healing. Central to her healing is the dramatic confrontation with her raging stepmother during the Carnival celebrations at a town named Sweet Pone. Tan-Tan finds the courage to publicly defend herself. Soon afterwards she gives birth to her son whom she names “Tubman,” after the leader of the Underground Railroad, Harriet Tubman. The section below discusses the unhelpful ways in which victims may respond to suffering and gives consideration to Tan-Tan’s journey in this regard.

The Limitations of Redemptive Violence and Redemptive Suffering

For those who find themselves on the receiving end of violence in whatever way, two reactions are possible: violent retaliation or capitulated surrender. Retaliation, even as self defense, is one of the most natural

32Ibid., 167-68.
human behaviors in the context of injustices meted out to individuals or groups. One spontaneously wants to
strike back. Retaliatory action can, but may not always, come from the victim’s sense of moral righteousness for
whatever wrong suffered. The logic at work in this regard is the expectation that the perpetrator should suffer
because he or she has caused pain to an innocent victim. An extreme instance of such a circuit of violence, in
the context of European colonization, is Jean Paul Sartre’s much criticized diagnosis of Senegalese Negritude
poetry of the 1930s and the 1960s anti-colonial revolution in French Algeria. He saw in those poets an anti-
European strain that promoted a “racist humanism” that was unfortunately a reversal of colonial politics.33

The recourse to violence “to heal the wounds it has inflicted”34 reflects the “tit-for-tat” “logic of
retaliation” identified by Crysdale, who draws on the insights of Walter Wink’s “myth of redemptive
violence.”35 Wink writes, “Violence is the ethos of our times. It is the spirituality of the modern world.”36 This
is certainly a harsh reading of reality that many would argue is not isolated to the present epoch. Nevertheless,
it is not an unreasonable assessment given the many challenges to wholesome living faced by contemporary
societies. In his encyclical, Evangelium Vitae, Pope John Paul II warns about the harmful ramifications of a
“culture of death.”37 The major challenge faced by the current global order or culture, as Wink understands it, is
that a “Domination System” is in operation. Its ideology of “victory of order over chaos” or the “villain” is
based on violent overthrow.38 While Wink generally addresses the problem at the structural level, it is
unquestionable that any culture of control also impacts individual lives and choices. In this worldview, the use
of violence in the defense of the innocent or the good is justifiable because one is fighting from a moral high
ground.

According to Wink, most contemporary superhero cartoons and movies such as the Popeye and
Batman series follow this logic. Such productions reinforce the myth that violence, in whatever expression,
from the petty retaliatory aggression of interpersonal conflicts to extreme reactions like murder and war, are
legitimate responses to injustice. The ultimate outcome is that “[r]edemptive violence gives way to violence as

33Jean-Paul Sartre, “Preface to Frantz Fanon’s Wretched of the Earth,
34Ibid., 11.
35Crysdale, Embracing Travail, 43.
36Walter Wink, Engaging the Powers, 13.
37Pope John Paul II, Evangelium Vitae, March 25, 1995, #21, http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-
38Wink, Engaging the Powers, 16.
an end in itself . . .” Moreover, genuine healing on either side may not occur. It is arguable that the theory does not apply in every case as not all victims are able to fight back, for instance, young children and women who are physically overpowered by their perpetrators. Conversely, there are instances when severe oppressive conditions need a response that literally fights back, as in Tan-Tan’s attempt at self-defense.

This, however, is where the Christian expectation of non-violence becomes a challenge. Is it acceptable to use force to right injustice? It is enough to say that any act of violence impacts the person, even as evil certainly cannot be simply left unchallenged. Stoeber provides an important insight in this regard. He acknowledges that “although the Christian is called to help transform even apparently destructive suffering in constructive and creative ways,” the ultimate dependence is on the “redemptive power of Christ” since it may be impossible for some experiences of destructive suffering to be restored in this life. In other words, priority must always be given to allowing God’s grace to act since human volition alone may compromise God’s action. It is a powerfully faith-based stance that does not deny the responsibility to respond in a life-giving way, but recognizes that, ultimately, transformation is God’s work in which we cooperate with God’s healing love.

The protagonist of Midnight Robber gives some insight into the attraction to redemptive violence, capitulated surrender, and their limitations. Admittedly, Tan-Tan’s story is complicated in ways that make it difficult to fit her neatly into the redemptive violence framework discussed by Crysdale and Wink. Tan-Tan is a victim of multiple incestuous rapes from the age of nine and several pregnancies, in addition to having committed patricide in self-defense at age sixteen. Violence against her perpetrator father is the outcome of a situation that seemed inescapable. Moreover, she is left with a debilitating feeling of the guilt and shame that compound the damage the years of abuse had already done to her dignity and selfhood. None of this may exonerate her deed. Yet her violent response, which develops into a self-assigned vigilante protector’s role, provides a useful interface with the redemptive violence paradigm. The error lies in the presumption that “direct action,” whose most powerful expression is violence, can destroy evil. It is actually fuelled by the need to regain “control” through the exercise of a similar brand of domination, only in the name of the “good.” The outcome, however, is that authentic transformation is blocked.

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39Ibid., 25.
40Stoeber, Reclaiming Theodicy, 74.
41Crysdale, Embracing Travail, 44.
At one level, Tan-Tan’s violation as well as her response to her pain is certainly symptomatic of the culture of domination and control into which she is socialized from childhood. Toussaint’s technologically controlled surveillance society very much recalls Michel Foucault’s panoptical, prison society. The childhood game she played there demonstrates her society’s violent status quo. She imagined herself to be the Robber Queen, the female version of a Carnival character called the Midnight Robber. Her language, in the tradition of the boastful and authoritative garb typical of the robber mask, reveals a value system oriented to domination: “Me is Robber Queen, yes? This foliage is my subject, and nobody could object to my rule.” In New Half-Way Tree, Toussaint’s “dark” “dub side,” which is described as a “planet full of violent people,” a more overt expression of that violence is lived. The penalty, for instance, for twice breaking the simplest “rule” is death by hanging.

Notwithstanding the physical and emotional affliction Tan-Tan suffered from the abuse she endured, it is understandable that her trauma re-stimulates the attraction to the Midnight Robber she exhibited when she lived in Toussaint. In the context of Carnival, he is an invincible conqueror of death and a master of language. The Robber Queen therefore functions as a strong and fearless alter ego that shields the girl from the powerlessness and shame she feels during the rape episodes. She is seen as “good” as opposed to the weak and voiceless “bad” Tan-Tan. This powerful “outlaw woman” is actually given the responsibility for the deadly act executed at age sixteen. So while the split personality is a manifestation of the disembodiment not uncommon in victims of trauma, it is a source of protection and preservation. As the fearless Robber Queen, she believes that “Nothing bad” can happen. “Nothing can’t hurt she. Not Blackheart Man, not nothing.”

Out of this false sense of empowerment the Robber Queen’s aggressive personality gives to the vulnerable child and then teenager, Tan-Tan develops a desire to save others from injustice. When pain remains unhealed, victims can become violent defenders of the oppressed. Such persons may target perpetrators from a well-intended but distorted sense of compassion for the suffering victims. In doing so, the cycle of violence is continued and they disrespect both themselves and the perpetrator. The ensuing damage to Tan-Tan’s personhood is the primary concern in this chapter. Her burden of guilt and shame increases, as does her

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44 Ibid., 127.
45 Ibid.
46 Ibid., 140.
experience of self-alienation and isolation. She spends her time fleeing from community to community to escape bounty hunters. People both fear and idolize her as a renegade heroine. Additionally, she must contend with the vengeance of her stepmother, Janisette who, from her state of denial, illogically blames the teenager for Antonio’s gross sexual behavior, and so desires her to be duly punished.

In spite of his or her behavior, the perhaps unsettling reality is that even the victimizer is equally deserving of redemption, as was the case Jesus made for Zacchaeus in Chapter Two. Violence denies them this possibility of embracing their conversion. Tan-Tan may only be a teenager, yet her recourse to violence both to defend herself and later others, makes her an example of how unhealed pain can have destructive outcomes. In one of the many stories told about the Robber Queen, for instance, she is a fugitive not only for the murder of Antonio, but also of a drug-dealing pimp, a man who the narrator says specialized in “young young girls.”

While just-war advocates, following the tradition of St Augustine, may see her as having acted to protect herself and other innocent victims, the debate is complex, particularly in light of the obvious psycho-spiritual damage such acts cause. The vigilante role the protagonist adopts is undoubtedly motivated by her disappointed expectations in a father who failed to protect her. Deborah Barrett writes, when “that in which we sought to find security betrays us, we suffer.” The protagonist’s almost insatiable grief is linked to her feeling of betrayed and undefended vulnerability. She therefore experiences no healing or liberation even when perpetrators are punished.

Intertwined in this caldron of pain, however, is also a retributive impulse grounded in unhealed anger. The resultant desire is to punish perpetrators. Even if subconsciously, it is oriented to the redemptive violence paradigm of justice. The life-denying nature of such resistance to injustice is cryptically echoed in the “moral” law of the douen community: “It ain’t have no magic in do-for-do, / If you take one, you must give back two.” The riddle directed to Tan-Tan haunts her. Its essential logic is that all life is to be valued and any failure to respect this basic “law,” for whatever reason, requires repentance and reconciliatory action. Tan-Tan confronts the necessity to heal and forgive in an episode where she confronts and overcomes the wild beast called “rolling calf,” a story that significantly occurs when she meets a character called, Sadie, on her way to “Resurrection” town. An allegorical parallel is set up between the circumstances of her father’s murder and her effort to protect

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47Hopkinson, Midnight Robber, 290.
49Hopkinson, Midnight Robber, 290.
herself and Sadie. She is forced to kill the beast and in the wake of its death must take responsibility for the care of the creature’s orphaned calf. Both Tan-Tan’s encounters in the Dry Bone and the Rolling Calf stories can be read as subconscious signs of a deeper healing process related to her father’s death and the “demon” pregnancy she wishes to abort.

For those who retaliate either consciously or unconsciously from a control or redemptive violence model, the destructive outcome is that anger merely calcifies and hurts are not only unhealed, they are exacerbated. Crysdale quotes Wink on the danger of redemptive violence: “Once children have been indoctrinated into the expectations of a dominator society, they may never outgrow the need to locate all evil outside of themselves.” The extreme desire to retaliate displayed by Tan-Tan reveals the influence of the domination based culture of violence, described by Wink, as a major contributor to the perpetuation of destructive responses to suffering. Nevertheless, such a claim does not adequately satisfy the need to respond in the interest of justice, especially when the seriously disadvantaged are involved, like children.

Tan-Tan’s undeserved pain certainly increases her awareness of the suffering of others and this fuels her desire to assist in changing their situations. “Only those who themselves are suffering will work for the abolition of conditions under which people are exposed to senseless, patently unnecessary suffering,” Soelle argues. The path of violence she chooses, however, is definitely destructive or counterproductive to any hope of healing, not to mention transformation. Equally useful is Stoeber’s caution that while Christians are basically “called to attempt to transform all apparently destructive suffering,” it is also true that “it can take many years for people to discern or indeed to integrate for themselves and thereby realize the positive effects of certain radical suffering that initially appeared to have been destructive.” The shift from an apparently destructive reaction to a transformative response is neither automatic nor instantaneous. Further, for some, full recovery is not possible. Their negative witness, however, may provide the incentive for others to make a different choice. Tan-Tan’s vigilante choices certainly disturb; but while the community’s response to her “heroic” actions is ambivalent, she does not have its complete approval. She is the feared “outlaw” that Sadie eventually flees in the Rolling Calf story.

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50 Crysdale, *Embracing Travail*, 44.
52 Stoeber, *Reclaiming Theodicy*, 62.
Along with her informants, Walter Wink and Sharon Welch, Crysdale maintains that violence begets violence. The key to recovery is to resist the way of domination, which “presumes that evil, when encountered, can be overcome through direct action.” Unfortunately, the “worldly” understanding of what qualifies as effective engagement with violence can very well turn out to be a violent response, which is “the *modus operandi*” of Wink’s notion of the “Domination system.” The myth to be debunked is that violence and control can be redemptive. The danger, Crysdale notes, and which Wink addresses, is that, these influences will ultimately become “ends in themselves, and must be preserved at all costs.” While there is no intention to take any moral high ground about Tan-Tan’s action towards her father given the multiple rapes and her need to defend herself, the path on which she finds herself, because of her wounded-ness, is definitely destructive. This tendency on small and large scales to respond out of what Sharon Welch calls an “ethic of control” makes it imperative that an alternative system be found. The following section explores this alternative.

**Transformative Resistance as Surrender: a “third way”**

There is another way to deal with suffering and injustice. Crysdale advocates the model of Jesus’s life, death and resurrection to can radically change the attraction to domination practices—even in the pursuit of liberation and justice. His cross offers a “healing and non-violent way to authentically resist suffering.” The work of Sharon Welch on “ethic of risk” as opposed to “control” assists her thinking in this regard. Crysdale, however, is clear that there is a condition to approaching the Cross. She writes:

> But unless one discovers oneself in Jesus, discovers oneself as both victim and crucifier, this resistance runs the risk of either succumbing to suffering and yielding to the Powers [ways of domination], or of turning into a vengeful violence that never establishes justice. Either way one becomes a part of the system of domination; one perpetuates rather than ends the cycle of redemptive violence and suffering.

Crysdale is essentially calling for a spirituality of “surrender” that intersects with Gill Goulding’s self-emptying disposition discussed in Chapter Four. It is a response to injustice or evil that neither falls into scapegoating, that is, projection, or introjection, that is, undeservedly blaming the self. This returns us to Crysdale’s “third way” mentioned earlier in this chapter. The transformative qualities identified include

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54 Crysdale, *Embracing Travail*, 44.
55 Crysdale, *Embracing Travail*, 44.
56 Ibid.
57 Ibid., 45.
58 Ibid., 45-56.
meaning reconstruction, exercising personal agency as an actor, the ability to know the limits of one’s moral action and the liberating potential of ancestral community.\textsuperscript{59} Modeled on the imitation of Jesus, this approach represents the grace-assisted, non-violent mode of “authentic resistance”\textsuperscript{60} Crysdale endorses.

The fundamental work of remaking meaning for the victim must entail a renewal of self-image that attains, with time, a firmer grasp of his or her original identity as a child of God. When this happens sufficiently the choice is to neither project nor introject, which is how Jesus dealt with his suffering. He does not “demand justice at all costs.” He rejects, for instance, armed retaliation. He asks his disciples to put away their swords (Lk 22:52), choosing instead to resist unjust persecution by holding firm to his “identity” as “a beloved Son.”\textsuperscript{61} The type of “surrender” modeled by Jesus of which Crysdale speaks, but must be carefully discerned, is best defined by its opposite, that is, acquiescent capitulation.

The challenge, however, is that one is required to have a solid sense of self and a firm faith in one’s Divine destiny. Not all victims have this capacity. Further, the experience of suffering or the witness of it may seriously call that faith into question. It is certainly difficult to see how projection applies in all instances of suffering, particularly when victims such as small children have neither the cause nor capacity. They are simply the victims of evil. One therefore naturally falls back on Stoeber’s relevant query in relation to Dostoevsky’s character Ivan who refuses to believe in a Christian God that allows the destructive suffering of innocent children. Stoeber asks: “How indeed, are the divine purposes in relation to the suffering of children revealed in the crucifixion of Jesus?”\textsuperscript{62} Crysdale’s model does not directly engage this dilemma. Stoeber, however, indicates the comforting possibility of an afterlife resolution, but without minimizing present suffering or abdicating the responsibility to creatively respond. He writes, the “destructive experience of suffering is in some cases clearly beyond present restorative powers.”\textsuperscript{63}

The scapegoating of redemptive violence is nevertheless a very real option. Tan’s circumstances are admittedly complicated. Her father’s actions are certainly an evil that negatively impacts her. Yet her violent vigilante heroism does qualify as a projection of her own understandable self-hatred, anger and unhealed hurt on those she deems deserving. The myth of redemptive suffering is its outworking. Victims believe they are

\textsuperscript{59}Cf., 28.
\textsuperscript{60}Ibid., 54.
\textsuperscript{61}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{62}Stoeber, \textit{Reclaiming Theodicy}, 5.
\textsuperscript{63}Ibid., 75.
unworthy and so deserving of punishment. Many historically oppressed people, for instance, could adopt this mindset that interjects unworthiness, believing they deserve nothing more than the little that the system allows them. It is a kind of false martyrdom or victimhood that becomes a lifestyle. Soelle notes that such negative surrender is connected to a sense of one’s “powerlessness.” She writes that “[e]very attempt to humanize suffering must begin with this phenomenon of experienced powerlessness and must activate forces that enable a person to overcome the feeling that he [or she] is without power.”

Acutely damaged self-esteem, a sense of powerlessness, fear, and the loss of faith in self, others and even God can hinder the activation of the positive life forces, like forgiveness and trust in a loving community, that may enable the healing and transcendence of victims. Further, her discussion of Christian masochism and affliction sheds light on the victimhood mindset when she writes that the “more a person perceives his [or her] suffering as a natural part of life, the lower his [or her] self-esteem.” Such a person feels “compelled to fulfill a certain role” even though it is a self-sabotaging one. Novelist Earl Lovelace, in his exploration of postcolonial Trinidadian society, captures this psychological hiding place in a character named Dixon, a laborer on the wealthy Carabon estate, who adopts a martyr’s persona. He labors without desire for proper remuneration or just elevation, believing that his moral superiority rested in his sacrificial commitment to the “covenant” he had made with “pain.” A similar, though differently manifested, surrender to her “lot” is Tan-Tan’s belief that she is “nothing but a “wicked crosses for people to bear” and so expects little from life.

At the time of her abuse and long after, Tan-Tan certainly does not possess the capacity for the type of kenotic surrender Crysdale’s paradigm demands. In fact, a crisis that resembles the spiritual pitfall of redemptive suffering is creatively allegorized by Hopkinson in Tan-Tan’s encounter with a Caribbean folklore character called “Dry Bone.” In a common version of the tale, an emaciated man (or a disguised Anansi-spider) preys on the sympathy of the unsuspecting passer-by, asking that he be carried being too weak to walk. Once inveigled, the carrier soon discovers that Dry Bone not only gets heavier and heavier with each step, but parasitically clings to his victim, demanding that he be fed day and night. The situation is resolved when the victim outwits the creature by striking a deal with a vulture. Once Dry Bone is drawn into the open, the plan is

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64Soelle, *Suffering*, 11.
65Ibid., 12.
that the bird would swoop down and carry him away forever. Tan-Tan, ignoring the wise warning of the community, is tricked by the creature and becomes the guilt-ridden fugitive to whom he clings.

The period of her literal enslavement to the creature who takes up residence in her house, analogizes the guilt-burdened reality of her life and the dead weight of the unhealed pain she hauls around. So wounded is she that the narrator describes her as “dragging” her feet to a community significantly called “Duppy Dead Town,” a place for people who have had life “boof them” or treat them badly: “Duppy Dead people have one foot in the world and the next one already crossing the threshold to where the real duppy-them living.” This death-in-life condition, and her literal imprisonment in her own house by Dry Bone, signifies a chronic degree of acquiescent resignation to her suffering. This stems from a seriously distorted selfhood that believes she is “a worthless, wicked woman that only good to feed a duppy like Dry-Bone.” She has so internalized unwarranted unworthiness that she considers herself undeserving of love and community being no more than “mud in the street.” Hers is the living-dead condition of the afflicted.

According to Crysdale, transformative suffering, especially for those on the “underside” of society, must involve an experience of elevation or “resurrection” by identifying with the cross of Christ. The essential difference therefore between transformative suffering and its opposite, destructive suffering, is the movement from the wound to renewal as a personal experience of empowerment or finding one’s voice and dignity. She, however, makes it clear that transformation requires “resistance that is not violent, is never once and for all.” In other words, it is a process of interior change that springs from faith in a higher power and openness to cooperation with Divine grace. The wager that transformation is indeed a possible horizon for victims, in the broadest sense of the term, takes one back to Stoeber’s notion that painful experiences can stimulate human development that are linked to intellectual, moral and spiritual growth. At the same time, however, he warns that while certain kinds of spiritual growth are positively stimulated through one’s own suffering... this does not mean that all forms of spiritual transformation require suffering. Suffering, therefore, should never be

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68 Ibid., 198.
69 Ibid., 202.
70 Ibid., 165.
71 Crysdale, Embracing Travail, 10-11.
72 Ibid., 50.
73 Stoeber, “Transformative suffering, destructive, suffering and the question of abandoning theodicy,” 431.
74 Ibid., 432.
considered an end in itself. Such an approach merely exonerates all sorts of injustices where people suffer: rape, ethnic cleansing, religious fundamentalism and systemic poverty.

Tan-Tan’s story is one such example in which a positive movement through transformation to liberation occurs, via what Crysdale calls “resistance and surrender within the ethic of risk.”\textsuperscript{75} If the “ethic of control” enforces a belief in redemptive violence or acquiescent surrender, which Tan-Tan at various stages in her journey opts for, the victim’s engagement in the “reconstruction of meaning” involves allowing forgiveness and love rather than fear and anger to be the major values in healing self and relationships. Key to this process is her encounter with the marginalized douens of New Half-Way Tree, particularly the couple Benta and Chichibud, and their daughter, Abitefa who rescue, defend and befriend her. They welcome her into their community, significantly called a “Papa Bois, the daddy tree.” It becomes a nurturing, protecting and re-educative environment for the emotionally wounded adolescent. The violent culture of her old and new worlds, symbolized by the abusive paternity of her father, is replaced by their offer of “peace” and “friendship.”\textsuperscript{76} The same is also true of the consistent love she finds in the young tailor, Melonhead. At first, however, it is difficult to accept their kindness because of the anger, suspicion and self-loathing that define her. Very slowly, with their persevering love and compassion, Tan-Tan begins to discover a new possibility for herself and the child of rape she reluctantly carries.

The foundation in “love” provides the impetus to shake off the burdens of her past as a process of healing and unlearning of patterns of aggression and self-isolation take place in her. Stoeber argues strongly for the importance of the connection between healing and “empathic love,” going as far as saying that there is a dynamic between suffering, compassion and spiritual growth, which he notices is evident cross-culturally and is “shamanic” in its expression. In the Christian tradition, Jesus exemplifies this shamanic “compassionate participation in human suffering.”\textsuperscript{77} Arguably, the companionship of Abitefa and Melonhead provide a compassionate presence for Tan-Tan. They both love and befriend her. Abitefa acts as teacher, confidante and even savior.\textsuperscript{78} Tan-Tan, importantly, is able to disclose the exact source of her pain to her, “‘He rape me, Abitefa. He put this baby in me, like the one before. He was forever trying to plant me, like I was his soil to harvest.’” Moreover, Melonhead is selfless in his love for her, accepting even the baby conceived by her father.

\textsuperscript{75}Crysdale, \textit{Embracing Travail}, 82.
\textsuperscript{76}Hopkinson, \textit{Midnight Robber}, 179.
\textsuperscript{77}Stoeber, \textit{Reclaiming Theodicy}, 31.
\textsuperscript{78}Hopkinson, \textit{Midnight Robber}, 257.
They become what Crsydale calls her supportive and therapeutic “intentional” community. Growth to greater wholeness requires that Tan-Tan lets go of her self-loathing and the hate she bears for the unborn child. By choosing to become vulnerable to their love, she is eventually better able to embrace responsibility for her woundedness as she regains bit by bit a sense of her dignity and selfhood.

Significant in this movement to greater belief and confidence in herself is the discovery of “voice,” which enables her to tell her side of the story. It happens in a town called “Sweet Pone,” during the Carnival celebrations. Tan-Tan joins the festivities dressed in a new Robber Queen costume made by Melonhead, indicative of the new selfhood she is about to claim. At first she is afraid of the people’s rejection and even imagines that the “boom-boom” of the steel pans sounds like “Tan-Tan doom.” Yet it is in that context that she finds the liberating power of speech. Her vengeful stepmother, Janisette, is confronted when she unexpectedly appears in an armored vehicle, a “bullet-shaped tank,” representative of the culture of violence she literally embodies. Tan-Tan is able for the first time to speak her truth about her actions and pregnancy in the presence of the entire community. Language, “the power of words,” not the machete or gun is her “weapon.” She rejects victimhood and claims a new identity for herself by first establishing her origins in the “love” union shared by her parents before her mother’s infidelity and her father’s demise. Next she identifies with the great warrior women of her ancestry—women who were strong defenders of their dignity and cultural heritage and who stood in solidarity with their people’s suffering. These mothers and nurturers of nations are the ancestors who give her name its meaning:

“Not wo-man; I name Tan-Tan, a ‘T’ and a ‘AN’; I is the AN-aconoana, Taino redeemer; the AN-nie Christmas, keel boat steamer; the Yaa As-AN-tewa; Ashanti warrior queen; the N-AN-ny, Maroon Granny; meaning Nana, mother, caretaker to a nation . . . .

At this stage one begins to recognize a solidifying of the healthy self-image that enables the type of “authentic resistance” of which Crsydale speaks. Abusive power attempts to silence and so dehumanize people. Women, as Crsydale notes, are especially vulnerable to this kind of domination. An essential aspect of their re-socialization must be to help them experience that they are not meant to be just receivers of knowledge. They must experience themselves as discoverers and knowers. Elevation is therefore a necessary dimension of

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79 Crsydale, *Embracing Travail*, 49.
81 Ibid., 319.
82 Ibid., 320.
83 Crsydale, *Embracing Travail*, 76-77.
healing women who have been silenced. Tan-Tan’s empowerment is an elevation that allows her to reject silence. In fact, at this stage, she no longer operates from the need to “control” but to “risk” vulnerability by first allowing others like Melonhead and Abitefa to love her and be the community that helps to heal her. In seeking to right her life, she also risks becoming vulnerable before the entire community and her aggressive stepmother. By daring to speak her truth, and so take responsibility for her life, she refuses the yoke of the victim’s powerlessness. In the end, while Janisette, who is made to see her complicity in Antonio’s death, remains bitter, Tan-Tan finds healing enough to celebrate the life of the child of rape she carries and to finally decide that “[n]ow was the time to put away guilt.”

The acceptance of her child, a son whom she names “Tubman” after famous slave liberator, Harriet Tubman, demonstrates a new awareness of her responsibility to work for justice. Implied in this shift is the recognition that a different kind of “power” is needed to live compassionately. This is perhaps what underlies the curious naming of her son, the hope that he would live by a transformed code of behavior, that his masculinity, in particular, would not be patterned after the violence that wounded her and so many. In a sense, the wager that the individual’s transformation will not only be sustained but will impact the community, is made by Jesus when he healed persons like the woman caught in adultery and the paralytic in the Temple (Jn 8:11; Jn 5:14). The grace of elevation comes with a responsibility that has implications for the entire community, indeed the whole world. Soelle articulates this in relation to compassionate responsibility when she writes that: “Suffering makes one more sensitive to the pain in the world. It can teach us to put forth greater love for everything that exists.” This compassionate stance, however, has its starting point in the arrival at one’s ability to embrace and love the self. Tan-Tan finally gets to that place after much tribulation and many errors. Her son’s birth signals the opening of a new horizon.

**Conclusion**

Redemptive violence and redemptive suffering can be considered two detours that are really false paths to meaningfully resisting the injustice of suffering. Crysdale, in her elucidation of the ideas Wink and Welch develop, argues that authentic resistance involves rejecting the way of control and domination for the “third

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85 Soelle, *Suffering*, 125.
way.” This path of nonviolent surrender of the self to love provides the victim with a means of experiencing upliftment. At the same time, it allows him or her to take responsibility, as Tan-Tan eventually does, for the actions that sabotage that process and, in certain cases, cause harm to others. The loving embrace of self, which necessitates self-forgiveness and becoming an active agent in one’s healing are the key steps to transformation. An experience of genuine empathy and compassionate love, the “feeling-along-with” that Stoeber describes, puts one in touch with Divine unconditional love and this is sustained in the formation of intentional nurturing communities and relationships.

Victims are never guaranteed complete healing. Authentic liberation, however, requires surrendering the desire to violently oppose evil. There also needs to be a willingness to “risk” the letting go of negative self-images and debilitating behaviors, even when they may have permitted one’s survival in oppressive situations. Radical transformative change is very much a journey in spiritual growth, wherein the victim discovers, over time, a mode of being that transcends the wound. Even if one argues absolute healing is not possible and the scars remain, they are no longer debilitating and can be carried in an attitude of hope that is concretely expressed in compassion for the suffering of others. Serene Jones, in conversation with Shelly Rambo and others, articulates this transformed mode of being when she says, “there’s that continuing [or continued] resistance to letting [the trauma] be the final word.” It seems that the issue is not so much the type of suffering or the intensity of the trauma, but the capacity to respond in a transformative manner both for the good of self and others. In fact, it is always an influence of grace, which as St Paul writes makes us a “new creation” (2 Cor. 5:17).

Chapter Four

Go into the World: A Theological/Spiritual Model for Ministry

Introduction

Christianity, Jon Sobrino argues, has a responsibility to see that “the task of lowering the crosses of the crucified of history is better carried out.”\(^1\) Individual and communal responses to suffering, in other words, must mean much more than being a “remover or consoler,” as Dorothee Soelle argues. She references Simone Weil in holding that this must entail an attitude that “strives” for “‘a supernatural use of it.’”\(^2\) Spiritual growth and transformation, for Soelle, is a faith response. This thesis maintains that the cross of Jesus Christ enables that striving for transcendence, through the working of divine grace and the loving presence of others. It is the spiritual “classroom” for persons impacted by suffering as much as it is for those who are called to minister to them. Unless suffering in its many manifestations is responded to in ways that enable and support a transformative possibility, the probability is increased for individuals and communities alike to resort to violent recrimination and despair.

The Christian mandate to “go and do likewise” (Lk 10:37) means that suffering demands a particular kind of response, one that is oriented to Jesus’s voluntary kenosis and resurrection. Gill Goulding intimates this essential connection when she writes:

> We come to see that God’s reverent attending to human beings is an ongoing invitation to conversion and a growth in holiness that will bear fruit in the reverent way that individuals relate to each other. In this way, human beings are drawn into the creative initiative of God. They are called to be co-creative by bearing witness to the Word of life in a life-giving stance towards others. In this way also, authentic conversion may be seen as gradually fashioning the individual more and more to resemble Christ.\(^3\)

Goulding’s reference to the process of “ongoing conversion,” at the heart of which is the imitation of Christ, is critical to the concern of this chapter. Its purpose is to articulate a theological/spiritual model for ministry to God’s people. The fact that, according to Walter Brueggemann, “the doing of justice is the primary

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\(^2\)Dorothee Soelle, *Suffering*, 155.

\(^3\)Gill Goulding, *Creative Perseverance*, 76.
expectation of God,” \(^4\) makes the facilitation of positive change central to ministerial care. Referencing the work of Cynthia Crysdale, this study shows how Sobrino’s category of “the crucified” can be complicated, for instance, when some victims become perpetrators. This implies that any category of perpetrator is open to conversion and reconciliation.

Pastoral care workers can learn a great deal from a spiritual and theological model for ministry which Goulding calls “creative perseverance.” She describes this as “the essential grace-gift,” \(^5\) divinely given to those who dispose themselves to receive and cooperate with it. The beneficiaries are threefold. Faithful, life-giving ministry sustains those who minister, those who are ministered to and the wider church (inclusive of all God’s people). What enables those who minister to the suffering to creatively persevere in the face of suffering? Goulding argues that a kenotic “disposition” committed to contemplative prayer, discernment and loving service is essential. It is animated by an attitude of humble openness to “the possibility of being transformed” and requires the “willingness to be part of a speaking, listening, truthful, risky conversation.” \(^6\)

In conjunction with the insights of Goulding, Crysdale and others, this chapter will first explore Goulding’s spiritual “disposition” for ministry, drawing closely on her book, *Creative Perseverance*. While cultural and historical specificities relevant to issues of power and powerlessness are helpful, it sees Goulding’s “key constituents of creative perseverance,” that is, “vulnerability, humility and compassion,” \(^7\) as applicable across borders of difference. The chapter then weaves Goulding’s kenotic disposition into key themes of suffering drawn from the novels discussed in Chapters Two and Three. In doing so complementary insights from Crysdale’s renewed “law of the cross” are discussed in conjunction with Goulding’s emphasis on exercising a new “powerlessness” in Christ.

**Kenosis as a disposition for Mission and Ministry**

If as Soelle so eloquently states, “[w]herever people suffer, Christ stands with them,” \(^8\) the disciple of Christ is called to be a life-giving presence for all those who “cry out.” This is so whether that “cry” is a loud

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\(^5\)Goulding, *Creative Perseverance*, 104.

\(^6\)Ibid., 15.

\(^7\)Ibid.

\(^8\)Soelle, *Suffering*, 177.
shout of the blind beggar, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” (Lk 18:38), the silent “cry” of a host of voiceless persons like Abel’s (Gen 4:10), or from the Zacchaeus’s of the world who sincerely want to “see” Jesus (Lk 19:3). At different points in time we may find that we occupy all of these categories. To say that God is love is to move away from a vendetta model of divinity who hears the “cry” of only a select few. It is to move towards a model of mercy that, as Pope Francis insists, includes everyone. In his apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, the Holy Father writes,

> The salvation which God offers us is the work of his mercy. No human efforts, however good they may be, can enable us to merit so great a gift. God, by his sheer grace, draws us to himself and makes us one with him.”

Moreover, the Pontiff reminds us that the salvation God offers “and the Church joyfully proclaims, is for everyone.”

Three things are crucial here. Firstly, movement to an experience of saving transcendence is a free “gift” of God’s mercy. Secondly, all have access to it. Thirdly, the church, which is Christ’s everlasting body (1 Cor 12:27), has a responsibility to “proclaim” God’s mercy, which heals, renews and ultimately redeems. The sustained effort of the church to participate in the redemptive desire of God is precisely Goulding’s key concern in her reflections on recent sexual abuse scandals involving clergy. She holds that “creative perseverance” is a theological foundation for a “renewed practice of ministry” that nourishes life-giving outreach, being founded on a rich interior life open to the imitation of Christ. The term defines a contemplative stance that mirrors the loving, attentive gaze of God. As such, those who respond to the needs of suffering humanity are called to open themselves to “a process of ongoing conversion and transformation that is facilitated by prayer, discernment and a renewed asceticism.” This disposition for ministry is fundamentally grounded in “a gradual conformity to the kenosis of Christ.” Believers are invited to participate as “co-creators” in the life of God, which is essentially to love because the character of divinity is to love (1 Jn 4:8) unconditionally regardless of the outcome.

Any consideration that suffering can be transformative should draw attention to an important caveat: suffering in itself is not redemptive. Crysdale makes it clear, for instance, that “Jesus chose love, not suffering.

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10Ibid., #113, 91.

11Goulding, *Creative Perseverance*, 137.

12Ibid., 104.

13Ibid., 109.
It is essential to grasp that Jesus chose suffering only as the indirect consequence of choosing to be himself, to fulfill his mission, to love the world. . . . Jesus *accepted* suffering, he did not choose it."\(^{14}\) There is, then, an important distinction between suffering as a voluntary outcome of the choice to love as Christ loved and involuntary suffering, such as the unwarranted suffering caused to others and the self as the result of the choice not to love, which is "sin." Both aspects intersect with the purpose of this chapter to articulate a pastoral disposition for outreach to persons wounded by the cycle of violence. In the Christian tradition the cross of Jesus Christ lies at the heart of humankind’s redemption story. Crysdale contends that its “story of betrayal, repentance, and forgiveness continues to elicit profound transformation for many today.”\(^{15}\) She intersects with Goulding’s recognition of the kenotic “framework” as essential to Christian formation and ministry.

Both theologians in this regard echo Hans Urs von Balthasar’s theological insight that the “Cross is the centre of the world’s history, for it transcends the categories of ‘elect’ and ‘non-elect’ by reconciling all human beings in the crucified body which hangs there. . . .”\(^{16}\) In other words, it speaks true to all humanity and all creation. The cross of Jesus, from the Christian perspective, is the theological answer to the timeless questions about what it means to be a human being susceptible to suffering as much as open to joy. It embraces what it means to be capable of betrayal as well as made for transcendence. Essential to accessing the deepest dimension of human living, therefore, is conversion from the selfish, the false “I”\(^{17}\) or ego-centric self, which betrays our truest identity as made for a God who looks lovingly at the Son in us (Mk 10:21). Goulding therefore sees ongoing conversion as a decision “to risk cultivating a disposition that mirrors the attentiveness of God towards all human beings, for we are called to be open to all human beings.”\(^{18}\)

Echoing Bernard Lonergan, Crysdale provides a useful definition of conversion as a work of grace that “involves an about-face, a dramatic reversal of previously known meanings and values.”\(^{19}\) Conversion is a slow multifaceted process. Lonergan’s three-dimensional model identifies religious, moral and intellectual aspects to which Crysdale adds Robert M. Doran’s notion of psychic conversion.\(^{20}\) Goulding also emphasizes conversion’s gradual, continuous nature, which requires a “permanent commitment to change” and “a

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\(^{14}\) Cynthia Crysdale, *Embracing Travail*, 155.
\(^{15}\) Ibid, 8.
\(^{18}\) Goulding, *Creative Perseverance*, 103.
\(^{19}\) Crysdale, *Embracing Travail*, 135.
\(^{20}\) Crysdale, *Embracing Travail*, 141.
commitment to vulnerability."  
Pastoral ministers, she suggests, must be serious about personal holiness and solidarity with the suffering. This is the only effective means for authentically sharing with others the healing hope of transcendence, which is ultimately Christ’s work of redemption.

If Divine grace is the starting point of any authentic experience of transcendence, conversion is its enactment, that is, a radical commitment to changing one’s former “meanings and values,” thereby, through grace, becoming more like the image of the Creator. Goulding’s dialectic formula for conversation, which requires a surrendered attitude that facilitates speaking and listening, offers those called to pastoral care a theological foundation for outreach. It also provides a good interface with Crysdale’s insights into the healing of the perpetrator and victim discussed in Chapters Two and Three. The focus this chapter gives to ministry is less oriented to the psychological strategies for healing and more to the exploration of a spiritual stance for sustaining a creative practice in assisting persons in the process of healing and transformation. The following section discusses Goulding’s model in more detail.

**Towards a Ministry of Compassion: the Role of Speaking and Listening**

Christian ministry to God’s people can be succinctly summarized in Goulding’s definition of compassion as “the disposition to love in a world filled with suffering.”  
It is a stance of solidarity with a broken humanity loved by a God who constantly gives without cost, but invites our reciprocated response, in freedom. Those called to pastoral care to the suffering gradually learn to become “empty” in an attitude of humility that gives the other’s story priority. Such openness will involve the risk that perceptions and attitudes will be transformed, even by those who appear to be weak and dispossessed. Jesus’s encounter with the Syrophoenician woman is a case in point. Her spirited retort challenged him to see her as a child of God, which meant that her demon-possessed daughter was deserving of liberation (Mk 7: 25-30). Ministry therefore is a context for deeper conversion into the mercy and compassion of God’s loving acceptance of all persons. A kenotic spirituality is radically different from worldly understandings of powerlessness and vulnerability. It is a disposition that empowers one to speak and act with power drawn from the Divine and in imitation of the obedient and loving self-emptying of Jesus who became a servant, “though he was in the form of God.” (Phil

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22 Ibid., 15.
Sarah Coakley’s argument for the recovery of “a christological kenosis” that unites “human ‘vulnerability’ with authentic divine power (as opposed to worldly or ‘patriarchal’ visions of power),” assists Goulding in her support of a non-violent, spiritual practice, assisted by contemplative prayer.

In a world culture oriented to domination and control, a theological model for journeying with those victimized by abusive power or with their victimizers, particularly in the case of abused women and historically oppressed people, can draw instruction from Coakley’s kenotic reading of vulnerability. This is especially necessary in situations where waiting for persons to enact life-giving choices becomes challenging or in situations of extreme suffering where the temptation to “control” liberating outcomes may compromise Christian values or even circumvent Divine grace. Coakely’s reconstitution of power from a worldly and patriarchal ideology to “power-in-vulnerability” certainly challenges power as control. As Goulding argues, such vulnerability is fundamentally modeled on a Trinitarian intimacy of the loving, reciprocated self-offering among the Three Persons. She sees participation in the life of the Godhead, through prayer and grace, as a gateway “to a deeper living of that death to self and new life in Christ, which is oriented towards Christ’s mission of reconciliation. This is also the church’s mission today in a work of reconciliation and healing of the world.”

The act of speaking, within the ambit of “creative perseverance” is therefore the willingness to voice one’s truth and to be open to the truth of the other. Referring to the silence of those who suffered sexual abuse at the hands of the clergy, Goulding affirms the right to be heard in light of Pope John Paul II’s compassionate encouragement to victims to “Speak, you have the right to do so—you who have suffered.” To speak is to register in language, the validity of one’s experience and perspective. Soelle points out the connection between affliction and silence, manifested as the loss of speech. Isolation, helplessness and hopelessness can lock the afflicted person into a state of passive self-absorption and resignation. She delineates a three-step movement out

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24Ibid., 5.
25Goulding, Creative Perseverance, 110.
26Ibid., 19.
of such suffering. The victim moves from mute powerlessness and isolation, to autonomous communication as in lamentation, and then to the possibility of change experienced through hopeful solidarity with others.27

Coterminous with speaking is listening. It completes the dialectic process that leads to conversation. At best, healer, victim, perpetrator and the wider community can be included. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa, which took place in the aftermath of apartheid, was an attempt at such a dialogue, regardless of its faults. Authentic listening makes it possible to respond with compassion for the sake of justice. It requires surrendering one’s own positions and ideas in order to give center stage to the truth of the other. In terms of the responsibility of church as compassionate listening neighbor, Goulding writes, “There is a critical imperative to listen to those who have suffered. This encourages the sufferer to speak . . . . Unfortunately, many fail to find the attentive listener they seek.”28 Listening requires self-emptying and is consonant, Goulding contends, with “a reverent waiting, a presence to the other that allows for the divine initiative, that brings insight.” The fruit of this “reciprocal process” is the grace of understanding and acceptance that requires genuine conversion at personal and social levels.29 Speaking and listening therefore require the humility to be respectfully open in conversation and to be transformed, even in the role of agent or facilitator in the “co-creative” work of God’s transformative action in another person. The following section explores how a spirituality given to the dynamics of speaking and listening may assist in pastoral outreach with reference to selected issues discussed in Chapters Two and Three.

**Listening to the Victim**

Goulding makes an interesting claim for the importance of respectful listening for the work of reconciliation. She sees this dynamic as potentially analogous to prayer and the attentiveness of God. She writes, “When listening to such experiences and hearing them within the heart, a new awareness may emerge. Indeed there is a possibility, by grace, of glimpsing something of the divine compassion and redeeming love that come from God and lead back to God.” Moreover, the divine encounter described has the power to transform all parties because of the space of compassion opened up. Goulding continues, “This kind of awareness can be the stimulus for an ongoing purification of motivation within human hearts. It can also assist a

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27 Soelle, *Suffering*, 70-73.  
28 Goulding, *Creative Perseverance*, 44.  
29 Ibid., 49.
conscientious examination of the means of using authority at both an individual and structural level."  

Compassionate listening, therefore, can encourage conversion and be a catalyst for liberation and reconciliation. Ministry from an authentically contemplative disposition provides the opportunity to facilitate such a possibility.

Traumatic suffering often imprisons its victims in a dehumanizing silence because of the powerlessness and shame they experience. In Hopkinson’s *Midnight Robber*, Tan-Tan’s discovery of voice empowers her to speak her truth about her abuse and the act of self-defense that resulted in the death of her father. Crysdale’s work also gives significance to voice and speaking to the “underclass.” Apart from noting the crucial connection between “social location” and “one’s ability to claim voice,” she recognizes the importance of speech to groups, inclusive of women, who have been silenced and remain passive “receivers” and not “discoverers” of their own truths, as discussed in Chapter Three. Pastoral care directed to the traumatized must therefore be sensitive to this need of victims to speak. Vigilance should be maintained so as to not perpetuate the silence, powerlessness and sense of rejection they endured. In the case of Tan-Tan, she had no voice or power to resist the physical and sexual abuse she suffered. The same, incidentally, can be said of Donne’s abusive treatment of his concubine, Mariella, who like her people, was seen as a “senseless creature whom he governed and ruled like a fowl.”  

Ministry to the victims of trauma therefore requires attentiveness to their crushed and wounded self-esteem, but without encouraging blame, self-pity or abdication of responsibility for their healing.

It is very easy to see the victim in a one-dimensional way, especially because of their inherent vulnerability. In certain cases however, they must be compassionately challenged to actively engage in changing self-sabotaging behaviors like helplessness, self-hate, distrust and anger. The low self-esteem and self-hate Tan-Tan possessed, for instance, is analogized in the tale of Dry Bones. She remains spiritually isolated until she can take the responsibility to creatively rid herself of guilt. Further, it is necessary to be aware that a distorted spirituality of suffering can easily elevate suffering to an end in itself—into a kind of theological masochism, as Soelle describes it. Unhealthy attitudes of passive acceptance, and in the extreme, apathy, can be nurtured. Victimhood therefore flourishes where selfhood is damaged. Low-self esteem, shame and guilt in

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30Ibid., 65.
32Ibid., 77.
33Wilson Harris, *Palace of the Peacock*, 15.
Tan-Tan’s case resulted in self-loathing. She saw herself as “a wicked crosses for people to bear,” in other words, an undesired burden or curse. A possible repercussion of this lack of self-love and unhealed pain is the temptation to give oneself a pseudo-mission to engineer change. Tan-Tan’s self-assignment of the role of the Robber Queen is an extreme case of the unhealed victim trying to be a healer. The result is that she perpetuates violence.

Crysdale’s caution against spiritualizing suffering in ways that intensify the victimhood syndrome is also important given the traditional theological focus on repentance for one’s sinfulness. In such a situation, the victim, without voice and self-esteem, never really recovers his or her personhood. Crysdale writes:

For those who approach the cross with an already beleaguered sense of self, what is to be discovered in the cross and resurrection is not – initially – forgiveness but healing. The wounded victims of the world, in contemplating Jesus on the cross, discover themselves not primarily as crucifiers of a sinless one but as victims who have been slain.

The ability to see the cross of Jesus as a healing possibility and hope for new life in situations of powerlessness can release victims from an apathetic or passive acceptance of their fate. Apathy, Dorothee Soelle points out, is often the response of the powerless in the face of suffering. She argues that an “apathetic” response to the conditions of suffering and/or their effects is a choice that can be fed by a masochistic Christianity. Such a person sees suffering as a test. Otherwise, a spirituality driven by “theological sadism” sees God as a mute, tyrannical punisher. For victims, the way to redemption, like Abel’s blood “crying from the ground,” must entail “claiming a voice, naming victimization, claiming human dignity and then discerning responsibility.” This movement is less about repentance and forgiveness, and more about the recovery of the wounded Self, which enables the rejection of complicity with abuse and the reclaiming of one’s power to positively change the circumstances of abuse.

Certainly there are many innocent victims of extreme suffering who are simply so broken by their experiences they are unable to find paths to recovery. In such cases loving empathy seems the only possible healing response. Stoeberv, drawing on the work of Edith Stein, defines empathy as “the ability to reach out to another and feel her or his emotions—to relate to another person intimately through a sharing of their thoughts

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34Hopkinson, Midnight Robber, 215.
35Crysdale, Embracing Travail, 8.
37Crysdale, Embracing Travail, 17.
and feelings.” Compassion is empathizing with another’s suffering through a framework of love. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that the temptation to capitulate to the burden of suffering by passive acquiescence is very real. Healing undoubtedly requires the ability to encourage victims to confront self-sabotaging attitudes and behaviors.

Passivity may of course result from the inability or refusal to exercise one’s agency to change the dynamics of oppressive situations, perhaps for fear that the conditions of suffering may intensify, as in the case of chronic domestic violence. On the other hand, in extreme situations of domination and trauma, acquiescence may result from the incapacity to believe that one has a Self to defend. In either case, Cynthia Hess’s distinction between external and internal violence is useful. Expanding on the work of John Howard Yoder, Hess encourages an awareness of the dynamics of trauma itself, which means giving attention to the workings of “externalized” and “internalized violence.” She defines the “internal” type as “violence that has assaulted people from without and then become embodied within their bodies, minds, and souls.” Apart from the psychic reliving of negative internalizations, these traumas can be manifested as radical forms of self-abnegation or acts of aggression. Such persons and communities are not only embodied sites of violence, having internalized their negative self-images via “social construction.” They are also vulnerable to becoming agents of violence often perpetrated against their own, thereby repeating cycles of dehumanization because of unhealed anger, humiliation and resentment.

Victims may become perpetrators, as the only power they have is to project their woundedness onto vulnerable others, making of them pariahs. They can seek, as Tan-Tan did, to “fix” injustice by a commitment to redemptive violence. Much can be gained therefore from what is arguably Crysdale’s decentered approach to identities like victim and victimizer. Transformation, from a Christian perspective, implies that some people will “discover themselves in the crucified Jesus as crucifiers,” and “others will come to the challenge of new life through discovering themselves in Jesus as the crucified.” A one-sided view of categories like the “oppressed” and “oppressors” cannot be sensitive to the complex dynamic of unhealed pain in victims, not to mention their perpetrators. For some, it may be difficult to accept that the potential to become a perpetrator is in

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40Ibid., 26.
each person given the inherent brokenness of the human condition, as Crysdale argues. The more important question, therefore, especially for pastoral caregivers, is how to help break the cycle. She writes:

> Whatever the nature of the transformation, and whichever direction it takes, beginning with the crucified or with the crucifier, neither pole is dispensable. Sooner or later, in some form or other, one must discover oneself as both a crucifier and a victim. The failure to do this can lead to self-righteousness on the one hand or self-immolation on the other.”

The failure to confront squarely the complexity of suffering can very well become less about enabling conversion from self-sabotaging attitudes and lifestyles, and more about the will to “control” revolutionary outcomes. The understandable moral righteousness of the victim’s stance can easily validate the pursuit of victory by any means, even violent ones. This is the option Tan-Tan chooses. It is also true of Mariella’s abuse and the reality/dream of her murder of the abusive Donne who had made her “vulgar musing executioner.”

Even the possibility in Hopkinson’s novel of the generally peaceful douens evolving into an armed, warring community is hinted at to better defend themselves against the abuse of the humans. When Chichibud considers learning how to use Tan-Tan’s gun, it is a sure sign of the snowballing effect of a violent ethos.

Justice is indeed a significant aspect of healing and reconciliation. It is, however, counterproductive, as Wink argues, to operate from an ethic of domination to fix wrong. If this pitfall is unconsidered, then an important growing point in the experience of suffering is overlooked: the capacity to creatively wait with a discerning attitude and humble openness to cooperate with God’s liberating action. The possibility of victims getting enmeshed in modes of redemptive violence or retributive justice would also be missed. This kenotic disposition is of benefit to both the givers and receivers of pastoral care. According to Goulding, “[f]or the one who suffers, the result may be a damaged capacity to trust others and an inability to embrace vulnerability.”

The ability to risk openness to speak one’s truth, to receive love, to dialogue, and even to forgive would be severely inhibited, thereby making authentic liberation impossible. Goulding notes that “[t]he resulting isolation, withdrawal and disassociation can be highly destructive.” As in the case of Tan-Tan, these can be the root of the violent acting out of unhealed hurt.

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42Ibid., 20.
43Harris, Palace of the Peacock, 25.
44Hopkinson, Midnight Robber, 272.
45Goulding, Creative Perseverance, 113.
46Ibid.
Listening to the Perpetrator

Scripture is clear that perpetrators are required to take responsibility for the suffering caused to others. The strong admonitions of the Old Testament prophets directed to those who oppress the poor are clear (Jer. 7:5-7; Isa. 10: 1-3). Jesus’s stance against injustice, for instance, in the story of the rich man, Lazarus (Lk 16:19-31) does not contradict his communication of a loving and merciful Father. Conversely, he invites victims to exercise forgiveness as a necessity for healing self and freeing perpetrators to seek reconciliation (Mat 18:22). Of course, the choice is theirs to accept or decline. Justice cannot be overlooked in whatever circumstance. Yet the challenge is to not deny either victims or their perpetrators their human dignity, which means extending to them a compassionate presence that is at the same time a source of challenge. A critical dimension of enabling speaking is the capacity, therefore, to be a non-judgmental listener to the perpetrator’s story. In this regard, Goulding’s point is important:

To really perceive the mystery of God at work in all human beings is an inspiring stimulus for our attempts at real dialogue and conversation. With such a presupposition, it is impossible to write off any individual or group. It is to deem all worthy of the respect of a genuine interaction.47

This is not at all an easy task, particularly if one is stuck in a retributive “eye for an eye” framework of justice. Christianity, however, requires a radical practice of compassion that sees, as Jesus did, the dignity of all persons. Jesus sees Zacchaeus, for instance, as a child of God and instructs his disciples that the Father “causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous” (Mat 5:45). God is perfect mercy, in other words. A powerful example of compassionate presence to the perpetrator, referenced by Crydale, is Sister Helen Prejean’s journey with a convicted multiple rapist and murderer in the book, Dead Man Walking (also made into a popular movie). Sister Helen’s primary role was to help the man, Matthew, “take responsibility for his action” and at the same time be a compassionate presence in the “imitation of Jesus.”48

Participation in on-going conversion is an exercise of free choice. The humble acceptance of responsibility for one’s errors and destructive lifestyle cannot be forced on anyone. Similarly, God does not demand love for love. Even our redemption, as St Paul reminds us, is a free gift of love: “God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom 5:8). Bernard Lonergan therefore

47 Ibid., 140.
48 Crysdale, Embracing Travail, 51.
appropriately describes conversion as an “otherworldly falling in love”\(^{49}\) as a reciprocated response to Divine love. The mission of extending a welcoming and healing presence to a suffering world necessitates the sincere exercise of a contemplative “listening disposition,” as Goulding defines it. The kenotic “waiting” “that is empty of self-interest” and so “allows for the Divine initiative that brings insight”\(^{50}\) is therefore a key characteristic. Only prayer and a consistent sacramental life nurture communion with the mission of Christ to be a loving and saving presence. This allows the Christian, according to Michael Stoeber, to be “spiritually linked to a redemptive power that gradually draws him/her into its cosmic healing work.”\(^{51}\)

The victimizer’s voice or truth is undoubtedly difficult to receive yet the listening church must remain open, even as it helps him/her to accept culpability and responsibility for meaningful reconciliatory change. If the ownership of one’s own “evil” is difficult enough, “the acknowledgement of God in the enemy – is for many simply too high a price to pay,” according to Walter Wink.\(^{52}\) Christian love seeks to stretch itself beyond the inclination to withdraw, and this outreaching is an aspect of the call to “act justly.” This of course is not in conflict with the responsibility of the church to play its role in realizing a just world without becoming enmeshed in partisan politics, which compromises its mission to love unconditionally. Responding to the tension between politics and the mission of the church, Pope Benedict XVI writes that a, ”just society must be the achievement of politics, not of the Church. Yet the promotion of justice through efforts to bring about openness of mind and will to the demands of the common good is something which concerns the Church deeply.”\(^{53}\) A noteworthy example of activism that seeks a non-violent and loving mode of encouraging positive change can be drawn from Malala Yousafzai in her 2013 address to the United Nations General Assembly. She says,

> I do not even hate the Talib who shot me. Even if there is a gun in my hand and he stands in front of me. I would not shoot him. This is the compassion that I have learnt from Muhammad-the prophet of mercy, Jesus Christ and Lord Buddha. This is the legacy of change that I have inherited from Martin Luther King, Nelson Mandela and Muhammad Ali Jinnah. This is the philosophy of non-violence that

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\(^{50}\) Goulding, *Creative Perseverance*, 49.

\(^{51}\) Stoeber, *Reclaiming Theodicy*, 53.

\(^{52}\) Walter Wink, *Engaging the Powers*, 29. Also quoted in Crysdale’s *Embracing Travail*, 45.

I have learnt from Gandhi Jee, Bacha Khan and Mother Teresa. And this is the forgiveness that I have learnt from my mother and father. This is what my soul is telling me, be peaceful and love everyone.\textsuperscript{54}

Most, if not all, highly respected peace advocates and social transformers uphold nonviolent action as a strategy for change that humanizes both sides of a conflict. Martin Luther King, Desmond Tutu and Mahatma Gandhi are examples of such reconciliatory figures. Like Jesus, they practiced non-violence as a way of gradually bringing about, as Pope Benedict XVI writes above, “openness of mind and will to the demands of the common good.” Forgiveness is a faith response that refuses to cooperate with violence, but it is not silent or inactive. Rather it is propelled to work for justice from a compassionate stance. Even as Pope Benedict cautions against liberationists’ enthusiasm for righting wrong, Leonardo Boff engages the limits of justice in light of the higher virtue of forgiveness. He writes,

> Experience also teaches us that the actual achievement of justice is meager and fragile, though human life would be ignoble and impossible if we did not keep trying to achieve it. On the other hand justice alone is not enough to maintain peace. There must also be a gratuitousness and a self-giving that transcend the imperatives of duty. We need love and a capacity for forgiveness that go beyond the limits of justice.\textsuperscript{55}

The underlying issue here is the Liberationist movement’s apparent preference for highlighting structural or systemic change over the more interior, grace-derived and interpersonal process of forgiveness and reconciliation. Justice is not always a prerequisite or guarantee for real transformation and peace. Love transcends “law,” as Jesus taught, although just laws can express a commitment to love. Pastoral caregivers by learning how to creatively wait on God’s initiative can avoid the temptation to seek justice at all costs. Genuine peace is therefore given the time to happen. As such, a practice of forgiveness, compassion and reconciliation is essential to mediating healing in a world where we suffer and are also agents of suffering.

Conversely, in dialogue with perpetrators, their tendency to resort to accustomed modes of domination and control must be creatively challenged. Harris’s character, Donne, for instance, provides an extreme example of a desire for spiritual intimacy based on possession or usurpation, not self-emptying. His violent hammering of the window behind which the Christ-like “young carpenter” worked\textsuperscript{56} demonstrates that even late in his purgative journey, he misguidedely desires to establish a connection with the Divine that simply reinforces his...


\textsuperscript{56}Wilson Harris, \textit{Palace of the Peacock}, 132-33.
accustomed life of entitlement and power. Early in the novel, for instance, he tells his brother, “I am everything. . . every blasted thing to the laboring people.”\(^57\) At the point of his ascent of the waterfall Donne, at the end of the plot, still struggles with “moral conversion,” which Bernard Lonergan says, radically “changes the criterion of one’s decisions and choices from satisfaction to values.”\(^58\) He therefore demanded from the Divine carpenter, “the kind of attention and appreciation dead habit taught him to desire.”\(^59\)

The perpetrators in the novels under consideration give the listener-reader the opportunity to understand the motives and the values that produce violent masculinities defined by power and possession, entitlement and control. Such ideologies are at the basis of the choices and behaviors that inform the lives of Antonio, Tan-Tan’s father, and Donne, the landlord. In fact, abusive “patriarchal” power is the pervasive social norm of their respective cultures, influencing the attitudes that perpetuate violence towards vulnerable groups like children, women and ethnic minorities. An ugly manifestation of its ideological entrenchment is imaged in the armored tank in which Tan-Tan’s stepmother pursues her. Coakley’s kenotic “power-in-vulnerability” offers a disposition that can nurture the non-violent presence and basis for relating necessary to make possible the transformation of the social ills the texts explore.

While Donne’s redemptive journey is difficult, the text holds out the possibility for healing that transcends even earthly existence, introducing the idea of an afterlife stage or stages, like the Christian concept of purgatory or karma-cycle of renewal not wholly unlike those that Stoeber explores in his theodical reflections.\(^60\) Harris’s plot therefore appears to be one of several such journeys, The arrival at the new consciousness or “mind” during the ascent to the mystical “palace” at the novel’s end reinforces the role of faith in a supreme Other or God, which makes change possible. Donne realizes his inherent interconnection with all life and the “dance” of the cosmos\(^61\) as he becomes fully united with his “true” spiritual Self in Merton’s sense.\(^62\) In the context of the story that “true” Self is embodied in his alter ego, the “Dreamer” brother who significantly takes over the narration in the final two chapters. Donne ultimately comes to a new understanding that takes, in Harris’s vision, many lifetimes. It is realized only in communion or, to use Goulding’s term, in persevering, sincere “conversation” with others. The path to this “vision” of liberation and transformation,

\(^{57}\)Ibid., 17.  
\(^{58}\)Lonergan, Method, 240.  
\(^{59}\)Ibid., 133.  
\(^{60}\)Stoeber, Reclaiming Theodicy, 91.  
\(^{61}\)Harris, Palace of the Peacock, 150.  
\(^{62}\)Merton, Seeds of Contemplation, 31.
however, entails “embracing wounds” and seeking forgiveness and reconciliation. Sometimes this arduous journey to wholeness, for the person open to conversion, is more realizable than the illusive “ghost of a chance” Donne initially suggests. Like Zacchaeus’s transformation, it can be concretely experienced as a renewal of right relations with God and the community. Alternatively, it can be like the promise of mercy and redemption the “good thief” embraces in the very last moments of his earthly travail (Lk 23:43).

**Conclusion**

Reverent listening to the pain of the other gives recognition to the essential dignity of the person. Moreover, listening opens a space for the “intersection between speaking, listening and hearing leads to a fullness of understanding that is most profound.” The difficulty of this spirituality of listening is compounded when one is required to listen both to victims and their perpetrators with the same non-judgmental reverence. Suffering implicates everyone. Linda Hutcheon articulates the complex web of ramifications especially traumatic suffering has when she writes, “Trauma most obviously affects victims; but it also has an impact upon its perpetrators and collaborators, on bystanders and resisters. It also influences those born later. . . .” Goulding concurs when she states that “we are all to some extent victims and perpetrators of abuse—by collusion, denial, if not by active participation.” Charitable openness is therefore vital.

In its mission to be compassionately present wherever there is suffering, the ecclesial community of believers is called to be as Balthasar so powerfully images “the presence of a Church of love at the foot of the Cross.” This image of solidarity invites us to be “co-creators” in God’s desire to redeem by living a self-surrendered life. Persons committed to living well what Goulding calls “creative perseverance” will continue to be powerful witnesses to a world in need of compassion. Hess, for instance, considers Christians well equipped because of their faith to form a powerful “witnessing community.” They can assist in empowering traumatized victims by being a context where trauma victims can voice their “pain (and the pain of others) to God,”

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64 Harris, *Palace of the Peacock*, 57.  
65 Goulding, *Creative Perseverance*, 49.  
67 Goulding, *Creative Perseverance*, 137.  
especially since they experience so much grief and anger.\textsuperscript{69} Ministry to the suffering certainly demands being sensitive to the slow process of conversion. At the same time, the ecclesial community has to be a sign of challenge even as it remains supportive. Indeed, Soelle writes that “[i]t is possible to help bear the burden [of people’s suffering], contrary to all talk about a person’s final solitude.”\textsuperscript{70} Pastoral caregivers witness to God’s forgiving and healing indwelling, through sharing the life of faith and risking vulnerability in order to offer non-violent presence in contradistinction to worldly power. No matter how slow the process, fidelity to the resurrected Christ sustains the sure hope that the fruits of Harris’s insight will be realized, that “violence is not the cornerstone of a civilization.”\textsuperscript{71}

\textsuperscript{69}Hess, \textit{Sites of Violence, Sites of Grace}, 104.
\textsuperscript{70}Soelle, \textit{Suffering}, 177.
\textsuperscript{71}Wilson Harris, \textit{Carnival} (London: Faber & Faber, 1985), 90.
Chapter Five

Making Things New—A Conclusion

This thesis invested in an interdisciplinary approach to its reflections on contemporary theologies of suffering and the value of trauma literature. Theology and literary studies have been certainly enriched by recent scholarship on trauma literature and theory. The fresh inroads made by these scholarly trajectories were argued to be useful resources for theologizing suffering and pastoral care. The point of focus taken in this regard, however, was on the ways in which suffering can significantly derail persons from really flourishing. While the impact of trauma on victims of suffering was a seminal concern, the study argued for the necessary inclusion of the perpetrator in the cycle of healing. It also gave consideration to the appropriate spiritual disposition of pastoral caregivers. To this end, the work of Cynthia Crysdale, Michael Stoeber, Dorothee Soelle and Gill Goulding was closely referenced. Its main literary resources were *Palace of the Peacock* by Wilson Harris and *Midnight Robber* by Nalo Hopkinson.

Literature possesses “witnessing” power that facilitates an empathetic context for remembering and mourning, which are important to the healing process. This is especially so for traumatic suffering where trust is radically broken. One can claim for the reader a healing role similar to the therapist, who is “a witness and ally, in whose presence the survivor can speak of the unspeakable.” A bridge of connection is therefore constructed with the sacred narrative of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. His “story” is *the* spiritual template for working through and responding to human suffering. The witness of divine love in action, signified by the Cross, then, is the spiritual resource through which the experiences of suffering represented by the literary texts selected for discussion were read. Christians rest their faith in the person of Jesus, whose voluntary and singular kenosis is the sacred “drama” of redemption that overarches all movements to healing, transformation, forgiveness and reconciliation. The “grace-gift” of participation in this prayerful self-donation is a faith-derived hope that new horizons of possibility will dawn in God’s time.

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The study, therefore, interfaced the stories told through the literary word and the Word of God, the *Logos*, Jesus Christ, whose redeeming narrative is the faith “narrative with which St John’s gospel opens: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (Jn 1:1). Story and “remembrance” are at the heart of the Christian faith. Believers are especially called to nurture a memory of Jesus’s words and acts, most perfectly expressed in the Eucharist: “do this in remembrance of me” (Lk 22:19). Moreover, this remembrance of his redemptive self-donation is essentially for the life of the world, which embraces the lives and stories of people everywhere—including the Earth’s story. Flora Keshgegian creatively captures this interconnection when she writes:

“If the promise of Christianity’s redemptive Word is to be kept for those who suffer, then that Word must include their words and their memories in a way that actively shapes redeeming truth. Indeed, we must begin with listening to and receiving these memories. New words will constantly come forth in this process of hearing and speaking, of witnessing and proclaiming.”

The claim made for literature as a kind of speaking-text for the myriad memories and perspectival differences is, therefore, foundational to the shared responsibility we have to participate in Christ’s “redemptive Word” and life. This dialogue is of great value to theology and all those “sent” to “feed” God’s sheep (Jn 21:17). The intersection between the literary representation of human suffering and the evangelical witness of the Gospel of Jesus’s redemptive mission and ministry can, therefore, creatively inform theological reflection and pastoral responses to suffering humanity. Though it should be the social and political imperative of communities and governments to ensure the building up of a just and humane environment where life can flourish, it is a characteristically Christian responsibility to attend to the needs of the afflicted and broken hearted. This mandate, however, demands an even greater commitment to be, as St Paul describes in Romans 6:4-5, Christ’s eternal Body, for a graced but wounded world. Participation in the co-creative work of God, however, is not automatic or self-assigned. Rather, one is called and, as Goulding argues, it is a spiritual discipline that is sustained through willing surrender to on-going conversion and discerned action in humble obedience to God’s will. Deep prayer and immersion in the sacramental life of the church help nurture this self-giving.

There is a need, however, to tell a more holistic story of the movement of redemption from suffering and the alienation of “sin.” This is particularly important for the un-silencing of many voices that remain muted.

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by narrow or biased listening practices, in which the church can also participate. From a theological perspective, Crysdale’s revised “double sided” “law of the cross” provided an insightful revision of the traditional redemption theologies, which she claimed had tended to be too guilt based with their focus on forgiveness for “sin” being paramount.³ Victims’ need for elevation was therefore suppressed and little was said about the complex process of healing. Additionally, the possibility of healing for their perpetrators was left largely unattended in both trauma theory and theologies of suffering. Together with Michael Stoeber’s detailed and sensitive reflections on destructive and transformative types of suffering, Crysdale’s insights, as well as the foundational work of Dorothee Soelle, were useful for considering the stories of victims and their perpetrators.

Chapter One argued for the theological fruitfulness of exploring literary representation of suffering. It suggested that an interdisciplinary approach helps to engage more effectively with the non-communicable illusiveness of traumatic suffering. In giving focus to the literature of the Caribbean diaspora, the study contributed to the needed expansion of the originating ambit of trauma discourse indicated by Stef Craps. He argues that trauma theory and imaginative works defined as representative of trauma literature display a Western bias. This betrays Caruth’s early ethical claim to a “cross-cultural solidarity,” which humanity’s shared occupation of an essentially traumatic historical narrative necessitated.⁴

Pope Benedict XVI writes that Jesus’s “death on the Cross” is a dramatic outworking of “[l]ove in its most radical form.” Moreover, to contemplate the pierced Son of the Father, he insists, is where “the Christian discovers the path along which his life and love must move.”⁵ This study attempted to respond to the basic truth about divinity as “radical” “love,” which St Paul expresses when he says, “God has no favorites” (Gal 2:6).

Without desiring to minimize the seriousness of “sin” that harms others and self, a difficult aspect of suffering was confronted—the general exclusion of the perpetrator’s story in the cycle of healing. This was the focus of Chapter Two, which discussed Wilson Harris’s novel, Palace of the Peacock. Donne’s journey evokes the colonial past but allows for an interesting window into the destructiveness of the will to power and control that can be applicable to other contexts of victimization. The Zacchaeus story was used to establish a Christological response to abusive power, which then interfaced with Crysdale’s work. The movement to conversion for a

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³Cynthia Crysdale, Embracing Trava il, xiii.
⁴Stef Craps, Postcolonial Witnessing, 2.
character like Donne required a descent from pride and from a violent domineering lifestyle, oriented to possession and control. His conversion is essentially to a new valuing of life founded on the interconnectedness of all persons, which in his final transcendent vision is experienced as a cosmic oneness. Harris does not envision an earthly reconciliation for Donne, suggesting perhaps the difficulty of the struggle with the dominant ego and sin. For some persons, conversion and reconciliation may only be fully realized in the afterlife.

The story of Tan-Tan in Hopkinson’s *Midnight Robber* explored the victim’s healing as a journey through the destructive attitudinal and behavioral “detours” of redemptive violence and acquiescent redemptive suffering. Tan-Tan finally arrives at self-love and self-autonomy manifested as the exercise of voice, the acceptance of empathetic love and community support. Crysdale’s emphasis on the healing and elevating aspect of the redemptive story of Jesus’s cross speaks to the wounded victim. Yet Tan-Tan’s vigilante path demonstrates how the open wound of traumatic suffering can result in the morphing of some victims into victimizers. Her conversion is therefore an experience of elevation and the restoration of her destroyed self-esteem, as well as release from the guilt of killing her father.

The reality of suffering cannot be far-removed from the work of healing and restoration. Both are facets of divine mercy and justice. While the systemic injustices that entrap so many in cycles of poverty and abuse are in dire need of change across the globe, the study invests in the value of giving empathic and informed attention to the individual process of healing. Ministers to the suffering people of God do well to adopt Pope Francis’ rustic metaphor of authentic evangelizing as the willingness to take on the “smell like sheep.”6 The faith community is called to be the “keeper” of those who suffer (Gen. 4:9), a role Jesus translated to mean “servant” at the Last Supper (Jn. 13: 3-5).

Goulding’s speaking-listening disposition discussed in Chapter Four provides a useful model for compassionately and productively realizing that radical, empathetic being-with closeness that Pope Francis’ metaphor evokes. An authentic contemplative life, aligned to the kenosis and resurrection of Jesus can safeguard against superficially spiritualizing suffering and recovery for both victims and their perpetrators. Like the stories encountered in the novels discussed, the listening presence of healers has to be oriented towards compassionately going into difficult and even unfamiliar territory. This may mean being stripped of accustomed modes of thinking and doing. One has to be willing to do this for both sides of the story. Not an easy

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requirement, especially for those who find it difficult to accept perpetrators’ desire for contrition. Harris’s focus on the character, Donne, for instance, shares in the commitment Paula Morgan notices in other such imaginative works from the Caribbean canon. The urge is to retell the story of the region’s encounter with the ethos of Empire so as to have its actors “grapple with the half which has never yet been told” in order to envision “liberatory patterns of interaction . . . in the interest of preserving the human.”

Implications

Stories give windows into the different attitudes and behaviors people adopt to handle the realities of life. They offer a means of reflection on motivations, desires, and their outcomes. Additionally, imaginative constructions provide possibilities for educating and humanizing the sensibilities of readers and audiences on matters they may not have personally experienced. Journeys to healing and transformation considered in Chapters Two and Three, for instance, lay bare histories of tremendous loss and pain. They also represent the textual exorcism of the psychic ghosts that haunt the “dangerous memory” of “victims and their tormentors.” In this way they allow insights into such hidden terrain of mind and emotional landscapes that can be of service to theological discussion and pastoral ministries. This widening of awareness, at best, opens one to aspects of humanity’s suffering body that require compassion and advocacy for just change.

Shelly Rambo directs attention to the “open wound” of traumatic experience—which intersects in an uncanny way with Derek Walcott’s description of the trans-Atlantic slave trade and its New World aftermath as an incurable psychic blow when he writes, “Something inside laid like a wound.” Yet the novels discussed point to the possibility, though not guarantee, of a movement beyond the intergenerational transferability of trauma. Rambo, may be right in stating that “[t]rauma is the suffering that does not go away.” A hope-fuelled urgency to heal wounds, however, can be discerned in the creative work of the writers explored. This commitment to the recuperation of fractured lives and histories is also evoked by Walcott when he images the “restoration” thrust of “Antillean art” in these words, “Break a vase and the love that reassembles the fragments

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8Dorothee Soelle refers to J.B. Metz’s term in *Suffering*, 124.
9Quoted by Morgan in *The Terror and the Time*, 89.
is stronger than that love which took its symmetry for granted when it was whole.”  

The unarticulated implication of course is that the remaking of selves after trauma is potentially a deeper encounter with “God’s whole-making love.”  

In this sense the literary endeavor to imagine new futures through the painful “working through of suffering” cooperates in this slow but sure growing into Christ, “from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love as each does its work ” (Eph. 4:16).

Narrative’s power to assist in the psychic and spiritual reconstitution necessary for healing and transcendence stakes a greater claim in the resource of the interior journey, which theology brings to bear on the cross of Jesus Christ. Trauma theory’s preoccupation with the transmissibility of trauma from generation to generation can therefore learn from a faith perspective that sees the healing and transcendence of suffering as a real possibility for some people. The authors discussed are far more interested in healing the violent ideologies and structures that fragment and wound people and communities, even as the “catastrophe” of violence is confronted. Individual and social transformation is therefore the hope they communicate to the witnessing reader cum society. In this way, the imperative they put forward is the need to work for change. Further, a creative response is invited to address their respective voicing of historical, personal and communal suffering. Literature in this way actively participates in and seeks to invent new narratives of transformation. They therefore provide more than observable data of human pain and an aesthetic mirroring of the effects of trauma. They enable theological and pastoral understanding towards recovery and so can assist in constructing strategies for meaningful pastoral outreach aimed at realizing transformation.

At the same time, however, the awareness that the work of conversion is ultimately God’s work makes the disposition of listening Goulding describes a safeguard against the temptation to try to control outcomes. Listening may mean the acceptance that change will not be forthcoming, for either victims or perpetrators, in the timeframe one expects. Some victims like Tan-Tan will, with time and grace, experience deep psycho-spiritual healing and renewal, symbolized by her “new” Robber costume, the outward sign of her becoming a “new creature” (2 Cor. 5:17). Other victims may never be able to recover or only partially so. Further perpetrating persons or systems may not immediately respond to invitations to change. Some like Donne, and the oppressive ideologies and systems of domination they serve, may take several generations to be

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12Crysdale, Embracing Travail, 27.
transformed. The commitment to listening, however, leaves the door of dialogue open and so increases the “risk,” as Crysdale argues, that conversion may happen.

Goulding’s model of speaking-listening and conversation, which ideally mirrors “the attentiveness of God,” clearly has trans-historical and trans-cultural applicability.

The immediate implication is that values and virtues of love, humility, surrender, obedience, forgiveness, faith and human dignity are not culture specific. The means by which persons can be facilitated in their recovery process, however, can draw on cultural traditions particular to their contexts. Hopkinson does so to great effect in her novel by utilizing the Caribbean storytelling traditions and Carnival cultural elements. It is important to recognize, as Crysdale and others point out, that socio-cultural specificities do impact how the practice of surrender maybe differently understood and lived. Surrender for an abused woman would be quite different from the surrender required of her perpetrator. Letting go of a negative self-image in the former would be the prime requirement, not the descent of repentance required of the perpetrator. In this regard, pastoral care workers can take full advantage of the richness of cultural and ancestral traditions as strategies for building self-esteem and autonomy. They can better practice authentic solidarity in the work of transformation without reductively universalizing pain.

The multi-cultural and cross-cultural nature of the Caribbean, which is also true of the global situation, makes it imperative that both parties are drawn into the cycle of healing and transformation. This does not deny that blame must be cast where there is unquestionable evidence of abusive and oppressive behavior. The risk of not extending this embrace is that unjust divisions, which marginalize people, may simply mutate into other kinds of divisions and in the extreme violence simply begets violence. Additionally the study’s interface of the colonial context of Harris’s *Palace of the Peacock* and the futuristic post-postcolonial world of Hopkinson’s *Midnight Robber* certainly demonstrates the localized nature of suffering. It however simultaneously elucidates the universality of the healing process. Not forgetting that individuals and perhaps even communities respond differently to suffering and renewal possibilities, it is clear that Christ’s message transcends cultures and histories. Further, Hopkinson’s casting of the Caribbean as a futuristic colonizer, for instance, suggests that abusive power remains a problem of our shared humanity, not just the colonizers of the first Empire represented by Donne.

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13Goulding, *Creative Perseverance*, 103.
Any attempt to understand and care for the person in the context of suffering, returns one to the universality of the human condition. As St Paul indicates, Jesus Christ is the divine-person who makes all persons one in him (Gal. 3:28). An overemphasis on geo-cultural specificities can unnecessarily complicate the fact that all persons share the basic need for love, dignity and community. Christianity has to respect sociocultural specificities and faith practices. Additionally, theology and pastoral care must be rooted in a historical context. Moreover, because of Christ, there exists a ground for the unification for all peoples in relation to the spiritual path to healing, wholeness and ultimate redemption. The ecclesial community, by virtue of its faithful Christian praxis, is at the forefront of outreach. Elected communities of compassionate care, which include the church, are fertile sites for providing a context for supportive and non-threatening grieving, speaking and listening. They can facilitate healing conversations and change. Careful discernment, however, helps to keep all service to the suffering focused on the redemptive mission of Christ.

As co-creators in God’s mission that all shall be “made alive” in Christ (1 Cor. 15:22), the response this thesis seeks to make to the all-inclusive mercy of God is to explore ways in which victims and their perpetrators impacted by the cycle of suffering may experience healing and transformation. This effort to un-silence something of the perpetrator’s story is a necessary dimension of the vocation of the faithful to walk the path of “love.” Pope Benedict XVI is adamant that “caritas” the vocation of the church. He therefore insists that the church’s ministry of “charity” (diakonia)\(^\text{14}\) is distinct from social activism. “[Humanity] does not live on bread alone” the Pontiff explains. Rather, Christ’s message is salvation without price and without the expectation of reward, and so must be impartially offered. This mode of “radical love” is lived out by the passion, death and resurrection of God’s only Son.

Finally, the destabilization of the at times artificial border between the victim and the victimizer means that any theology of suffering must take greater risk of engaging the interpretative challenge to redemption presented by traumatic suffering, as Shelly Rambo argues.\(^\text{15}\) In whatever way possible, it must include in its discussions and pastoral outreach the presence of their perpetrators, some of whom may have the capacity and desire to participate in transformative change for personal and social benefit. In this way love, defined, as “caritas” better participates in Jesus Christ’s cosmic mission to make “everything new” (Rev 21:5).

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