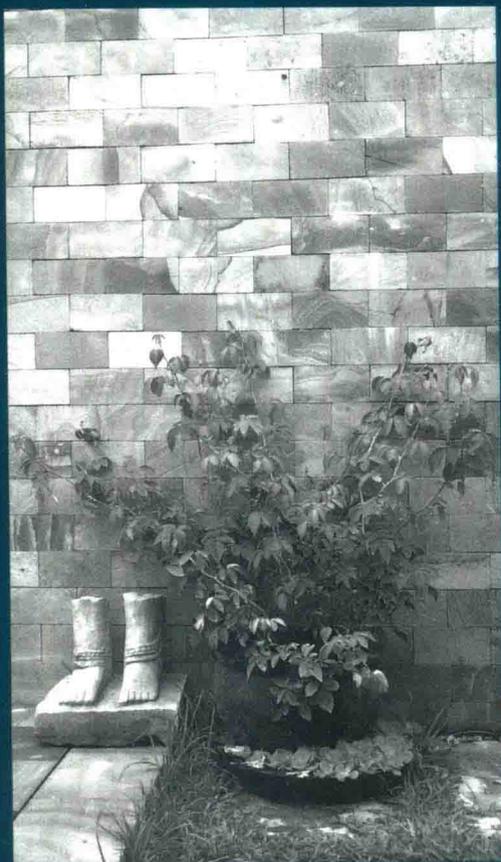


The Poetics of Otherness

War, Trauma, and Literature



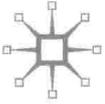
JONATHAN HART



THE POETICS OF OTHERNESS
WAR, TRAUMA, AND LITERATURE

Jonathan Hart

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THE POETICS OF OTHERNESS

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THE POETICS OF OTHERNESS

For my students, past, present, and future

how pleasant a life it is that time of the year, with hunger, and
after sore travail to harbor long and cold nights in cabins made of
boughs, and covered with grass, . . .

Sir Henry Sidney

And yet I must say, that as I have more just cause to make a pitiful
defence of poor poetry, which, from almost the highest estimation
of learning, is fallen to be the laughing-stock of children; so have
I need to bring some more available proofs, since the former is
by no man barred of his deserved credit, whereas the silly latter
hath had even the names of philosophers used to the defacing of
it, with great danger of civil war among the Muses.

Sir Philip Sidney

PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The dedication includes epigraphs from Henry and Philip Sidney, father and son, both writers and soldiers, and in the case of Henry, an administrator for Elizabeth I in Wales and Ireland. His *Memoir* is an important work in the life of a political man who could write and fight. His son, Philip, never had such a long career in the service of the queen, but he did write some of the most interesting fiction, nonfiction and poetry of his time in England. His *Defence of Poesy* is the probably the first great work of literary criticism or theory in English, and the *Arcadia* is a great prose romance, while *Astrophel and Stella* is as accomplished a sonnet sequence as there is in English. Philip's first major appointment was in the Netherlands during the Dutch Revolt against Spanish rule, and there, not putting on his cuisses, he was, on September 22, 1586, wounded in the thigh, his bone shattered, and died, from infections to his wounds, in Arnhem on October 17, 1586, at the age of 31. The calm and religious way Sidney, the governor of Vlissingen or Flushing, faced death impressed those about him and became part of his legend. Here was a writer who wanted to be more of a soldier. Henry Sidney had died on May 5, 1586. Mary Sidney, the sister to Elizabeth I's favorite, Robert Dudley, attended her husband Henry's funeral and herself died on August 9, 1586. When Philip died, he had lost his parents, his father over four months before and his mother about six weeks before. The grief and the distraction may well have deflected his mind. Was he careless, or in the trend for officers on horseback to be under-armed, or was he brave, or did he have a death wish when he did not put on those cuisses that would have partly protected him from that musket ball that shattered his leg above the knee? Henry left behind a wife and son he could not know would be dead within months of his death. Philip left behind a widow, Frances, who was pregnant and had a miscarriage in December 1586 and who secretly married Philip's friend, Robert Devereux, Earl of Essex, in 1590. Philip's brother Robert, who became Earl of Leicester, on

the death of his uncle, and his sister, Mary, who became the Countess of Pembroke, and who worked on and edited, along with Fulke Greville, Philip's writing after his death. Father and son, Henry and Philip, were of each other but other to each other in the degree to which they wrote and fought. Some of their countrymen wrote but did not fight, at least to our knowledge, and Shakespeare, another sonneteer, would be of this camp, and then others fought but never seem to have written literary or sustained political works. The literate soldier would write letters, but not an extended memoir or sonnet sequence, like the Sidneys. The Sidneys were both knights, and Philip had even more of a dose of aristocracy than Henry did, given who Philip's mother was. Mary Dudley herself was well educated in Latin, French, and English; was keen on literature and history; and wrote herself. Her marriage to Henry also produced a daughter, Philip's sister, also Mary, who was a writer in her own right and transformed or edited what we call the *Old Arcadia* into the *New Arcadia*. The Sidneys were not a disadvantaged family, except perhaps in comparison to the Tudors, who called the shots.

So in Henry and Philip Sidney we have soldier-writers like Robert Graves and Siegfried Sassoon in the First World War. The Sidneys were at the upper echelons of Tudor England, and the state funeral of Philip Sidney was a grand and great event. In France, Victor Hugo, who suffered exile and wrote about war and whose father was a general, had, in the nineteenth century, a great funeral with countless people lining the streets of Paris. Writing and poetry mattered before the age of bureaucratic and commercial prose. George Orwell understood, in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and in "Politics and the English Language," the deadening rules and erasure of distinction in the dreary contest to make the souls of people small and then possess them. The Sidneys had lively minds, full of moment and wit. Graves and Sassoon were the same but in different ways, and represent the enfranchisement and spreading literacy that allowed soldiers of all backgrounds to try to make sense of the violence and trauma of war. Writers look into the world of others and otherness and try to make some sense through their poetry and poetics.

This book discusses violence, trauma, and war in poetry among ancients and moderns and across cultures. It begins with otherness and difference in prose and poetry and then concentrates most on poetry. In the end, the war texts that receive the most attention are those that represent the First World War and the Second World War. My father, who is in his hundredth year, was born about two months after the beginning of the First World War, and his family lived in

London while it was being bombed in both wars. These wars are palpable for me. When I was young, the veterans' hospital was full of those who had been gassed or severely wounded in the First World War. I played football (soccer) and other sports with children whose parents came from nations who fought on all sides of those wars.

But this book really had another shape before this last draft, but as often happens, my books change and subdivide. The main impetus was a wonderful conference on the First World War, held in Singapore in February 2014, where I gave a paper on indigenous Canadian soldiers in that conflict. Then the rest happened and joined my earlier work on violence and trauma, and a new poetics of otherness was forged. The book and research took a life of their own and the archives in North America and Britain yielded riches, like Canadian War Posters in the Toronto Public Library; Siegfried Sassoon's letters to his mother in the Manuscripts Room in the Cambridge University Library; work by Sir Walter Raleigh in the Bodleian Library, Oxford; and a treatise on war in Tudor England in the British Library.

Early on, I had written about war and violence in Shakespeare's history plays, and my poetry also included meditations on violence, like the death of a bird on a road near Girton College in Cambridge. As a child, I did not even want see mosquitoes killed or kill them myself, which is nothing except an observation that my personal feeling and thought since I can remember have shown an abhorrence and lack of tolerance for violence. Later, I felt sympathy for the ideals of Buddhism, the Society of Friends, and the John Howard Society. Still later, I discovered the correspondence of one my ancestors, John Throckmorton, with his friend and neighbor, Roger Williams, in which they discuss many things, including religion, the inner light, and reasons to be a Quaker. John had been a pillar of the Boston Puritans before having to leave with Williams, a Baptist, and so he switched until he found what he must have thought was a gentler way of being and seeing. Those who fought for the emancipation of women and slaves were those I found exemplary and those I admired. Elsewhere, I have written on those subjects, hard as they are. Yet here, somehow, a person with hopes of peace and pacifist tendencies found himself, without planning to do so, writing about violence and war. As a poet, I thought in addition to prose, why not poetry? And so the book just happened, against the grain, but here it is.

The Canadian aboriginal soldiers are at the center of the book. Their story deserves to be heard, not only in Canada but also elsewhere. The plight of indigenous peoples is global, and Canadian Natives are part of that long and difficult history. I try to show representations

and misrepresentations of them and to appeal to their voices so others can hear. They speak for themselves and have much of interest and importance to say.

Poetics is the writing and reading of poetry, and I also use it in a wider sense to mean the writing and reading of texts. Otherness is something we are to ourselves and others as they are to us. We are all strangers to ourselves and others, in our own lands and in strange lands. The range of the texts I discuss are from Homer and the Bible to recent times. I explore the typology of past and present, there and here. The past and future are foreign countries: the present is a vanishing homeland.

In the past I have dedicated my books to family, friends, teachers, mentors. Here, I dedicate this book to my students. They are also my teachers. They have also sustained me. Thank you.

I cannot name all the students I have met or taught in schools and universities, from preschool to doctoral defenses and postdoctoral fellowships, but those of you in Asia, North America, and Europe, I mention you generally and include all of you in the Acknowledgment. Being a student is the most important job there is. We are all students throughout life, as we are all writers and readers or speakers and listeners, hearing or reading or writing argument, dialogue, or stories. Sometimes, students do not get the due they deserve for their dedication and innovation, so I wish to call attention to that. Four-year-olds can be such good poets. These students have all taught me something, for which I am grateful. I am, I hope, a student masquerading as a teacher, researcher, and writer. But then, you, my students, get to decide if that is just a delusion I have. In any case, please accept my admiration and thanks.

Although I have taught classes and seminars or supervised students or given lectures in many places about poetics and otherness, I have worked in a most sustained way on these subjects at Princeton, Alberta, and the Sorbonne-Nouvelle (Paris III). My thanks to my students there from all over the world for enduring and for your many points of view. At Paris, it was good to have the seminar on otherness in French and English, so we could simultaneously compare the otherness of each language and tradition (not to mention others) and to be in the heart of the city where so much of the theory of alterity was written. I have also tried to encourage those students in their publications, and some have made outstanding contributions on poetics and on otherness.

Rachel Fitz Prusko, Nadezda Vashkevich, and Jane Wong Yeang Chui all studied with me and have recently moved on from doctoral

studies and are writing in related areas, and I want to thank them for their kindness, support, and collaboration in other projects outside this book. I thank Jane and Rachel for advice on research elsewhere and Nadezda and Jane for their beautiful images on other works, and for Jane, for the cover image.

So much depends on the kindness of others. In many ways, others have been supportive, and here I include students, current and former, including postdoctoral fellows, those whom I have supervised, on whose committees I have served, or those with whom I have had extended conversations (I cannot list all): Kara Abdolmaleki, Pushpa Acharya, Jonathan Allan, Jolene Armstrong, Frances Bitney, Shelina Brown, Peter Buse, Ka Hing Cheung, Oksana Cheyppesh, Cindy Chopoidaló, Candace Chu, Kris Conner, Richard Cunningham, Paul DePasquale, Katy Emck, Simon Estok, Jessica Fleming, Jessica Friederichsen, Gina Froese, Ernst Gerhardt, Piotr Grella-Mozejko, Lily Gulcev, Somayeh Hadidifard, Nat Hardy, Valerie Henitiuk, Jordan Kardosh, Richard Janzen, Sarah Jefferies, Alicia Jewett, Heather Kilbrai, Lorelee Kippen, Xinhui Liu, Manijeh Mannani, Kazuko Masumitsu, Naomi McIlwraith, Jurate Motiejunaite, Safaneh Neyshabouri, Lindsay Parker, Celia Paz, David Porter, Rachel Fitz Prusko, Uzma Qasi, David Reddall, Colleen Irwin, Jean Richardson, Christian Riegel, Guo Rong, Asma Sayed, Steven Scott, Dalbir Sehmy, Danila Sokolov, Magali Sperling, Irene Sywenky, Rupert Thorough, Wojciech Tokarz, Monique Tschofen, Nadezda Vashkevich, Christian Ylagan, Sheena Wilson, Jane Wong Yeang Chui, Min Yang, Minhao Zeng, and Andrei Zlatescu. I have thanked my students elsewhere or helped them when and where I could, including contributions like prefaces to their work, so I have kept this brief.

Two friends and mentors at Cambridge, Philip Ford and Anne Barton, died this past year, and I miss their generosity, kindness, and brilliance and remember them with thanks.

Others have been kind and made life and the writing of this book easier or better, owing to friendship, collegiality or kindness: Alfred Alcorn, Sally Alcorn, Hans Bertens, Jean Bessière, Barbara Bienen, Rick Bowers, Peter Box, Brad Bucknell, Sean Caulfield, Susan Colberg, Tom Conley, Verena Conley, Cecily Devereaux, Merrill Distad, Kate Drizos, Heather Dubrow, Fatima Festić, William Fleury, Marjorie Garber, David Gay, Gerald Gillespie, Mariusz Golab, Teresa Grant, Ricardo Gutiérrez-Mouat, Bill Hamade, Paul Hjartarson, Wladimir Krysinski, Timothy Kilbourn, Kristof Jacek Kozak, Matthew Kramer, Roland Le Huenen, Johanne Le Huenen, Kevin Lewis, Maria Felisa López Liqueste, Nicole Mallet, Linda Matarazzo, J. Hillis Miller, Calin

Milanesu, Noel Mobbs, Stephen Mobbs, James Mulvihill, Kenneth Munro, Malcolm Murfett, Anthony Pagden, Donald Pfister, Cathleen Pfister, Ricardo Quinones, Josef Raab, Glenn Rollans, Clemens Ruthner, Cristina Santos, Peter Sinclair, Charles Stang, Jüri Talvet, Andrew Taylor, Neil ten Kortenaar, Gordon Teskey, Pauline Thomas, I-Chun Wang, Robert Rawdon Wilson, and Linda Woodbridge.

Along the way, I was fortunate enough to be welcomed into the following libraries, among others: the British Library, the Churchill College Archives, the University Library at Cambridge, the Toronto Public Library, the University of Alberta libraries, and many others, including archives in Bermuda and elsewhere. My thanks to the librarians at these and other libraries and archives. Since the late 1970s, the Canada Council and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) have been generous to me with scholarships and fellowships, and I wish to thank them for this support that made life as a student and a scholar much better by enabling my research. I also thank the Sorbonne-Nouvelle (Paris III), the University of Toronto, Emory University, University of the Basque Country, The Faculty of Humanities Koper at the University of Primorska, University of Bamberg, University of Warsaw, National Sun Yat-sen University, and other universities for giving me the privilege of working with your students. I thank my many hosts for the invitations to give talks. My thanks to Michael Walsh and Andrekos Varnava, the organizers of the conference, “The British Empire and the Great War: Colonial Societies/Cultural Responses,” February 19–22, 2014, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. Many thanks also to I-Chun Wang, who organized a conference on landscapes and seascapes in Taiwan, and also coordinated this and other visits, which involved lectures at other universities, for showing kindness, hospitality, and grace.

Thanks to my family: my father, George Edward Hart; my brothers and sisters, Charles, Gwendolyn, Deborah, Alan, and Jennifer; my aunt, Helen Fitzsimon; Lolita Cayaman, and my wife, Mary Alice Marshall, and our twins, Julia Hart and James Hart.

Books depend on so many people, and I would like to thank my marvelous editor at Palgrave Macmillan, Brigitte Shull, and others at Palgrave, including Ryan Jenkins, and others in the production team, including Susan Eberhart and Jamie Armstrong. It has been a pleasure to be with Palgrave Macmillan for some time now, and my thanks to their employees past and present who supported me so well.

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In all this, then, I have tried to be a student who continues to learn and to thank my students, formal and informal, for teaching me and for being fellow students along the way. Henry Sidney and Philip Sidney were students of war, politics, and writing, and they taught others outside their families. The trauma and violence of Philip's death was both premature for his contemporaries and a loss for those who came after, for literature and culture. That kind of violence in search of heroism and honor and in the face of death occurs with many of those who write in and about war, soldiers and soldier-writers, those who find themselves in these pages. In what follows I will look at the traumatic and violent world in literature, poetry, and life, in war and peace.

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CHAPTER 1



INTRODUCTION

The poetics of otherness combines two strange and familiar ideas: first, that of making, and second, the other of what is different from ourselves. Poetics is a making of words and also the study of that making. Otherness is alterity, alternative and alienation. Poetry comes from the Greek for making, something I have made much of elsewhere.¹ The etymology of *other*—which is cognate with forms in Old Frisian, Middle Dutch, Old Saxon, and various German languages—seems to derive from the Indo-European base of Sanskrit *anya* and relates to the Latin *alter*. The Indo-European comparative suffix is, as the *Oxford English Dictionary* attests, also represented by the Sanskrit *-tara*, the ancient Greek *-τερος*, the classical Latin *-ter*, the English *-ther*, and the Early Irish equitive suffix *-ithir*, and it suggests the meaning of that original: “The Indo-European suffix seen in this word originally had a spatial sense, expressing the contrast between two or more things with regard to their location.”² There is, then, in my book a poetics of space, of here and there, as well as a poetics of time, of now and then. This poetics also has some hiddenness of unknown places to explore as well as the unknown of the future.

Otherness includes a comparison in which something or someone is not the self but is compared to the self and thus defines the self. Self and other define and distinguish and are engaged in metaphor, in a yoked comparison. To purge the other is to purge the self. In killing the other, one kills a part of oneself. Otherness provides alter egos, other or possible worlds, choices. Otherness opens up possibility but also, if taken negatively, leads to senses of estrangement and alienation, a kind of second fall and exile from Eden. Language itself can heal the wound by trying through metaphor and image to repair

that ruin between humanity and the world in a kind of imaginative atonement or unity. However, in language, people can feel and think of alienation between word and world, a gap of desire and yearning for a past garden or a future heaven. On earth we wander in a ruin of words, but it is all we have. Perhaps all we have is the stoic present and wrapping ourselves in ourselves as a form of self-protection and a way to face the world, or live in the present moment, as Marcus Aurelius suggests.³ Having a sense of self irrespective of others, of looking after what can (that is, one's words and actions), is one way to live. In a poetics of otherness, one cannot rely on others for happiness, but one should not retreat from the world and others. This question affects the tension between contemplation and good works in the Catholic Church.

"Alienation" in English comes from Latin through Anglo-Norman and Middle French and is a word Wycliffe uses in his translation of the Bible. The Latin word can relate to property, estrangement or madness. Karl Marx, adapting G. W. F. Hegel, saw alienation as being also expressed through self-alienation—that is, people's value being reduced to price and wage in a kind of commodification of self. *Entfremdung* and *Entäußerung* differ from Bertolt Brecht's distancing of the audience in the theatre through estrangement, his *Verfremdungseffekt*. Can the self relinquish ownership of the self to others or lose a sense of self through a negative othering of the self, or is othering positive by providing critical distance on the naturalization of the self and the environment?⁴ Here, then, in this question lies a tradition in German from Hegel through Marx to Brecht in which there is not a singular answer. Rather than codify any question or response, this book seeks to bring out in analyzing texts, in prose and even more often in poetry, in their very making, what sense of otherness they express. The other provides possibility and understanding and can provoke fear, trembling, and loathing. I am interested in the contours of otherness, as one of the topics of this book. Alternatives (to alter and to alternate) have, in etymology, more to do with change and the ebb and flow than strictly with otherness, but often understanding others and different ways frees up the self to understand or even embrace change.⁵

The Poetics of Otherness: War, Trauma, and Literature, as the title suggests, is about a number of subjects, including, most centrally, the warlike and traumatic in representations literary and otherwise. As I shall say something about trauma—the wound—in the early chapters, I wish here to point out that the Germanic peoples did not have a word for war in their living language and only in remnants of their

poetry, our word coming from late Old English, *wyrre*, *werre*, just before the Norman conquest of 1066, and north-eastern old French, *werre*. For such a warlike group, it was not until modern times that the various Germanic nations on the Continent found words for war. The German *krieg* and the Swedish and Danish *krig*, the Dutch *oorlog* and the Icelandic *ófriðr* or “un-peace” turn away from the Germanic root *werz-* and *wers-* for better or worse. The *Oxford English Dictionary* also lets us know that there are related words—Old High German *werra* and Middle High German *werre* meaning confusion, discord, and strife. The dictionary also notes that the Old Saxon *werran* is a strong verb that signifies bringing into confusion or discord, a source for the modern German *wirren*, a weak verb meaning to confuse, or perplex, and observes that the earlier verb persists in *verworren*, a participial adjective—confused. The Romance languages have a similar word to the late Old English and north-eastern Old French word, from the Central Old French and modern French *guerre* through the Provençal *guerra*, *gerra*, Spanish *guerra*, and Portuguese *guerra*, to the Italian *guerra* (from the medieval Latin *werra*, *guerra*).⁶ There is a complex of related words for war in Western Europe in an earlier period that diverged in modern times when the wars of perceived difference seem to grow in ferocity. I am not implying a causal connection, but observe this relation from the etymological record.

Violence, a key to the book, derives from the classical Latin *violentia*, which means unreasonable or overwhelming force, and that the English form is closest to the Anglo-Norman and Middle French *violence*, signifying excessive force.⁷ The wound of violence is at the heart of this study, and what beauty and truth that poets, poet-soldiers, soldiers, and writers can glean in the asymptotic search for expression, for bridging the gap between word and world. The nostalgia for the garden and the yearning for paradise are the ever-changing, ever-tentative, and always provisional nature of human language. Speaker and hearer, writer and reader yearn for unity, wholeness, meaning, and something beyond here and now and the obliteration of death.

Violence itself is a consequence of, or reaction to, that original breach we feel and make in myth. Some lash out as individuals and in groups for the fall into death and sin, into the ruin and broken world after disobedience, and the yearning for the knowledge of the tree of good and evil and then the exile of Cain for his murder of Abel and the forlorn cross, that other tree in Calvary, that other Golgotha or hill of skulls. I state this in Christian terms, but there are equivalents or analogues in other religions and what we sometimes call mythologies, although the original adherents might scoff at such

a designation. This book, then, explores mythological truth in the drama of meaning, that liminal and dramatic space between speaker and hearer, writer and reader in which both engage to be more than one of the other, or the sum of the parts. Their interpretation in writing and reading (they are usually now writers and readers just as they were always both speakers and hearers) is invisibly catalytic. Storytellers and their audience both tell and hear stories. Narrative truth and logical, argumentative and dialectical truth meet in what I have long called story-argument, in which, for instance, the analogies of stories and logic share but differ in their characteristics. Story and argument are separate and different, but combine in areas, like those old Venn diagrams we had in school. Stories include persuasion but also the uninstrumental world of myth: poetry is rhetorical, but it also suggests something that does not rest on persuasion, unless sometimes that is love, altruism, and other feelings not for profit or power. Reading is a waste of time in the short-term, at least the reading of fictions, including poetry. The tax code, constitution, or a stock prospectus are other more worldly matters that may share some of the same words.

Poetry and words can try to mend the breach of nature, the ruined natural world and what we have made of the gap between world and word, the nostalgia and yearning in our minds and souls and bodies for unity, truth, and beauty. For soldiers, they try to make sense of a world torn by war, trauma, and violence. Some of the soldiers are poets and are riven themselves between their quest for the right word, for some beauty and truth in a broken world, and how to talk about otherness and alternatives in an impossible world. Some of the writers are not involved directly in violence, trauma, and war, but they record the yearnings of love and gentleness in a hostile environment. Can the uselessness of poetry and literature more generally provide a spiritual but secular healing in a space displaced with the crisis in religion, one of the early languages of nostalgia, and yearning or anticipation? There are also religious traces and representations in this book.

The movement of the study is from the genocide of the American Natives after 1492 to the genocide of the Jews during the Second World War. The body of the book begins in chapter 2 with Bartolomé de Las Casas's representation of this destruction in the Americas, particularly in connection with women and children. Besides discussing mimesis or representation, which can be as much about misrepresentation, I call attention to the context for Las Casas that concerns the discovery of otherness, which is found in Herodotus, Christopher Columbus, José de Acosta, Michel de Montaigne, and other "ethnographical" texts. Chapter 3 examines the literary and the other,