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The Way to Proceed

High mountains, deep waters, and a dense jungle of high grass—

—Kusan Sunim, *The Way of Korean Zen*

Pain. This word powerfully names a specific something, a thing most humans (and all other creatures for that matter) would rather avoid. The sight and/or sound of the word itself often evokes a visceral response that appears to need no further explanation. Yet, finally, pain names nothing in particular. It is far too generic to have any real meaning; it is far too abstract to speak to the specificity of the often intense experience it attempts to represent.

What, after all, does it mean to say something like “that wound must be painful”? One can, as an attempted answer, rearrange the words: “pain fills the wound.” But what, precisely, is that which fills the wound? Is it the resonance of the sounded letters? Is it the typography of the read word? If it is these graphic and phonic traces only, how can it fill the wound that weeps on the soldier’s leg? Obviously, it can’t. Or, it can only if one works wholly in the dimension of language and brackets the somatic world. Thus the traces of the “pain” syntactically fill the traces of the “wound.” But, if one wants to link the linguistic and somatic worlds, if one wants to speak from and about the weeping wound, if one wants “pain” to serve semantically as well as syntactically, what can one do?

One possible tact is to qualify “pain” syntactically so that it has semantic specificity: “the soldier’s searing cut moans; it moans minutely.” Still, despite the use of adjectives, nouns, pronouns, verbs, adverbs, and other syntactical devices, can this “pain” now qualified ever be more than words to another? Can one ever feel the profound suffering

of another's shrapnel-invaded foot, his electrocuted testicles, her vagina torn open by gang rapists, his kneecap broken by a hammer blow?

Paradoxically, pain both defies linguistic representation and generates it. Pain defies it because language can never fully speak/write what the psychosomatic entities that we call human beings experience when they experience what we call pain. Too, as Elaine Scarry has masterfully argued, pain does not simply defy linguistic representation; it destroys language itself. At its most extreme, pain reduces the pained to preverbal moans and grunts. It reduces the unpained other, who views the one in pain, to visceral horror or, even worse, incomprehension or disbelief.¹

Yet pain also generates language. Again, as Scarry maintains, pain is a site of "invention" (22) and thus leads to the production of "things" that attempt to represent the pain and forestall its future occurrence. These things can be anything. Winter coats, for instance, are products of a painful impulse: they are constructed, finally, to protect wearers from the searing effects of cold. So too the book of Job was, in part, generated by pain. It is structured by Job's afflictions and the narrative attempts to write the origins and ramifications of suffering.

As a site of destruction and invention, pain is the province of many disciplines. Garment makers, Biblical writers, doctors, theologians, poets, politicians, and others often find themselves challenged and guided by the power of pain.² Like any experience, however, pain is always open to interpretation. The perverse, for instance, are guided and challenged by pain to inflict pain in order to gain power and pleasure.³ Soldiers may fulfill their duty not out of a sense of patriotism but out of a desire to make people suffer: they bayonet not for democracy but for the charge of power and pleasure they receive when people bleed at their hands. So too a parent may spank his child not out of love for the child and with the hope that spanking will stop the child from touching, say, a hot stove, but because he enjoys inflicting pain upon a helpless human and the delightful power that accompanies this. As David Morris argues, sex, pain, and pleasure are indelibly linked. The Marquis de Sade represents the human impulse to find pleasure in painful sexual activity (224–43).

Fortunately, many find themselves at pain's inventive site and respond compassionately: they are guided and challenged by pain to prevent and alleviate suffering. Thus, in response to her encounter with

Central American political refugees in Chicago, a young pastor may dedicate herself to work in El Salvador in order to help Salvadorans recover from a devastating civil war. So too a young college student, searching for a career, may decide to become a pediatrician after having worked on a pediatric cancer unit. Certainly, pain guides and challenges people to alleviate pain in less all-encompassing ways. A middle-aged, middle-class suburban woman may see pictures of starving Somalian children on television and decide to contribute monthly to a relief organization working in Somalia.

All of these people, from the soldier to the suburban woman, produce 'things' in response to the inventive impulse provided by pain: the soldier, a bayonet thrust; the parent, a spank; the pastor, administrative and counseling work; the doctor, medical treatment; the woman, money and thus food, clothing, medicine, and other goods. Scarry argues well that most, if not all, cultural artifacts find at least part of their origins at the inventive site of pain.

This is as true for rhetoric as it is for any other human activity. Scarry's book alludes to rhetoric, but only alludes to it, thus missing what is perhaps at the heart of her work: the relationship between pain and rhetoric. Her use of the word *invention*, one of the classic categories of rhetorical theory, coupled with her attention to language (such as the documents of Amnesty International), opens up an area of exploration that she herself ignores: the dynamics that exist between pain and rhetoric.

Rhetoric can respond to pain negatively, neutrally, or positively. By negatively I mean destructively. Rhetoric can arise from pain and attempt to inflict more pain. Certainly, rhetoric has been, and is, used in this way, as I will discuss more fully in ensuing chapters. Rhetoric can also respond neutrally. That is, it can recognize pain as a site of invention but not attend to it. This option, given the omnipresence of pain in the world, is simply irresponsible. If rhetoric ignores pain, it will lose whatever cultural value it may still have. Rhetoric can also respond to pain positively, that is, constructively. Rhetoric can accept pain's reality, pain's destructive and inventive power, and begin to discern how it should respond to pain in order to help prevent and alleviate suffering.⁴

One path for such a task lies in this direction: rhetoric can be reconceived as what I call a "religious" dialectic and it can make

paramount the dialectic that exists, as Scarry argues, between pain and imagination. Rhetoric must explicitly highlight, explore, and respond to pain because it must boldly confront the bruises, the burns, the cuts, the breaks, the physical damage that people inflict upon one another in an attempt to destroy both soma and psyche. Rhetoric must fully and explicitly embrace imagination because imagination allows rhetoricians to speak of pain and the possibilities for a less painful world.

In order to begin to open this path, this book will attend, in particular, to the dialectic of pain and imagination as it appears in the efforts of certain representatives of postmodern and liberation rhetorics: Kenneth Burke and Thomas Merton, Paulo Freire and Archbishop Oscar Romero. The nexus of postmodern and liberation rhetorics is an important trailhead, perhaps the most important in the contemporary world. Read badly, it leads only to a debilitating morass of sloganeering. Read well, it can serve the larger purpose of a rhetoric of pain and imagination. It can provide the inventive force for the construction of a new dialectic aimed toward the prevention and alleviation of the 'sociopolitical' pain that humans heap upon each other with stunning frequency and ferocity.⁵ As I will argue later in this chapter, this dialectic is finally religious because it is guided by visions of the excessive, of what is, finally, the religious.

Rhetoricians of all types—students, critics, teachers, practitioners, and theorists⁶—are diligently working to reinvent rhetoric. Once central to education and civic life, rhetoric in education was reduced to stylistic concerns and relegated to composition and speech classrooms. In civic life it was labeled a tool of liars. These pages, while affirming the importance of speech and composition classrooms, and basic language education in general, have the grandest view in mind: rhetoric as crucial to the functioning of the painful body politic, in all of its manifestations, from the rarefied circles of high academic theory to the cultural critics attempting to speak to the world, from practitioners laboring with rhetoric to teachers who see themselves as rhetoricians regardless of their discipline, teachers reinventing, strengthening, and propagating a rhetoric invented at sites of pain and suffering.

As an approach to this end, the remainder of this chapter tentatively defines the extremely ambiguous and troubled, yet key, concepts in play: rhetoric, postmodern, liberation, pain, imagination, religious. I

heed well Clifford Geertz's reminder that "definitions establish nothing." I grant that the trail I am building is tentative. Yet Geertz also reminds one that if definitions "are carefully enough constructed, [they] provide a useful orientation, or reorientation, of thought, such that an extended unpacking of them can be an effective way of developing and controlling a novel line of inquiry" (*Interpretation* 90).

Rhetoric

Anyone familiar with the history of the word *rhetoric* knows that its meanings are many. Rhetoric was in various ways considered to be a 'good' discipline from the late Classical period through the Renaissance, part of essential education, a praxis to be mastered by any who would be educated (Valesio 5; Perelman 1–8). Beginning with Ramus' attacks, rhetoric has suffered since early modernity: it is no longer understood to be essential to literate education. By all but a few academics, it is at best thought to be concerned with ornamentation; at worst it is associated with glib, deceitful talk. It is 'mere' rhetoric. However, among certain academic fields, such as English, anthropology, theology, and the history of science, rhetoric has been undergoing a period of 'reevaluation' with the likes of Peirce, Richards, Perelman, Tyteca, and Burke attempting to rewrite its meaning (Valesio 5, 260).

While helpful and hopeful, this twentieth-century rewriting of rhetoric is problematic. The plethora of theories has led to an almost chaotic abundance of definitions. For every two theorists, there are three meanings of this ancient word. As I will discuss below, relative to the postmodern recognition of the plurality of language, this is not a wholly undesirable state: language is indeed ambiguous; words are fillable forms. Yet one must finally claim a meaning, however tenuous, in order to proceed. It is most helpful, as Paolo Valesio argues, to return to Aristotle, but with a twist: rhetoric is not simply a branch of dialectic, as Aristotle argues; it is dialectic.⁷

In a potentially meaningless fashion, Valesio states boldly that all language, organized into discourse, is rhetoric (7). Lest this seem too vague, dangerously close to the chaos of complete ambiguity, he later specifies that "rhetoric is dialectic" (66). For Valesio, and for me as well, discourse is functionally organized primarily by dialectic (115), by "an

alternation or antithesis” of “inverse . . . contrary . . . contradictory” statements, or “intellectual or psychological movements” (108).⁸ Insofar as rhetoric is discourse, discourse is dialectic. Discourse, as dialectic, as rhetoric, is marked by internal and external struggle. Internally, that is, internal to the linguistic formation of discourse, rhetoric “is that of managing a continuous battle among its components” (23). Externally, that is, in the relationship between the discourse and the surrounding semiotic frame, dialectic manages “a struggle among ghosts: the images of actions, things, and events” (24). For my purposes, the components and ghosts are pain and imagination as they are discerned and constructed as rhetoric by these representatives of postmodern and liberation rhetoric, respectively: Burke and Merton, Freire and Romero.

Dialectic is not to be understood always as leading to synthesis because a wish for synthesis often leads to forced, invalid melding and, finally, ideology (117). Ideology is “*decayed rhetoric—rhetoric that is no longer the detailed expression of strategies at work in specific discourses*” (66). In other words, ideology is anti-dialectic: it is the prevention of the dialectical movement (98). As such, ideology forbids “access to politics” because rhetoric is “*the political dimension that every discourse possesses*” (99). As dialectic, as rhetoric, politics is the continual “alternation or antithesis” of opposites in discourse. Ideology, then, is a threat to human community because it is a threat to the discourse that makes a community human. It stops discourse as it prevents dialectic. By contrast, rhetoric supports the community because it is human discourse itself. It is the alternation and antithesis of opposites that comprise human language and being. Ideology threatens the “fluidity” of rhetoric; rhetoric as dialectic “is perhaps the most powerful weapon we can use against the continuous, subtle, pervasive assaults of ideology” (66). It is the copenetration of opposites with which this study is concerned: liberation and postmodern, pain and imagination.

To theorize rhetoric as dialectic is to place oneself, as a rhetorician, squarely into politics. As Valesio argues, rhetoric as dialectic is politics (44, 99). This is a critically important step for a rhetorical theory that would both be practiced outside the classroom and transform that classroom. To understand rhetoric as politics is to place rhetoric back into public life, the location of potential and actual pain. Rhetoricians can understand themselves, and teach others to understand themselves,

as important members of the body politic. Perhaps, as well, budding public figures (which would ideally include all citizens) should again explicitly study the theory and practice of rhetoric. Also, to understand rhetoric as dialectic as politics is to revolutionize the teaching of writing and speech: it demands a classroom where teachers and students must engage themselves and each other in a rigorous exchange and exploration of competing ideas. Of course, this pedagogical practice need not limit itself to writing and speech classes. Any teachers who understand rhetoric to be fundamental to their work may benefit.⁹

In defining rhetoric as dialectic as politics, I consciously link myself to the efforts of Herbert Marcuse and the Frankfort School. About dialectic Marcuse writes this: "Interpretation of that-which-is in terms of that-which-is-not . . . has been the concern of philosophy wherever philosophy was more than a matter of ideological justification or mental exercise" (447). Rhetoric, as dialectic, is neither the servant of ideology nor a cerebral gymnast. It is, rather, both a historical actor and that which works with those forces that oppose reification of any form of human being. As Marcuse argues, dialectic deals with "*historical* factors and forces" and proposes "*ultimately a political* negation" (449).

This point is critically important for all types of rhetoricians: dialectic deals with *historical* factors. Rhetoric is neither theorized nor practiced well if it is not practiced with conscious attention to history. The rhetorician who practices cultural criticism, for instance, stands to benefit from this reminder. If one studies the rhetoric of a popular film like *Rambo*, it is not enough to study the internal dialectics, that is, the dialectics at play within the text of the film itself. The rhetorician must also look beyond the bounds of the screen in order to study the dialectics between the film as film and the societies out of which it emerged (say America during the Vietnam War era and America during the filming of the movie) and the societies into which it is has been received (the various cultures that comprise the United States and other countries). This historical task, certainly, is a return to the demands of classic rhetoric. The rhetorician must study both the invention and the audience.

The import of Marcuse's insight concerning history is twofold. First, it highlights the political facet of the dialectic of pain and imagination with which Burke, Merton, Freire, and Romero deal. By placing this

dialectic at the center of their rhetorics, these four challenge any linguistic/social system that would attempt to reify any sociopolitical order based on a single understanding of pain and imagination. Burke, for instance, castigates any Marxism that would uphold a single utopia as globally valid. The second import of Marcuse's insight is this: postmodern and liberation rhetoricians, even as they share the dialectic of pain and imagination, challenge each other as dialectical partners. Necessarily their systems are involved in the oppositional movement that is rhetoric. As such, neither is wholly adequate, neither can be seen as the ultimate rhetoric for the twenty-first century. Rather, their tension provides a site of departure: in their dialectic one can begin the invention of a painful, imaginative rhetoric.

Postmoderns versus Liberationists

One could justifiably argue that postmoderns and liberationists can only shout at one another. Both attend to the dialectic of pain and imagination, but they do so in such ways that any conversation between the two may appear to devolve into hopeless opposition. Postmodern work, or at least the best variants of it, attempts to alleviate oppressive pain and to construct a less painful world by speaking pain and imagination within a worldview that conceives of language as plural, history as ambiguous. In fact, postmoderns hold that much, if not all, oppressive pain is the result of worldviews that don't recognize the plurality of language and the ambiguity of history. Liberationist thought also attempts to alleviate oppressive pain and to construct a less painful world by speaking pain and imagination. It does so, however, with reference either to nonplural language and/or unambiguous history. Liberation thinkers would be befuddled, if not angered, by the postmodern reticence to commit to a specific language, a particular history. The postmodern tendency is to claim that all histories and languages are relatively equal. Liberationist thinking holds that, finally, the language and history of a particular group are superior for both interpretation and political programs. Thus the conflict between postmodern thought and liberation thought is perhaps set, precluding fruitful conversation. Yet, if read well, it is precisely this antithesis that can help invent a new rhetoric.

The meaning of 'postmodern' is as ambiguous and troubled as is that of 'rhetoric.' David Tracy, a Roman Catholic theologian, has thus far provided the most succinct and encompassing definition. Typical of the Western academy, 'secular' theorists have largely ignored Tracy. One imagines that his status as a priest is not considered kindly by secular academics still afraid of the religious. Nonetheless, Tracy's understanding of the postmodern worldview is invaluable. Simply put, to be postmodern is to take seriously both the plurality of language and the ambiguity of history. Like any definition, this belies plurality: it attempts to anchor firmly a word that floats. Definitions of postmodern are rightly many and varied; yet Tracy's both encompasses and helpfully delineates what is implied in the definitions provided by others.¹⁰

Against positivism, which holds that language can transparently "articulate and communicate scientific results as facts rather than interpretations" (Tracy 49), and romanticism, which maintains that language can transparently "express or represent some deep, nonlinguistic truth inside the self" (49), I, with Tracy, maintain that language is doubly plural. First, there is an "ineradicable plurality of languages and forms of life"; language communities are many and varied (51). Second, there is "plurality within language as an object of differential relations" (60). That is to say, the relationship between the signifier (language) and the signified (the extralinguistic) is one of convention and guided by a rhetoric of tropes, such as metaphor and analogy (58–59).

This delineation of the plurality of language as a key component of postmodern praxis is important for a number of reasons. Among these, Tracy seems to focus primarily upon what one might call its inescapability (one must attend to the plurality of language because language is plural). However, this delineation is especially important for rhetoric for another reason. As Tracy himself suggests (49), modernity has been dominated by a positivist understanding of language that has been the cause of cultural impression, if not oppression.¹¹

This is a particularly important point for rhetoricians who are concerned about pedagogy. Speaking, reading, and writing, of whatever forms, always imply worldviews and impose worldviews on students.¹² Education and literacy theorist David Olson details this phenomenon in his work on the emergence of the positivist understandings of language. Olson argues that as western European culture shifted from a

predominantly oral to a predominantly literate mode of linguistic interaction (evidenced, by the way, in Plato's *Phaedrus*), there was "a transition from utterance to text both culturally and developmentally and . . . this transition can be described as one of increasing explicitness, with language increasingly able to stand as an unambiguous or autonomous representation of meaning" (258). Heralded by John Locke and the Royal Society of London, this "Essayist Technique" (Olson 268–270) gave rise to the possibility of "objective" knowledge, Olson argues: essayist language stands on its own; it is an autonomous, clear marker of the writer's meaning. To make this specific, generations of students in America have been taught not to use the first person, I, in their writing. The rhetorical position of such a stance is clear: the one who speaks is not a historical person imbedded in her own text but a voice above the flux of human affairs.

At the very least, this understanding of language is impressed upon students in the course of schooling. In many cases, it may be a positive impression. However, as postmodern ethnographers Ron and Suzanne Scollon argue, such an understanding of language can also oppress. They duly note Olson's work (43), but claim further that it is this essayist understanding of literacy that leads to cross-cultural conflict and oppression.¹³ Working among the Athabaskan peoples in Alaska, Scollon and Scollon have come to realize that Euro-Americans (and this includes Canadian and U.S. citizens) have "taken a particular model of prose style as the central, organizing model of our view of language" (41), that this to a large extent defines "modern" consciousness, and that this prose model is that of the essayist tradition (49–51). As a result, Scollon and Scollon have discovered ethnographically what Tracy has discovered through the reading of philosophy: language is doubly plural.¹⁴

As Euro-Americans have come into contact with the Athabaskan peoples, and with more contact inevitably to come with the expiration of treaties that protect Athabaskan land from Euro-American developers (6), essayist literacy/modern consciousness has caused at least two problems for Athabaskans, according to Scollon and Scollon. First, Athabaskan children have difficulty in the Euro-American school system because their own consciousness has not been formed by the essayist tradition. However, teachers expect them to perform as moderns, expect them to ignore what Scollon and Scollon have identified as their own

“bush consciousness” (100). As a result, Scollon and Scollon have found that these teachers are biased against students whose “reality set” (41) is bush consciousness (5, 17). Second, Scollon and Scollon argue that the difference between Euro-American essayist literacy/modern consciousness and Athabaskan bush consciousness has led to an underservicing of the Athabaskan people by the Euro-American government (6). Euro-Americans tend to dominate and control communicative situations between Athabaskans and themselves, due to the differing linguistic styles that are formed by their respective reality sets (22). Euro-Americans furthermore expect Athabaskans likewise to attempt to dominate. Hence, when Athabaskans don’t attempt such discourse strategies, Euro-Americans treat the Athabaskans unfavorably in such encounters as job interviews (18–19). Furthermore, Scollon and Scollon well demonstrate the social ramifications when a dominant group of people doesn’t account for the plurality of languages and expects others to speak its language, which is, of course, the “natural one.”

As one is led to understand that one lives among plural languages, one is also led to understand that these languages are both the products and producers of history. As Tracy writes: “to acquire a native language is to acquire the means to articulate thought and feeling in a manner native to a particular history” (66), and to be in a particular history “is to be born, live, and die bounded by a particular sex, race, class and education” (66). I would amend Tracy’s point. “Bounded” is too restrictive. Consider the metaphor ‘founded’ instead. It indicates that one belongs in a certain place, that one does not, cannot, float endlessly among the peoples of the world. But founded also allows for movement beyond one’s location. Such movement is not only necessary but inevitable. Also, to Tracy’s list of particularities I would add religion, writing systems, and a host of other foundations that work to construct human beings. Still, Tracy’s point is useful. Humans don’t simply learn language as if it were separate from a historical location. Languages are historically particular: English, French, Christian, Muslim, Marxist, capitalist, southern, northern, urban, rural, and the like. Given the plurality of languages, the postmodern also realizes that no history is paramount. Upper-class, white, U.S. males, for instance, must realize that they live within a history that differs from that of Latinas and vice versa. Each group has a set of experiences and traditions that the other does not

share and that are not necessarily inferior or superior, relative to the other.

The ambiguity of history, furthermore, adds a much more ominous dimension. "To be an American, for example, is to live with pride by participating in a noble experiment of freedom and plurality" (68). Yet to be an "American" is to be a member of a historical community that has nearly destroyed the indigenous population of the United States and enslaved, within our country, parts of the primal population of another continent (68). At once we celebrate democracy and realize that, historically, we have violated the democracy we cherish. We live "a montage of classics and newspeak, of startling beauty and revolting cruelty, of partial emancipation and ever-subtler forms of entrapment" (70).

However, the postmodern recognition of the violation of democracy need not lead to debilitating guilt. Out of the ambiguity, the violent interruptions that shatter our sense of a pure and pristine history, postmoderns can claim responsibility. Tracy holds that "responsible here means capable of discarding any scenarios of innocent triumph written, as always, by the victors; capable of not forgetting the subversive memories of individuals and whole peoples whose names we do not even know" (69). In rooting the plurality of language in an ambiguous history, postmoderns announce themselves as embodied creatures who must act to live. A postmodern rhetorician, thus, will face suffering and speak out of its inventive site, rather than retreat to a safer, less ambiguous space. This announcement is an attempt to answer a question common to many postmodern theories: How can a postmodern, who has given up claims to the transparency of language, and the surety of history, act responsibly in the world?

Certainly, as Edith Wyschogrod attests, the postmodern claim to historical responsibility is not commonly held to be part of postmodernism by its critics or even some of its adherents. Postmodernism is generally understood to be a "system" that defends nihilism (xiii) and as a result is thought to look toward a world that must "go under in an orgy of conflicting and self-destructive struggles for power" (xxi). Wyschogrod, with candor, admits that this is one possibility of a way of thinking that has given up all claims to sure moorings. Yet she also urges her readers to consider another possibility: a postmodern ethic of alterity

(xxi). Wyschogrod's project is not far from my own. Like her, and Tracy, I seek to demonstrate that historical responsibility is a postmodern potential. Unlike her fascinating and fruitful turn to hagiography, I seek within rhetoric a place from which postmodern rhetoricians can, in Wyschogrod's terms, find a "sensible alternative to apocalypse" (xxi).

Liberation rhetoric, however, proclaims that this would be a very difficult, if not impossible, task for the postmodern. Finally, liberation rhetoricians claim, one concerned to act responsibly must side with a particular language and a specific history, because both form the matrix in which those most in need of liberation live. To forfeit language and history to plurality and ambiguity is to forfeit those most in pain. From the liberation rhetoric perspective, for instance, Tracy's claim concerning the responsibility one finds in one's history is still marked by a debilitating ambiguity. He calls upon postmoderns to face the interruptions in history, to discard any triumphalism, to remember "peoples whose names we do not even know." In so doing, Tracy says, postmoderns make a beginning. But even this beginning is not marked by a call to liberate oppressed people. It is not marked by the powerfully resonating line spoken by Moses, which Martin Luther King, Jr. so well used: "Set my people free!" It is marked, instead, by a call to listen to the oppressed's voices. Postmoderns belong to a group of celebrated oppressors but they also want to belong to the oppressed group(s). Yet this is impossible because they don't even know these groups' names; they are not the postmoderns' neighbors, their friends, their family.

Postmoderns, from the liberationist perspective, are privileged theorists who can criticize, teach, and learn in the comfort of a protected zone. Typical postmodern theorists in America, for example, teach at a university, enjoy extended periods when they don't have to teach or hold office hours, and have the leisure to dabble in the fluctuations of language and history. In contrast, liberation rhetoricians are always concerned about practice in the 'streets.' How, they ask, can theory, pedagogy, and criticism serve practice, a practice that engages in the struggles of oppressed, pained people?

Unlike Tracy, liberation rhetoricians know their histories, their languages, and make calls for liberation based on this knowledge. Philosopher of education and literacy theorist Henry Giroux is one such liberation rhetorician. Arguing for an emancipatory literacy that helps

readers comprehend how critical individual perceptions are marginalized (*Schooling* 152), Giroux looks to the “Dangerous Memory” of oppressed and suffering peoples both living and dead. One of Giroux’s central themes is that “America is becoming a land without memory” and that the dominant ideology operates so as to extinguish discordant and suffering voices that would necessarily disrupt the status quo (80). In order to counter this selective amnesia, Giroux suggests that radical educators should turn to liberation theology, which would have educators reclaim the dangerous memory of the oppressed and thereby rupture the monological voice that attempts to silence the memory (91). He argues that once educators recall the narrative memories of suffering people, truth will come from struggles that cannot be abstracted from networks of power and control.

Giroux borrows heavily from the work of Rebecca Chopp, especially *The Praxis of Suffering*, which details the relationships between political and liberation theologies.¹⁵ Chopp argues that liberation theology turns to the history of the oppression of the poor in order to “reveal a new identity and vision of the human subject in history” (8–9). In so doing liberation theology declares a preferential option for the poor (22) and reads history through the eyes of those who suffer in it. Political theology, through the voice of the European academic bourgeoisie, makes a similar claim (42), and together, Chopp argues, liberation and political theologies point to the suffering human as the subject who ruptures modernity’s “plastic mask,” its “freeway of progress” (2).

As Chopp notes, liberation theology locates God, Christ, and the Church in the history of those who suffer (3). So too, Chopp claims, political theology continues the anthropocentric turn of modernity (43). Despite their challenge to the claims of modernity, liberation and political theologies, as examples of liberation rhetorics, are not postmodern: language is not completely plural, history not completely ambiguous. The poor are privileged: their voice and history judge. God and God’s Word are not forever slipping and sliding in plurality and ambiguity; they are located, beyond the claims of postmodernity, in the lives of the oppressed.

At least one postmodern rhetoric theorist, Jean-François Lyotard, is aware of the differences between postmodern sensibility and liberation sensibility. As a postmodern, Lyotard in *The Differend* identifies and

criticizes both Marxist and nationalist rhetorics for making group claims that are finally oppressive. Marx's mistake, Lyotard argues, is that he interpreted the enthusiasm shared by the Paris Commune and other workers as enthusiasm for an unambiguous, homogeneous historical and cross-linguistic group (sections 237–39). The problem is that the Communist Party had to supply proof that such a proletariat existed, but it couldn't do so. Hence, the Party mistook as a singular proletariat what are the real, and plural, working classes. In so doing, the Party made itself into the arbiter of truth; it claimed the power to define the 'worker.' Similarly, Lyotard notes, nationalism, which makes claims to liberation based on nationalist grouping (a homogeneous historic and linguistic entity), is problematic because it tends toward hegemony (section 261) and, as a narrative, conceals the heterogeneity that is part of any linguistic/historical group (section 219).

While I generally agree with Lyotard, I do not dismiss liberation rhetorics. Given my station in life, it is easy to be postmodern. Also, my acceptance of the plurality of language and the ambiguity of history is perhaps only therapeutic: as Tracy suggests, I can call to consciousness the demons of the history my fathers made and claim responsibility for them. Lyotard himself recognizes the potential problem with his own postmodernism when, at the end of *The Differend*, he tells his readers that the heterogeneous "doesn't make a story, does it?—Indeed it's not a sign. But it is to be judged, all the way to its incomprehensibility. You can't make a political 'program' with it, but you can bear witness to it." (No. 1). I applaud Lyotard's courage to want to speak the differend, the heterogeneity, the space between phrases, which calls into question any homogeneous claims about language and/or history. Like a prophet, he bears witness to the silence between languages and histories. Yet in some situations, political programs are necessary, life-saving; hence a liberation rhetoric based on and propagating homogeneous claims, one that founds political programs, is perhaps also necessary. Bearing witness to the differend is not what the peasants to whom Archbishop Oscar Romero spoke needed most. The situation in which they found themselves demanded a rhetoric of sure claims to language and history, namely, their language and their history.

If postmoderns too easily dismiss liberation rhetoric, they may miss the opportunity for fruitful dialogue that can focus rhetoric's attention

on pain, imagination, and the religious. In their treatment of language and history, both postmodern and liberation rhetorics share a concern with these three crucial dimensions of human being. Postmoderns would be hasty, and foolhardy, not to engage liberationists in conversation about pain, imagination, and the religious because, despite their differences, their shared concerns would emerge. Such emergence may have revolutionary impact on the direction of rhetoric at the end of the millennium.

Pain

Pain, at its most destructive, disintegrates the human life-world as it disintegrates language: one's physicality is made so overwhelmingly present that one cannot speak it; one can neither point to nor construct objects in which the pain can be placed. Pain, Scarry writes, is "an intentional state without an intentional object" (164).¹⁶ Simultaneously, however, pain demands a language that would speak it. Pain's paradox is that it is not simply destructive; it can also generate language.

For rhetoric, the problem of destructive pain is one of public verbalization: How can people adequately write/speak their own pain? How can people adequately write/speak the pain of others? The former is a problem because "physical pain does not simply resist language but actively destroys it, bringing about an immediate reversion to a state anterior to language, to the sounds and cries a human being makes before language is learned" (4).¹⁷ Hence, any attempt to speak publicly one's own pain is done after the pain has lessened or ceased, thereby distancing the rhetoric from the situation it attempts to speak.¹⁸

The attempt to rhetoricize the pain of others is a particularly acute problem because another's pain is experienced only indirectly (4). While one may empathize with someone who is in pain, one cannot feel another's pain. One cannot even be sure, outside of the claim of the other, how the pain feels or even if the pain is real. Language seems woefully inadequate to the task. If one cannot know whether or not another's pain is real, then how can one speak it? If one speaks what one does not know, then isn't one engaging in deceit?

Yet as Stanley Cavell argues in his essay concerning *King Lear*, humans search suffering for meaning (47). And nothing means without language. Thus, as humans approach pain they are caught in a bind.

Sufferers know that their own suffering is essentially inexpressible. The observers of suffering know that their distance from another's pain precludes expression. At the same time, however, sufferers and observers of suffering alike seek to express the inexpressible: they wish to put pain into language. Elie Wiesel provides an outstanding example of this dilemma. After surviving Auschwitz, Wiesel traveled to France where he studied and worked as a journalist. For years he said nothing about the Shoah. This period of silence, when pain seemed to have destroyed Wiesel's capabilities for expressing his suffering, was a period of germination that bore fruit in the justly famous and eloquent *Night*.

The theologian Dorothee Soelle also recognizes the character of pain relative to language. As Soelle argues, pain makes humans mute. The human challenge is both to use language to lament the reality of pain and to change the painful situations in which humans are found (73). As I will argue throughout the ensuing chapters, the work of each of the four rhetoricians who form the core of this book recognizes both the destructive and generative power of pain. Romero, for instance, speaks of the pained and voiceless campesinos but refuses to allow their suffering to silence rhetoric. Rather, their pain, coupled with the pain of Christ on the cross, serves as a fundamental generative point for Romero. It serves to create language intended to bond those who suffer with one another and with those who do not suffer.

It is important to consider the rhetoric of pain because pain, and pain on a massive scale, is *the* fact of the twentieth century. The litany is obvious: the World Wars, the Shoah, Nagasaki and Hiroshima, Korea, Vietnam, Afghanistan, Chernobyl, famine in Africa and elsewhere, the Kurds, the targets of gun violence in America's inner cities, the victims of rape around the world, to name only the most well-known instances of mass pain. Any twentieth-century rhetoric that does not understand pain as one of its origins is antiquated at best, perhaps dishonest and manipulative at worst. Insofar as pain is a fact of human community, and insofar as rhetoric is community language, rhetoric must concern itself with pain.

The attempt to rhetoricize pain is central to liberation rhetorics. European political theologies and Latin American liberation theologies, representative of liberation rhetorics at large, share suffering as their fundamental generative point (Chopp, *Praxis* 1–7). Yet pain is also a concern of postmodern rhetoricians. Scollon and Scollon are deeply

concerned about the plight of the Athabaskan people, and offer a conception of postmodern rhetoric to aid interethnic communication. Tracy writes postmodern rhetoric in the face of his own language and history that has repressed and oppressed those who have been identified as other. Lyotard's project in *The Differend* centers on the question of the Holocaust and how it can be spoken, how it is that postmoderns can respond to it. So too Wyschogrod locates her postmodern project within the frame of pain. As she writes,

Why a postmodern ethic now? The twentieth century is witness to the deaths of millions within ever more compressed time frames: death through nuclear, chemical, and biological warfare, through death camps, through concentration and slave labor camps, and by means of conventional weapons. Newly emerging biological and chemical instruments for mass destruction are in the process of development. (xii–xiv)

It is important, in addition, to attend to the relationship between rhetoric and pain because pain can serve as a source of criticism. The pain-aware rhetorical critic or practitioner might ask the following questions: Have I accounted for the pain in this situation? Is the situation's rhetoric contributing to another's pain? If so, is the rhetoric wrong? This, I take it, is implicit in Tracy's argument. Once one recognizes that one participates in oppression and that one must act responsibly in oppressive situations, one is concerned about the ways in which one's rhetoric may be causing pain.

Pain can also provide a cross-cultural link. One of the most stultifying aspects of some postmodern rhetoric is the claim that it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, for people living in different linguistic communities to speak to one another in a way that can either connect them or adjudicate differences between them. As I indicated above, this is certainly the position Lyotard takes: at the end of *The Differend* he can speak only the space between languages and history; he can only bear witness to the heterogeneity that constitutes human being.

Other postmodern rhetoricians, such as Richard Rorty in his *Contingency, irony, and solidarity*, see the possibility of cross-historical and cross-linguistic solidarity in the rhetoric of pain. One dimension of

this new rhetoric is the recognition that, despite the heterogeneity that characterizes our languages and histories, humans are bound together, cross-culturally, by pain and humiliation (177). One of the tasks of Rorty's new rhetoric is to expand the sense of 'we' that is based on the similarities that humans have with respect to pain and humiliation (192). Rorty firmly believes that this is not possible through the work of metaphysical rhetoric and its search for universal human rights, a core self, or a God because such a search is impossible: truth is the property of sentences, sentences depend on vocabularies, vocabularies are made by humans, and truth, then, is made by humans (17, 173, 177, 192). Rorty suggests instead that journalism, ethnography, and novels best extend the sense of 'we' because they best speak, in detail, pain (94, 145, 169, 192).¹⁹ I find Rorty's work limited, though helpful. His claim that the suffering have no voice and hence need others to speak for them is simply not tenable (94). I would argue that humans can also be bound to each other across cultures by more than pain: hope, love, and respect come to mind. However, his attempt to begin to sketch a cross-cultural rhetoric of pain is helpful, especially since it is the attempt of a postmodern rhetorician to move beyond what Tracy has recognized as a tendency in postmodern rhetoric toward complacency (69). Rhetoric, involving pain, may help one to bridge cross-cultural impasses. This is, no doubt, ironic. Pain is the most divisive of human experiences because when one is pained, one cannot share this precise experience. One suffers uniquely (Scarry 4). Yet when rhetoricized, pain can provide a basis for solidarity. If people from vastly different, even opposing, cultures can share their languages of pain, perhaps these people will be less likely to seek to make each other suffer. If, for instance, the U.S. public heard the pain of burning Iraqi children, it would have less vehemently supported the 1991 Gulf War. If a mother and father from the Midwest came to understand that the children of those others screamed and hurt as their own child does, solidarity and not animosity may have been the tie that binds.

Imagination

As it works toward solidarity among divergent peoples, pain's dialectical partner is imagination. Defined by Scarry as "an intentional

object without an experienceable intentional state” (164), ‘imagination’ can be tentatively understood as linguistic manipulation of the facets of human experience, including the elements of sense reality and whatever realities there may be beyond or within the sensible world. My understanding of imagination is akin to Coleridge’s.²⁰ He argues that there are three levels: memory, fancy, imagination. Memory and fancy provide “to all faculties their objects and to all thought the elements of its material” (54). Memory, for instance, may recall to the person the elements of a book, or a building, which the person can then use in imaginative activity. Fancy is memory “emancipated from the order of time and space” (160). In short, fancy recalls the materials of existence but is able to rearrange them creatively. Imagination, for Coleridge, has two levels: primary and secondary; they differ only in degree. They are the prime agents of human perception, creators and synthesizers, repeaters and echoers of the “eternal act of creation” (159–60). Thus, imagination works with the elements and activities provided by memory and fancy but also introduces the intangible element of what Coleridge calls “the infinite I am” (159–60).

Consider the creation of a novel city. Simply put, one takes from memory and fancy other cities that exist in physical and textual form—that is, cities in which people live and cities planned but never accomplished. However, one is not content to act as photocopier, simply reproducing or even rearranging what has already been produced. Rather, one works with these elements and, if one is to create the new, one adds what Coleridge calls the power of the “eternal act of creation.”

This process is that with which all rhetoricians—theorists, practitioners, teachers, students, critics—struggle. The task, always, is not simply to reproduce the already produced. Teachers, for instance, constantly struggle with the dilemma of student writing and speaking, in whatever discipline. How is it that a teacher guides a student away from regurgitation to creativity? The effective practitioner similarly seeks creativity. The political preacher might ask, for instance, these vexing questions: How can I learn from Dr. King and yet not simply repeat him? How can I speak to my own people in my own time?

Unaccounted for, however, in Coleridge’s work on the imagination, is an imaginative dimension Scarry finds first in the Hebrew Bible. While she claims that “the only evidence that one is ‘imagining’ is that