PART 5

Conclusions and Future Directions for Evolutionary Perspectives on Violence, Homicide, and War

CHAPTER

24

The Extremes of Conflict in Literature: Violence, Homicide, and War

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Abstract

Literature depicts emotions arising from conflict and makes them available to readers, who experience them vicariously. Literary meaning lodges itself not in depicted events alone but also, and more important, in the interpretation of depicted events: in the author's treatment of the depicted events; the reader's response to both the depicted events and the author's treatment; and the author's anticipation of the reader's responses. This chapter outlines possible stances toward violence, makes an argument for the decisive structural significance of violence in both life and literature, and then presents a representative sampling of violent acts in literature. The examples from literature are organized into the main kinds of human relationships: one's relation to oneself (suicide); sexual rivals, lovers, and marital partners; family members (parents, children, siblings, aunts, uncles, and cousins); communities (violence within social groups); and warfare (violence between social groups).

Key Words: literature, emotions, interpretation, author, reader, suicide, lovers, family, community, war

Introduction

> What a book a devil's chaplain might write on the clumsy, wasteful, blundering, low, and horribly cruel works of nature!
>
> —*Darwin*, 1903; 1: 94; letter to Joseph Hooker of July 13, 1856

The world is a violent place. More are born, in every generation, than can survive. Natural selection filters out weaker organisms. Among creatures with nervous systems, those that do not survive seldom go quietly into that good night. They struggle and often suffer horribly before they die. Many become food for other animals. All compete for scarce resources against other creatures, including members of their own species. Human beings, despite all their technological and cultural contrivances, have not escaped this universal struggle. Conflict and struggle are integral to the evolved and adapted

characteristics of human nature. Literature arises out of and depicts human nature, so conflict is integral to literature, too.

Literary works sometimes depict hostile encounters between alien groups, but more frequently, the emotional interest of literary works arises out of conflicts among people who are intimately related to one another. Such conflicts are a natural product of inclusive fitness. Like other animals, human beings share fitness interests with their mates and offspring. Except for identical twins, though, the fitness interests of even the most closely related kin are not identical. Inclusive fitness produces a perpetual drama in which intimacy and opposition, cooperation and conflict, are closely intertwined.

The evolved reproductive strategies of men include both paternal investment, which requires mate guarding, and low-investment short-term mating, which often requires eluding the vigilance

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of other men. Men form coalitions for cooperative endeavor but also compete for mates (Geary & Flinn, 2001). Women have evolved strategies for securing a bonded attachment with men willing to commit resources, but they have also evolved strategies for taking advantage of short-term mating opportunities with other men, especially men who have higher genetic quality than their own mates (Buss, 2000, 2003; Geary, 1998). The pleasurable feelings associated with sexual relations are thus necessarily tinged with suspicion, jealousy, frustration, and resentment. Much of the time, men and women manage workable compromises, but sexual relations sometimes break down in rejection, violent emotional struggle, and physical abuse, including murder (Buss, 2000; Daly & Wilson, 1988).

A parent and child both have a fitness interest in the child surviving and reproducing, but a child has a 100% genetic investment in itself; each parent has only a 50% genetic investment in a child. Mother–child conflict begins in the mother's womb, with the embryo struggling to acquire more resources from the mother than the mother is willing to give. Siblings share fitness interests but also compete for resources. Parents must often distribute resources across multiple offspring, all of whom want more than an equal share. Parents often prefer some children to others, and they must also make choices between effort devoted to parenting and effort devoted to mating. Such tensions can and do erupt into homicidal violence, in both life and literature.

The conflicts generated from differing fitness interests manifest at the proximal level as motives that are driven by emotions: desire, love, jealousy, guilt, shame, frustration, resentment, rage, and hatred (Cosmides & Tooby, 2000; Ekman, 2003; Plutchik, 2003). Literature depicts such emotions, evokes them, and makes them available to readers, who experience them vicariously (Oatley, 1999, 2002, 2003; Tan, 2000). An author and a reader inhabit an imagined world created by the author, who chooses a subject, adopts a stance toward that subject, organizes the presentation of the subject, and modulates style and tone to affect the reader's responses. Readers can passively register the images and sensations thus evoked, but they can also stand apart from them, situating them in their own analytic and evaluative frameworks. Literary criticism is only the most explicit and highly developed form of readers' reflections on the imagined worlds created by authors.

Literary meaning lodges itself not in depicted events alone but also, and more important, in the interpretation of depicted events: in the author's treatment of the depicted events; the reader's response to both the depicted events and the author's treatment; and the author's anticipation of the reader's responses. It is worth pausing to emphasize the fundamentally social and psychological character of literature. Meaning in literature cannot be reduced to plot. Meaning consists in an imaginative experience at least partially shared between an author and a reader. When we analyze narrative/mimetic literature (stories, plays, and novels, as opposed to lyric poems), we have to consider the interplay of perspectives among characters, authors, and readers: how characters regard one another, what they think about one another, what the author thinks of them, what the author anticipates readers will think, and what readers actually do think about the characters and also about the author's responses to the characters. Consequently, in this chapter, the literary examples do not consist only in plot summaries. The chapter also takes account of authorial stances and readers' responses. Authorial stance and reader response are the substance of literary experience; they are, accordingly, the proper subject matter of literary criticism.

After outlining a range of stances toward psychopathic violence, this chapter makes an argument for the decisive structural significance of violence in both life and literature. The chapter then presents a representative sampling of violent acts in literature. The examples from literature are organized into the main kinds of human relationships: one's relation to oneself (suicide); sexual rivals, lovers, and marital partners; family members (parents, children, siblings, aunts, uncles, and cousins); communities (violence within social groups); and warfare (violence between social groups).

Stances Toward Cruelty

Psychopathic cruelty is relatively rare (Baumeister, 1996; Grossman, 2009). Even in genocidal warfare, people seldom regard their own behavior as intentional harm inflicted for pleasure. Instead they rationalize violence as self-defense or as a means toward a greater good. They also minimize or turn a blind eye toward the suffering of victims and instead magnify threats to themselves (Baumeister, 1996; Smith, 2007). Studies of soldiers in warfare support the contention that most people in postagricultural societies are on the whole reluctant to harm others. Even after heavy conditioning, and even when they are themselves in danger, many soldiers never fire their weapons, or they fire to miss (Grossman,

2009; Marshall, 1947). (Wade [2006] and Cochran and Harpending [2009] argue that sedentism, a prerequisite to agricultural and industrial economies, has selected for personalities less prone to violence.) Psychopaths, people who actively enjoy killing and feel no remorse, evidently constitute only about 2% of modern male populations (Swank & Marchand, 1946; cited in Grossman, 2009, p. 44). A similar percentage would probably prevail among male literary authors, and a still smaller percentage among female authors. Only a very few literary authors clearly invite readers to participate vicariously in sadistic pleasure. The Marquis de Sade, whose name is the source for the term "sadism," is one such author. (See for instance *One Hundred Days of Sodom*.) In the final chapter of Anthony Burgess's *A Clockwork Orange*, the first-person narrator unconvincingly disavows the gleeful psychopathic violence in the main body of the novel. In contemporary fiction, the most prominent overtly psychopathic novel is Bret Easton Ellis's *American Psycho*. Film directors attracted to sadistic cruelty include Stanley Kubrick and Brian de Palma. Kubrick produced a film version of *A Clockwork Orange*; and both Kubrick and de Palma produced film versions of Stephen King novels, eliminating, in both cases, the compassion that gives emotional depth to King's explorations of horror (Kubrick, *The Shining*; de Palma, *Carrie*). In most literary works that depict psychopathic cruelty, the author's stance registers revulsion against cruelty.

Baumeister (1996) defines "evil" most simply as "the adversary of good" (p. 67). We tend to regard ourselves and our associates as good people, and our enemies as bad people. Our enemies, who have their own distinct points of view, reverse the nomenclature. In fiction, the "good" is typically embodied in protagonists—agents with whom readers are invited to sympathize—and evil is embodied in their adversaries, that is, in antagonists (Carroll, Gottschall, Johnson, & Kruger, 2008; Carroll, Gottschall, Johnson, Kruger, & Georgiades, 2010; Johnson, Carroll, Gottschall, & Kruger, 2008, 2011). Among literary characters, most psychopaths are antagonists, for instance: Iago in Shakespeare's *Othello*; the malignant dwarf Daniel Quilp in Charles Dickens's *The Old Curiosity Shop*; Mr. Hyde in Robert Louis Stevenson's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*; the Catholic priest who tortures Dr. Monygham in Joseph Conrad's *Nostromo*; the renegade Blue Duck in Larry McMurtry's western *Lonesome Dove*; and the serial killer Arnold Friend (based on a real person) in Joyce Carol Oates's frequently anthologized story "Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?"

A few narratives adopt a structurally ironic stance, taking psychopaths as ostensible protagonists but treating them with implicit contempt and anger. Instances include Henry Fielding's caustic 18th-century narrative about a professional criminal, *Jonathan Wilde*, and William Makepeace Thackeray's depiction of Barry Lyndon, a heartless rogue who leaves a trail of wreckage behind him. (Kubrick's filmed version of *Barry Lyndon* eliminates Thackeray's satiric stance and turns the story into a prettily filmed picaresque adventure.)

Some writers are hard to locate clearly on either side of the divide between psychopathic and sympathetic perspectives. Flannery O'Connor, for instance, a Catholic American writer from the middle of the 20th century, envisions homicidal violence as a means of transcending ordinary social life, which she regards as hypocritical and spiritually shallow. Her story, "A Good Man Is Hard To Find"—one of the most widely anthologized of all short stories—depicts a psychopathic killer, The Misfit, as a religious skeptic. The protagonist of the story is an old woman who achieves, in terror for her life, a moment of Christian charity toward her killer. The protagonists of O'Connor's novels *The Violent Bear It Away* and *Wise Blood* both achieve spiritual metamorphosis through acts of homicidal violence.

Among contemporary writers held in high esteem, Cormac McCarthy gives an exceptionally prominent place to graphic violence. Throughout McCarthy's novels, gaining a tough-minded, realistic perspective means accepting the ultimate, decisive reality of homicidal violence. The dead do not get to establish moral norms. In *All the Pretty Horses*, McCarthy's protagonist is a young man who gets thrown into a brutal Mexican prison. To survive, he has to accept that lethal violence takes priority over all moral considerations, but his struggle to come to terms with the necessity of his situation tacitly locates his homicidal behavior in a moral context. The protagonist of *No Country for Old Men* is humane and warm hearted. He ultimately falls victim to a psychopath who tempts readers to identify with his stance of cool command. A similar kind of temptation for the reader is at work in Shakespeare's depiction of Richard III. Like the protagonist of *A Clockwork Orange*, Richard is witty and droll, though vicious. Even when dominant characters are purely destructive, they naturally tempt readers to identify with them, but Shakespeare and McCarthy also

include characters who offer alternative perspectives. Both authors leave it to the reader's own strength of mind to decide how to feel about the characters. In *Blood Meridian*, based on a historical event from the middle of the 19th century, McCarthy depicts a band of psychopathic killers who cut a swath of random violence through Mexico and the American Southwest. The protagonist is a boy who had been traumatized by violence from the time of his earliest memories. Though tagging along with the band, in a psychologically numbed condition, he is not ultimately absorbed into mindless and heartless brutality. In *The Road*, a futuristic novel situated in an American landscape devastated by an ecological holocaust, possibly nuclear, the moral lines are more clearly demarcated. The protagonists, a father and his son, are struggling to survive in an environment dominated by cannibalistic bands. The emotional focal point of the story is the father's devotion to his son. Though McCarthy is preoccupied with violence and often noncommittal in his own emotional responses, it seems safe to say that he is not ultimately a sadist along the lines of Burgess, Ellis, de Palma, and Kubrick. He just pushes the reader harder, in morally challenging ways, than most writers do.

How Important Is Violence in Literature?

Within social groups, the exercise of power tends heavily toward containing and deflecting lethal violence (Boehm, 1999). In virtually all social groups, the amount of time spent in violent encounters is small relative to the time spent in peaceful interaction. Nonetheless, because violence is the ultimate sanction against behavior that violates group norms, the potential for violence has a powerful organizing influence on behavior within a group. A similar point can be made with respect to interactions between social groups. One possible way to look at collective violence is to suppose that history consists in periods of peace and stability occasionally disturbed by military conflict. It would be more accurate to say that periods of peace and stability are contained and organized by periods of mass violence (Potts & Hayden, 2008, pp. 12, 268). Consider American history. Americans have not had a war within their territorial boundaries since the Civil War, 150 years ago, but the country was founded on aggressive acts of territorial acquisition from the natives; the natives the first colonists encountered were just the survivors of about 15,000 years of savage tribal warfare; the nation came to birth, as a nation, in an act of collective, organized violence (The War of

Independence); the South had an economy heavily dependent on slaves held in place by coercive force; the regional political conflict between the North and South was finally suppressed only in a bloody civil war; and during the last century America participated in the two largest wars in history, thus consolidating, for half a century, its now rapidly fading position as the dominant military and economic power in the world.

The picturesque landscapes of Europe— crumbling castles, walled towns overgrown with moss and ivy—are the quaint relics of a history of mass violence that shaped the demographic and political landscape. On the largest scale, world history consists in migrations and invasions: huge masses of armed people descending on other peoples, killing many of them, enslaving others, and gradually merging with the survivors. Instances on a continental scale include the barbarian hordes that inundated the Roman Empire; the Mongol invasions of China and Europe; the European invasions of North and South America; the Bantu expansion south and east in Africa; and the English colonization of Australia and New Zealand (Gibbon, 1776–1789/1994; Roberts, 2003; Turchin, 2007; Wells, 1921). Great Britain is the product of multiple genocidal events: the Germanic invasions that overwhelmed the Romanized Celts, who had themselves pushed aside the Picts; the Danish incursions into Anglo-Saxon lands; the brutal Norman conquest that subjugated the Anglo-Saxons and Danes; and the English conquests of Scotland and Ireland, especially Ireland (Davies, 1999; Johnson, 1980). World War II was initiated chiefly by German and Japanese efforts once again to change the shape of populations over whole continents (Davies, 2006; Gilbert, 1989; Keegan, 1990; Snyder, 2010; Spector, 1984). Both before and during the war, the Soviets reshaped and redistributed their vast population by starving, shooting, or deporting millions of their own citizens (Snyder, 2010). The period of relative geopolitical stability produced by World War II will not last forever. Expanding global population is placing increasing pressure on scarce resources, and that kind of pressure has always been a chief cause for the mass movement of populations. Sometime within the present century, the geopolitical landscape will perhaps be once again transformed by cataclysmic upheavals (Friedman, 2009; Wilson, 1998, ch. 12).

The case for the organizing power of violence on a world-historical scale has a bearing on even the most domestic and polite form of literature: the

"novel of manners." Novels by authors such as Jane Austen and Anthony Trollope (both British writers of the 19th century) contain very little overt violence. *Pride and Prejudice* and *Barchester Towers*, for instance, chiefly concern themselves with conflicts over mate choice and social status. But these domestic dramas take place within a sociopolitical landscape that is the stabilized result of acts of domination: the domination of whole populations over others, in fashioning the British nation; the domination of the whole population by an elite class living off the proceeds of agricultural labor; and the political and religious upheavals, culminating in the English Civil War, that created a national church and associated it with the elite political class descended from military barons who had domineered over a population of serfs. Austen's novels take place during the era of the Napoleonic Wars. No battles are depicted, but officers of the army and navy figure very largely among the casts of characters. In *Persuasion*, the male protagonist, Captain Wentworth, has become rich off the spoils of the French vessels he has defeated in battle. The polite manners and well-regulated social hierarchies in domestic novels are like the rock formations produced by molten lava once it has cooled. The exercise of social power in such novels has stabilized, so that violence is no longer often necessary, but violence helped create the stabilized social order and still sustains it through foreign wars.

The novel of manners is built on a foundation of cooled and congealed violence. The action in much canonical literature is violence still hot and liquid. ("Canonical" literature is literature that has had a seminal, creative force that makes itself felt in subsequent literature.) For the literature of the West—Europe, the Americas, Australia, and those portions of Asia, especially Japan, that have come under the cultural sway of the West—canonical literature has two chief wellsprings: ancient Greece and the Bible. Both sources offer abundant entertainment for readers with a taste for what the protagonist of *A Clockwork Orange* fondly describes as "ultraviolence."

The Old Testament consists largely in chronicling the wars, conquests, defeats, and enslavements of an ancient pastoral people who commonly practiced genocide against their neighbors (Headlam Wells, 2011). In the story of Noah's Flood, God goes the Hebrews one better, wiping out not just a few neighboring tribes but the whole human race, all but Noah and his family. The first family drama in the Bible, after Adam and Eve are cast out of paradise, is the murder of one brother by another. That theme is taken up again in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, probably the single most widely known work of modern Western literature. Contemplating his crime, Claudius, Hamlet's uncle, laments, "O, my offence is rank, it smells to heaven; / It hath the primal eldest curse upon't, / A brother's murder" (3.3.36–38; for an evolutionary interpretation of *Hamlet*, see Carroll, 2011b, pp. 123–147).

So also with the Greeks. The oldest classic that has come down to us is Homer's *Iliad*. Much of the *Iliad* consists in graphic depictions of the grisly forms of death produced by barbarian warriors wielding edged and pointed weapons (Gottschall, 2008b). Before the Greeks could set sail to rape, murder, and pillage among the Trojans, the Greek leader, Agamemnon, had to placate the Gods by sacrificing his daughter Iphigenia. And thereon hangs a tale, or series of tales: the *Oresteia*, three plays by Aeschylus (*Agamemnon*, *The Libation Bearers*, and *The Eumenides*). The act of child sacrifice sets off a chain reaction: Agamemnon is murdered by his wife, Clytemnestra, and her lover, Aegisthus; and Clytemnestra and Aegisthus are murdered by Clytemnestra's son Orestes. In addition to being Clytemnestra's lover, Aegisthus had a second motive for murdering Agamemnon: Agamemnon and Aegisthus are cousins; Agamemnon's father Atreus had murdered Aegisthus's brothers, who, like Aegisthus, were Atreus's nephews. (The murderous conflict between Atreus and his brother Thyestes is the subject of a play, *Thyestes*, by the Roman playwright Seneca the Younger.)

If we fast forward to the Christian Middle Ages, skipping past the derivative drama of Rome and the illiterate centuries of barbarian chaos, the most prominent landmark is Dante's *Inferno*, which consists largely of graphic, gruesome descriptions of physical torture, varied with monstrous ingenuity, in the nine circles of hell. Fast forward once again, and the next major landmark in Western literature is Shakespeare. Shakespeare's Roman history plays *Julius Caesar* and *Antony and Cleopatra* hinge on assassination and war. The English history plays chronicle the Wars of the Roses, a drawn-out sequence of intrigues, betrayals, assassinations, and bloody battles. The major tragedies (*Othello, Macbeth*, *Hamlet*, and *King Lear*) turn on murder, war, torture, or all three. Move up to the 19th century, a period in which representational/mimetic literature is dominated by the novel, and ask: What is widely regarded as the greatest of all novels? *War and Peace*, many would say. The central subject in *War and Peace* is Napoleon's invasion of Russia and the

retreat in which most of his army perished. Tolstoy's chief competitor for title of greatest Russian novelist is Dostoevsky. *Crime and Punishment* is about a young man who uses an axe to murder two old women; *The Brothers Karamazov* is about a malignant old man who is murdered by his illegitimate, psychopathic son. And in our own time, the last major canonical American novel that formed a shaping imaginative experience for a whole generation, many people feel, is Joseph Heller's *Catch-22*, a war novel full of violent deaths.

In answer then, to the question, How important is violence to literature? we can say that violence is as important in literature as it is in life. Like sex, even when it does not take much time, proportionally, it can have a decisive impact on subsequent events. Gloucester in *King Lear* jokes that there was "good sport" at the making of his illegitimate son Edmund, but then Edmund betrays Gloucester to his enemies, who gouge out Gloucester's eyes. McMurtry's *Lonesome Dove* offers an illustration of the same point. The protagonists are two middle-aged cowboys, former Texas Rangers, on a cattle drive. At one point, they must fulfill the unpleasant task of hanging one of their old friends. The friend is good natured but morally lax and had inadvertently become involved with a band of psychopathic killers. Over the years, the amount of time the three friends had spent in genial exchange was much more extensive than the few minutes required to perform the hanging, but the hanging is more important, practically, than anything that had preceded it; moreover, it sets the moral quality of the relationship into stark relief, revealing that the executioners, unlike their condemned friend, have a severe commitment to a moral code.

The emotional intensity and decisive practical character of homicidal violence invest it with special significance as evidence for underlying force in human mental and emotional life. Hence the very large role violence plays in literature.

Literary Depictions of Violence in the Phases of Human Life History: A Sampling

Beneath all variation in the details of organization, the life history of every species forms a reproductive cycle. In the case of human beings, successful parental care produces children capable, when grown, of forming adult pair bonds, becoming functional members of a community, and caring for children of their own. Survival, mating, parenting, and social life thus form natural categories in the organization of human life. They are common topics in textbooks of evolutionary psychology and also common themes in literature. In this section, these categories are used to organize a sampling of depictions of violence in literature.

Violence Against Oneself
UNDERSTANDING SUICIDE FROM AN EVOLUTIONARY PERSPECTIVE

People seem to have a natural inhibition against harming their own kind and a much greater inhibition against harming themselves. They often overcome both inhibitions, but not without a psychological cost. When we speak of "violence," the connotations of that word do not limit themselves to actions. "Violence" suggests high stress: intense passion and conflict, including inner conflict. Popular "action" movies are imaginatively uninteresting because they falsely depict violence as easy; they are emotionally shallow. Literary depictions of violence are most interesting when they evoke the greatest degree of inner struggle. No form of inner struggle is more intense than that which culminates in taking one's own life.

Most forms of violence can plausibly be described as extensions of adaptive behavior—sexual jealousy, struggles for dominance or resources. Not suicide. Efforts to explain self-inflicted death as a strategy for propagating one's genes have a strained look about them (deCatanzaro, 1981). From an evolutionary standpoint, not all significant features of human physiology and behavior need be regarded as adaptive. Illnesses such as stroke, cancer, heart attack, and diabetes are not adaptations; they are breakdowns in complex adaptive systems. That does not mean that evolutionary explanations are irrelevant. To understand how and why a system breaks down, one must understand the function for which it was designed. Adaptation by means of natural selection is the default explanation for complex functional organization (Pinker, 1997; Tooby & Cosmides, 1992). It also provides the necessary explanatory context for dysfunctional behavior.

Humans have a uniquely developed sense of self-awareness that derives from the evolution of the neocortex. Individual persons have a sense of personal identity continuously developing over time, and they consciously locate themselves as individuals within social networks and within nature. Self-awareness facilitates planning and actions that require shared images of collective purpose (Hawkins & Blakeslee, 2004; Lane, 2009, ch. 9; Tomasello, Carpenter, Call, Behne, & Moll, 2005). Self-awareness is evidently functional; it is complex,

expensive, universal, and reliably developing. It is also fragile. Human beings are peculiarly vulnerable to conceptions of their own existence that cause them intolerable mental pain. Grief, guilt, self-loathing, and the feeling of being trapped in impossible social situations or incurable mental illness can drive people to escape from their own minds in the only way possible: escaping from life itself.

GUILT

Literary suicides arising from simple grief are relatively rare. They do not reveal complex inner conflicts and thus offer little insight into inner life. Romeo kills himself because he mistakenly thinks Juliet is dead; Juliet kills herself because Romeo has killed himself. Lyrically moving, yes; psychologically interesting, no. Guilt is a more complex emotion than simple sorrow and a more common motive for literary suicide. In the best known of all ancient plays, Sophocles's *Oedipus Rex*, Oedipus stops short of suicide, but when he discovers that he has murdered his father and married his mother, even though he had acted inadvertently, he gouges out his own eyes. Oedipus's incestuous marriage produced a daughter, Antigone. In Sophocles's *Antigone*, the autocrat Creon is Antigone's uncle but has Antigone walled up alive for defying his orders. She hangs herself. Creon's son, who is in love with Antigone, kills himself when she dies. His mother then kills herself. *Antigone* does not reach an emotional climax in Antigone's despair, her lover's grief, or the grief of his mother. It reaches emotional climax in the tragic anguish of Creon, humbled, shattered, chastened, riven by guilt, with his vision of himself and the world fundamentally and permanently changed. Shakespeare's Othello murders Desdemona out of sexual jealousy. When he realizes that he has been duped and that she was innocent, he first mortally wounds the man who deceived him and then kills himself, turning his sense of justice against himself. In Jean Racine's 17th-century version of the Phaedra story (*Phèdre*), a stepmother succumbs to a guilty passion for her stepson; when her husband, Theseus, brings down a fatal curse on his son, unable to endure the commingled grief and guilt, she poisons herself. In Conrad's novel *Victory*, the protagonist Axel Heyst loses faith in the woman he loves. Too late he realizes that while he had been cynically repudiating her, she had been giving her life for him. He builds a funeral pyre for her and uses it also to immolate himself. In Émile Zola's *Thérèse Raquin*, Thérèse has a passionate affair with her husband's closest friend. She and her lover murder her husband, but the guilt torments them until they take poison to escape from themselves and from each other.

In most readers' perceptions, Thérèse and her lover undergo a transition in role: from being objects of horror—merely villains—to being objects of tragic pity. They learn about the moral magnitude of their crime only by committing it, but they do learn. As moral agents, they are thus radically distinct from characters such as Richard III, who commit horrible atrocities—Richard murders children—without ever feeling a shiver of guilt. On the scale of guilt, Shakespeare's Macbeth falls somewhere between Othello and Richard III. Macbeth and his wife are both tormented by guilt at the murders they have committed; she kills herself, but Macbeth, like Richard III, fights on to the end. Such a death leaves most readers suspended between a feeling of tragic pathos and a feeling of satisfaction at a just retribution. That ambivalent feeling can be contrasted to the simple emotions of grief and horror readers feel when Macbeth's henchmen murder Macduff's wife and children. (For convenience, responses to drama are designated as responses of "readers," though of course drama is in the first instance intended to be watched and listened to, not read.)

Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* has a fantastic plot device: Dorian remains perpetually young and beautiful, but his portrait becomes ever older and more hideously ugly, revealing the depravity of his soul, which has been corrupted by cruelty, drugs, and sexual excess. The portrait is an externalized image of his conscience. Riven by unresolvable conflicts between irrepressible desires and guilty self-loathing, he stabs the portrait in the heart; the portrait returns to its original state, and he himself lies dead, old and vile. Self-loathing is also the motive for suicide in Thomas Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. In middle age, the title character finds himself bereft of everything he had ever wanted or achieved; he is an outcast, without social standing, without friends, without family. He feels himself despised and also despises himself. He starves himself to death and leaves behind a will demanding that no man remember him. He has not lived a good or wise life, but having passed such severe judgment on himself, he leaves none for the reader to exercise in vindictive satisfaction.

SOCIAL FAILURE

People are social animals. Even their most intimate feelings about their own identities reflect their sense of their place in a social network. Some of the

best-known literary suicides find themselves caught in a socially intolerable situation—entangled in forbidden or hopeless passions, pushed against the wall for lack of money, or trapped in an ideological or political impasse.

In *Hippolytus*, Euripides's version of the Phaedra story, Phaedra is caught out in an illicit passion for her stepson, realizes she is socially lost, and hangs herself. Virgil's *Aeneid*, the most prestigious and influential literary work of the Roman world, contains a long episode in which Aeneas, fleeing from the havoc at Troy, lingers with the Carthaginian Queen Dido. When he abandons her to pursue his destiny, she builds her own funeral pyre and dies on it. (Christopher Marlowe produced a dramatic version of the story, and Purcell an operatic version.) Dido dies not merely from sorrow but from the recognition that she has hopelessly compromised her position as queen. Anna Karenina leaves her husband for the man she loves. Discovering that passion alone, outside the system of accepted social roles, cannot sustain her, she throws herself under a train. Winnie Verloc, in Conrad's *The Secret Agent*, murders her husband, flings herself at another man, and when he abandons her, throws herself overboard from a ship. Lily Bart, the protagonist in Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth*, cannot bring herself to marry for money without love, or for love without money. She loses her place in the social world and poisons herself. In George Gissing's *New Grub Street*, Harold Biffen, an impoverished author, realizes he has no hope of winning a worldly woman's love. He poisons himself. In George Orwell's *Burmese Days*, John Flory, a colonial administrator, is publicly humiliated and then rejected by the woman he loves. He shoots himself and his dog.

In Gustav Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, Emma Bovary takes arsenic because she has secretly gone into debt. The protagonist of Willa Cather's story "Paul's Case" is a sensitive adolescent aesthete, unfit for the world of middle-class squalor into which he is born. He steals money, lives a few days in luxury, and then throws himself in front of a train. In Dickens's *Little Dorritt*, the charlatan financier Mr. Merdle—a Bernie Madoff of the Victorian period—creates a speculative bubble and then cuts his throat before the bubble bursts. In Anthony Trollope's *The Prime Minister*, Ferdinand Lopez plays a high-stakes game for money and social position, loses, and throws himself in front of a train.

Cleopatra in Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*, and Cassius and Brutus in *Julius Caesar*, are all political people; their inner sense of self is bound up in their political identity. When they come to the end of their political ropes, they all take their own lives. Cleopatra uses an adder to poison herself; Cassius and Brutus fall on their swords. Hyacinth Robinson, in Henry James's *The Princess Casamassima*, takes an oath to perform a political assassination. He loses confidence in the righteousness of his cause but still feels bound by his oath; he resolves his dilemma by shooting himself. In Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*, Edna Pontellier feels stifled by the sociosexual roles open to her in turn-of-the-century New Orleans; she swims out to sea and drowns. In Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, the protagonists Okonkwo attempts to lead the people of his tribe in a revolt against White domination; when the rebellion fails to take fire, he hangs himself.

Meaning in fiction depends heavily on the degree to which an author's perspective corresponds to that of any given character. Gissing's perspective in *New Grub Street* is morose and self-pitying; he identifies closely with Biffen, and even more closely with Biffen's friend, Edward Reardon, who dies of illness brought on by hunger and exposure. Tolstoy's stance toward Anna Karenina remains clinically detached, registering the vacuity of the social conventions against which Anna rebels, but registering also the self-destructive character of her emotional impulsiveness. Cather evokes Paul's aestheticism in a sensitive way, but she looks with cold irony at the delusions with which he sustains his fragile arrogance. Emma Bovary, too, lives in flattering delusions. Flaubert sustains a stance of cool contempt for her, as he does for most of his bourgeois characters, in all of his fiction. (His stance toward his protagonists in *Salammbô*, in contrast, is almost tender. The protagonists are barbarian warriors leading a slave revolt in the ancient Near East. *Salammbô* luxuriates in a voluptuous welter of vengeful cruelty on a massive scale.) Emma's death is particularly painful and ugly. Flaubert dwells on the physically repulsive details of death by arsenic.

An author's moral and ideological views often strongly influence how he or she responds emotionally to characters. Euripides evidently expects readers to disapprove of Phaedra's willingness to sacrifice fidelity to a guilty passion. Her death seems right and necessary. Virgil regards Dido as a tragic victim of historical forces larger and more important than individual passion. He sympathizes with her, but his sympathy is tinged with contempt. Trollope regards Lopez as both an outsider and a psychopathic adventurer. Lopez's self-destruction reestablishes social equilibrium and thus serves as

a form of resolution. For Dickens, Merdle virtually embodies fraudulent social pretense; Dickens exults in vindictive glee over Merdle's death. Chopin seems to regard Edna Pontellier as a victim of a stifling social order—hence Edna's current status as an icon of resistance to patriarchy. James elicits pity for the death of Hyacinth Robinson and indignation against the maliciously manipulative anarchist who has placed him in an untenable position. Orwell's John Flory is intelligently appreciative of Burmese culture; he serves Orwell as a foil for the unintelligent arrogance of the British Raj. Nonetheless, Orwell registers the weakness of Flory's ego with pitying contempt. For Conrad, Winnie Verloc's passionate though "morbid" devotion to her retarded brother serves as a counterweight to the moral vacuity of the anarchists who surround her. Conrad treats Winnie's death with a combination of overstrained pathos and ironic distaste.

Tragedy requires an element of grandeur or nobility lacking in most cases of suicide for reasons of social failure, but Achebe's Okonkwo and Shakespeare's Roman protagonists are tragic figures. Okonkwo is a strong but flawed man, victimized both by circumstances and by the limitations in his own perspective. In the deaths of Cleopatra, Cassius, and Brutus, Shakespeare evokes a Roman ethos in which suicide is the only honorable conclusion to a failed political intrigue.

MENTAL ILLNESS

Mental illness is a neurophysiological dysfunction that produces mental anguish (Oakley, 2007). Virginia Woolf suffered recurrent bouts of mental illness; rather than go through it one more time, she drowned herself. Some sense of the horror she must have experienced is captured in one of her novels, *Mrs. Dalloway*. Over the course of a single day, Woolf counterpoints Mrs. Dalloway's placid ruminations with the hallucinatory terror of a battle-shocked veteran suffering from schizophrenia. At the end of the story, as Mrs. Dalloway is enjoying herself at a party, he kills himself by jumping out of a window. In *Maid in Waiting*, John Galsworthy gets readers close to the suicidal anguish of uncontrolled bipolar disorder, before that disorder had a clinical name. Edward Ashburnham, in Ford Madox Ford's *The Good Soldier*, is a slave to recurrent and irresistible romantic passions. He finally escapes by cutting his own throat. Severe clinical depression gets canonical expression in Hardy's last novel, *Jude the Obscure*. Jude is a disappointed

man, morose and fearful. His oldest child, a virtual personification of clinical depression, hangs himself and his siblings. Jude eventually stays out in the rain long enough to get pneumonia, thus bringing his own misery to an end. Chief White Halfoat, in *Catch-22*, uses the same strategy for ending his life.

EXISTENTIAL DESPAIR

Human beings are the only species with a brain so highly developed that they can locate themselves in a cosmic scheme of things. Humans are susceptible to religious fantasies and supernatural terrors. They often need to feel that their existence has some "meaning" within the larger scheme of things. Shakespeare's Hamlet, caught somewhere in between medieval supernaturalism and modern metaphysical nihilism, yearns to destroy himself but fears the afterlife. In his closet drama, *Empedocles on Etna*, Matthew Arnold captures the mid-Victorian mood of metaphysical despair, translocating his own metaphysical gloom into the voice of an early Greek philosopher. After discoursing eloquently about the futility of human life, Empedocles flings himself into a volcanic crater. In the later 19th century, with the widespread loss of religious belief among educated people, the sense of existential despair became a predominating theme in literature. Conrad is particularly effective in giving voice to that theme. In Conrad's epic novel *Nostromo*, Decoud, a Gallicized South American patrician, is trapped in solitude on a small boat for several days. Losing all sense of purpose or meaning in life, he shoots himself and falls over the side of the boat. Conrad speaks of this death with mocking contempt, but the contempt is directed as much at himself as at his character. Decoud's perspective is a close approximation to one main aspect of Conrad's own point of view; and, indeed, Decoud kills himself by shooting himself in the chest, the same method that in his youth Conrad had adopted for attempting suicide. Aldous Huxley's futuristic utopia/dystopia *Brave New World* depicts a society in which life is perfectly regulated by genetic engineering and behavioral conditioning. The protagonist, a "Savage" who had grown up on an Indian reservation and has thus escaped conditioning, cannot fully articulate what he feels is intolerable about such a society, but he ends up hanging himself in despair. The existential problems explored by writers like Shakespeare, Arnold, Conrad, and Huxley have not been solved; they are part of our active cultural heritage.

All in the Family

Next to one's relation to one's self, one's closest relations, genetically, are to parents, offspring, and siblings. The "ultimate" causal force, inclusive fitness, creates "proximal" feelings of psychological closeness. Blood is thicker than water, but in family dramas blood sometimes runs like water, producing in readers peculiarly intense sensations of shock and horror. Not surprisingly, in Dante's *Inferno*, people who commit crimes against kin are placed in the ninth circle of hell, the lowest circle.

Family violence is sometimes complex and sequential. The cycle of family violence that motivates Aeschylus's trilogy about the house of Atreus has already been mentioned: Agamemnon murders Iphigenia, is murdered in turn by his wife, Clytemnestra, who in turn is murdered by her son Orestes. Sophocles's depiction of Oedipus has also been mentioned: Oedipus murdered his father and married his mother, then in remorse gouges out his own eyes; Oedipus's daughter Antigone defies her uncle Creon and is executed by him; Creon's son, who loves Antigone, kills himself, and his mother then kills herself. In both Euripides's and Racine's versions of Phaedra's story, Theseus's wife, Phaedra, betrays her stepson; Theseus invokes the power of a god to destroy his son; and Phaedra commits suicide. In *King Lear*, Edmund betrays both his father and his brother Edgar. Lear's two oldest daughters, Goneril and Regan, collude in humiliating their father but then fall out over a sexual rivalry, each competing for Edmund's favor. Goneril poisons Regan, and then, when she is exposed and trapped, stabs herself to death. Edgar kills Edmund in combat, but Edmund has already ordered the execution of Lear's youngest daughter, Cordelia. After she dies, Lear dies from grief. In Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*, Fyodor Karamazov's illegitimate son Smerdyakov, inspired by the atheistic writings of his brother Ivan, murders his father. Then, feeling betrayed by Ivan, Smerdyakov kills himself, leaving another brother, Dmitry, to take the blame for the patricide.

Murdering one's own children has a peculiarly horrific effect, since it combines the revulsion against murdering kin with the revulsion against murdering children. In Flaubert's *Salammbô*, the worshippers of Baal are fighting off a genocidal revolt of slaves, and the war is going badly. To propitiate Baal, they burn alive all the infants in the city, flinging them one by one into the glowing belly of the great brass god. Medea, in a play by Euripides, abandons her homeland for Jason's sake; when he later abandons her, she murders their two sons for revenge. In George Eliot's novel *Adam Bede*, an unmarried woman, Hetty Sorrel, leaves her newborn infant to die in the woods. In William Styron's *Sophie's Choice*, Sophie has to choose which of her two children to sacrifice to the gas chambers at Auschwitz. Later, tormented by guilt, she commits suicide. The protagonist of Toni Morrison's *Beloved* chooses to murder her children rather than have them returned to slavery. In King's *The Shining*, Jack Torrance is gradually possessed by evil spirits in an isolated hotel; under their influence, he almost succeeds in murdering his wife and child.

In fiction, murdering members of one's own family almost always has an evil cast, but evil can be contextualized in many different ways, depending on the total worldview of the writer. Greek tragedies tend to adopt a stance that hovers ambiguously between moralism and fatalism, that is, between emphasizing the consequences of behavioral choices and counseling resignation to the caprice of the gods. In *Salammbô*, Flaubert seems to be aiming at a purely aesthetic goal: evoking the ferocity of a barbarian culture, without judging it from a moral stance. George Eliot, in contrast, dwells on a moral theme: the opposition between egoism and empathy. She sets up a clear moral dichotomy between the vain and shallow nature of Hetty Sorrel, who abandons her newborn child, and the loving nature of the female protagonist, Dinah Morris. The three main characters in Styron's *Sophie's Choice*—a Polish Catholic woman victimized by the Nazis, a Jewish schizophrenic, and a descendant of Southern slave owners—offer an occasion for meditations on problematic racial and ethnic relationships. Morrison's *Beloved* is designed as an indictment of slavery in the American South. Dostoevsky situates Smerdyakov's patricide within the context of a philosophical debate over morality and religion. Jack Torrance in King's *The Shining* is a recovering alcoholic and a failed writer. His demonic possession is cast in terms of an inner struggle between egoistic vanity, fueled by alcohol, and his devotion to his wife and child. *The Shining* is essentially a moral drama, like *Adam Bede*. *King Lear*, too, is a moral drama. Goneril and Regan are faithless and wantonly cruel; they provide a foil for the idea of family bonds personified in their sister Cordelia.

Violence and Sex
SEXUAL RIVALS

The biblical story of David and Bathsheba exemplifies homicide prompted by sexual desire. Greek

myth is replete with instances of Hera, queen of Olympus, punishing Zeus's mortal lovers or their offspring. Lethal jealousy is a major theme also in the three great epics of the Greco-Roman world—the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey*, and the *Aeneid*. The Trojan War, the subject of the *Iliad*, takes place, ostensibly, because the Trojan prince Paris runs off with Helen, the wife of the Greek leader Agamemnon. Gottschall (2008b) makes a compelling argument that this specific motive was merely the symbolic tip of the iceberg. All of Greek tribal culture in this historical period was organized around raiding for women. (Gottschall draws inspiration from Napoleon Chagnon's [1979] studies of the Yanomamö.) The *Odyssey*, recounting Odysseus's efforts to return home after the Trojan War, culminates with Odysseus slaughtering the suitors who had gathered around his wife, Penelope. The last half of the *Aeneid* occupies itself with Aeneas's war in Italy against Turnus. The ostensible occasion for the war is rivalry over the hand of the princess Lavinia. The first story in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, "The Knight's Tale," turns on the jealous rivalry of two former friends, who fight in knightly combat until one eventually dies. In Guy de Maupassant's *Une Vie*, a husband discovers his wife in a tryst inside a covered cart, which he rolls off a cliff, killing both his wife and her lover. Bradley Headstone in Dickens's *Our Mutual Friend* tries to drown Eugene Wrayburn in jealousy over Lizzie Hexam. William Boldwood, in Hardy's *Far From the Madding Crowd*, has a wedding party that is spoiled when his fiancée's husband, erroneously supposed dead, shows up at the party. Boldwood shoots and kills the husband. In Cather's *O Pioneers!*, the protagonist's brother is murdered by a jealous husband. Jean Toomer's "Blood-Burning Moon" depicts homicidal violence animated by both sexual jealousy and racial hatred; both rivals die, one with his throat slit, and the other burned at the stake by a lynch mob. Zora Neale Hurston's "Spunk" depicts a hapless wronged husband pitted against a cocky, dominant rival, Spunk, who shoots him. On the surface, Spunk seems unrepentant, but he is haunted by the murdered man's ghost, who pushes him into a buzz saw.

Sexual jealousy leading to violence, and especially male jealousy of rival males, is a human universal (Buss, 2003; Daly & Wilson, 1988; Geary, 1998). However, differences in cultural attitudes make a large difference in the stance authors take toward this universal disposition. From the perspective of Greeks in the barbarian period, Odysseus is wholly within his rights to murder his rivals, and along with them the serving maids with whom the suitors had had sex. In modern literature, men who resort to violence in response to sexual jealousy are seldom if ever treated as epic heroes. More often, they seem self-destructively obsessed with passions they cannot control. There are no modern literary heroes, like Odysseus, who are celebrated for murdering hordes of their rivals. Odysseus is a chief in a polygynous warrior culture. Modern heroes have to conform to the ethos of a monogamous bourgeois culture (Gottschall, 2008b; Jobling, 2001).

LOVERS' QUARRELS

Jealous hatred of a rival, like grief, is a simple passion. Jealousy of a lover or spouse is more likely to put intense emotions into conflict with one another. After murdering Desdemona, Othello describes himself as a man who "loved not wisely but too well" (5.2.44). In Racine's version of the Phaedra story, Phèdre is torn between jealous rage and shame; she colludes in a false accusation that results in her stepson's death, and then guilt, grief, and shame drive her to suicide. In Robert Browning's dramatic monologue "Porphyria's Lover," the speaker has been driven insane by jealousy. After strangling his lover with her own hair, he tells himself that he has fulfilled her own wish, since she can now "give herself to me forever." In William Faulkner's frequently anthologized story "A Rose for Emily," Miss Emily has an affair with a man disinclined to marriage. Like the speaker in "Porphyria's Lover," she kills him in order to keep him with her. Many years later, after her death, the town's folk find the lover's skeleton in a bed in her house, with a strand of her gray hair on a pillow next to it. In Honoré de Balzac's novel *Cousine Bette*, the fickle and opportunistic siren Valérie strings along several men at once, exploiting all of them, and is finally poisoned, along with her new husband, by one of her deceived lovers. Tolstoy, in his own life, was tormented by obsessive jealousy, a theme that figures prominently in both *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*. In "The Kreutzer Sonata," the first-person narrator explains that he murdered his wife because he was enraged both by ordinary sexual jealousy and by his own enslavement to sensual passion. In Zola's *La Bête Humaine*, Jacques Lantier is driving a train on which his mistress is a passenger; another woman, prompted by jealous rage, derails the train, killing many people, but not the two she was intending to kill. Remorse drives her to suicide. Lantier himself, afflicted with a mental disease that couples sexual passion with homicidal fury, eventually murders his

mistress. D. H. Lawrence's *Women in Love* pits two egoistic and dominating personalities, Gerald and Gudrun, against one another. After nearly strangling Gudrun to death, Gerald wanders away, yearning for a release from passion, and falls off a cliff.

Murder/suicide is as common in the crime section of the newspaper as it is in works of fiction. The commingling of love and hatred in works such as those just described gives readers imaginative access to the states of mind that animate such real-life behavior. Literary depictions also give us access to a range of possible attitudes toward this behavior. Racine's play is a neoclassical tragedy; it elicits responses that mingle emotions of horror and compassion. Browning's monologue creates a sensation of horror like that in some of the works of Edgar Allen Poe ("The Tell-Tale Heart," for instance)—horror both at homicidal violence and at mental derangement. Insanity precludes the dignity and grandeur that are typical of tragic emotion, but most readers' revulsion against Browning's lunatic is nonetheless tinged with pity. Commenting on "A Rose for Emily," Faulkner (1965) declared that his own attitude toward the story was essentially one of compassion for Emily's wasted life. Balzac's attitude toward Valérie and her lovers has an air of moral disapproval tinged with sensationalistic fascination. The first-person narrator in Tolstoy's story evokes little compassion for the wife he murdered; he wishes instead to mitigate his guilt by treating sexuality itself as a mental disease. In this story, Tolstoy not only depicts a deranged state of mind but also exemplifies it. Zola adopts a naturalistic stance—clinical, detached, empirical, fascinated by the spectacle of power out of control. At the end of *La Bête Humaine*, Lantier is driving a train full of drunken soldiers toward the front in the Franco-Prussian War. He gets into a fight with his stoker, with whose wife he is having an affair, and both fall overboard, leaving the train without a driver, hurtling toward disaster. Lawrence's stance in *Women in Love* is essentially moralistic; Gerald and Gudrun are used as foils for another couple, Birkin and Ursula, who represent, for Lawrence, a more wholesome form of sexual passion.

Killing a lover, like killing oneself or one's kin, limits opportunities to propagate one's genes. So in what way can an evolutionary perspective illuminate this kind of homicide? Two explanations seem most plausible. One is that a known disposition for uncontrollable violence can have a powerful deterrent effect (Frank, 1988; Schelling, 1960, cited in Wright, 1994, p. 278). Some people decrease their fitness by killing a mate; but many mates avoid infidelity at least in part because spurned or cuckolded lovers can be dangerous. The other explanation is that human passions are not necessarily optimized for inclusive fitness in every possible combination of circumstances. All adaptations have costs; all adaptive benefits involve trade-offs against other possible adaptive benefits; and some adaptations conflict with others. Male bears have adaptations for having sex and also for eating small animals; they sometimes eat their own offspring. Humans have adaptations for erotic fixation and also for punishing cheaters; they sometimes kill their lovers. In "Ballad of Reading Gaol," Oscar Wilde meditates on a man condemned to hang for murdering his lover. Protesting against singling this man out for punishment, Wilde declares that "all men kill the thing they love." The generalization stretches the point further than it will quite bear, but many people do indeed kill the thing they love; they thus also sometimes destroy themselves.

Violence Within the Social Group
INSTRUMENTAL VIOLENCE

Much of the violence outside the family circle, in literature as in life, is largely instrumental in character. People harm or kill others to defend themselves or their family and friends, to obtain money or other resources, or to remove an obstacle to social ambition. Odysseus jams a burning pole into the Cyclops's eye because the Cyclops is eating his companions. Robinson Crusoe, in Daniel Defoe's novel, also kills cannibals. In Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities*, the elderly and very proper Miss Pross shoots Mme. Defarge in order to protect Lucie Manette's family from the guillotine. In Haruki Murakami's *Kafka on the Shore*, Nakata, a gentle old man, stabs Johnny Walker to death to stop him from torturing cats. In *Crime and Punishment*, Raskolnikov murders a pawnbroker because he needs money; and he murders her sister to cover up the deed. In Frank Norris's *McTeague*, McTeague beats his wife to death over the money she is hoarding. Macbeth murders Duncan because Macbeth wants to be king, and Duncan is in the way. Claudius murders Hamlet's father for the same reason; and the future Richard III murders several people to eliminate the obstacles between himself and the throne. In Eliot's *Middlemarch*, Bulstrode murders Raffles because Raffles is threatening to expose his shady past and thus ruin his social standing. In Theodore Dreiser's *An American Tragedy*, Clyde Griffiths murders his

pregnant girlfriend, Roberta, because she is threatening to spoil his chances of social advancement. In cases such as these, though violence might be fueled by rage or hatred, harming someone else is not the ultimate purpose of violence; harming someone else is merely a means to an end.

The value attached to instrumental violence, like the value attached to all depicted behavior, depends on the state of mind of the character, the author's stance toward the character, and the reader's response to both. The stance of the author and the reader's response are in most cases heavily conditioned by the cultural ethos of the character, the author, and the reader, but any given cultural ethos is itself only a particular organization of the elements of human nature.

Odysseus exults over defeating his monstrous enemy, and most readers rejoice with him. Miss Pross is permanently shaken by the enormity of the deed required of her, but Dickens clearly regards her as a hero and as a symbol of British moral courage. Nakata is deeply disturbed to discover his own capacity for violence but recognizes, dimly, that violence is sometimes necessary to sustain humane conditions of life. Raskolnikov, finding he cannot rationalize murder, ultimately turns himself in; remorse and redemption are the central themes of *Crime and Punishment*. McTeague, in contrast, does not have a moral consciousness sufficiently developed to experience remorse. *McTeague* is a "naturalist" novel, a genre that typically depicts characters operating at a level of mindless animal brutality. Richard III, unlike McTeague, is not a mindless brute, but he is a psychopath, and he delights in his cunning manipulations. Readers are simultaneously lured into his perspective and repelled at his viciousness. Claudius and Macbeth are more like Raskolnikov than like Richard III; they are unable to reconcile themselves to the murders they have committed. Richard III requires readers to establish their own independent moral perspective; *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* provide an internal moral monitor in the conscience of the characters. *An American Tragedy*, like *McTeague*, is naturalistic. Clyde Griffiths has a social imagination more refined than McTeague's, but he seems morally helpless before the lure of social glamour. Though planning and executing a murder, much of the time he seems baffled, frightened, and wistful. One central implication of a naturalist vision is that people are ultimately driven by forces outside their control—a conclusion that converges with the fatalistic stance in much Greek drama. The polar opposite to that stance can be located in highly moralistic writers such as George Eliot. Bulstrode in *Middlemarch* serves Eliot as an exemplar of a morally ambiguous nature: a man with high ideals, low ambitions, and intellectual integrity too weak to acknowledge the discrepancy between them. For Eliot, Bulstrode's morally underdeveloped mind serves as a foil for the protagonistic characters who exemplify the power of directing one's own behavior in morally conscious ways.

DOMINANCE AND RECIPROCATION

In addition to association by kinship, there are two basic principles in human social organization: dominance and reciprocation (Boehm, 1999; de Waal, 1982; Trivers, 1971; Wilson, 1993). In social groups not related by kinship, if violence does not serve a primarily instrumental function, it usually serves either to assert social dominance, to suppress dominance in others, or to punish transgressions against equitable behavior. Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* offers a straightforward instance of dominance as a central theme. Caesar seizes dictatorial power, overthrowing the collective power of the senatorial class. In assassinating him, the senators exemplify the social dynamic delineated by Boehm (1996): collective force aimed at suppressing dominance in individuals. Suppressing dominance in individuals blends into punishing transgressions against equity. Individuals typically assert dominance by harming others; they thus violate an implicit social contract to treat others equitably.

In chimpanzee societies, sheer physical power establishes dominance. Even when weaker males form coalitions to overpower stronger males, physical strength ultimately determines hierarchical status. Two relatively weak males working together can be physically stronger than a single male who is stronger than either individually (de Waal, 1982). Physical power also undergirds human social relations, but human social relations are heavily regulated by norms and laws that prescribe obligations according to social roles (Hill, 2007). Civil society leaves little scope for individuals to assert dominance through sheer brute strength. Humans must instead use accumulated resources and acquired skills, including social skills, to establish their place in a social hierarchy. Sports constitute a partial exception. In Shakespeare's *As You Like It* and Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, the protagonists gain prestige through victory in wrestling matches. But, then, sports are not means for dominating a social hierarchy through raw physical strength; they are forms of regulated social activity.

In most literary traditions, domestic violence—asserting individual dominance through physical force—falls outside the range of acceptable behavior. The most famous character in medieval English literature, Chaucer's Wife of Bath, takes as her chief theme the moral norm that prohibits violence against wives. In the prologue to her tale, she describes her relationship with her fourth husband, a scholar and misogynist. They quarreled; she ripped pages out of his favorite antifemale tract, and in a rage he struck her, knocking her senseless. His remorse was so severe that he conceded complete interpersonal dominance to her. She says they were very happy together after that. Her actual tale, as distinct from her prologue, is a fable illustrating the idea that men should yield domestic dominance to women.

In literature as in life, alcoholic derangement often plays a precipitating role in domestic violence. In *The Dram Shop*, Zola depicts the moral squalor of the alcoholic underclass in Paris. A father who gradually beats his prepubescent daughter to death is only the most poignant instance of pervasive, gratuitous violence. McTeague is drunk when he beats his wife to death. In King's *The Shining*, Jack Torrance reverts to alcoholism, beats his wife nearly to death, and tries to murder his son. At the time, he is under the influence of "evil spirits" in both senses of the word. The supernaturalism of the novel serves as a symbolic vehicle for depicting Torrance's losing struggle to resist his own inner demons.

Individuals in literature seldom assert dominance through sheer force, but groups often do. Racial or ethnic domination forms the theme of works such as Sir Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe*, Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Faulkner's *Light in August*, Richard Wright's *Native Son*, Tadeusz Borowski's *This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen*, Art Spiegelman's *Maus*, William Styron's *Sophie's Choice* and *The Confessions of Nat Turner*, and J. M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*. Class conflicts culminating in riots with fatal consequences appear in Scott's *The Heart of Midlothian*, Benjamin Disraeli's *Sybil*, and Eliot's *Felix Holt*. Dickens's *Barnaby Rudge* climaxes in a deadly riot animated by religious strife. In *A Tale of Two Cities*, Dickens depicts the Terror that followed the French Revolution. In most representations of collective violence, authors sympathize with protests against racial oppression, class injustice, or political tyranny. At the same time, few literary authors give an approving depiction of mob violence.

REVENGE

Individuals who assert dominance through sheer physical force belong to a despised fringe in both life and literature. Using violence to gain revenge for injuries or insults is a different matter. Bullies are held in contempt, but characters who seek revenge through violence often elicit readers' respect, if not their conscious approval.

Personal injury motivates many instances of murderous revenge. Samson is tricked, blinded, and shackled for public display. When his strength returns along with his hair, he crushes the Philistines, along with himself, under the stones of their temple. In *One Thousand and One Nights*, a medieval Islamic collection of stories, Sharyar, a Persian king, discovers that his wife is unfaithful. He has her executed, and then, extending his revenge to womankind in general, marries a new woman every night, executing each the next morning. (Scheherazade avoids this fate by telling Sharyar a new story each night, but leaving each unfinished until the following night.) In Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, Frankenstein's monster develops a grudge against his creator and eventually kills everyone in Frankenstein's family. In Dickens's *Oliver Twist*, the criminal psychopath Bill Sikes beats his girlfriend to death because he thinks, mistakenly, that she has informed against him. The protagonist of Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* is raped and her hopes of happiness ruined by Alex d'Urberville. She stabs him with a carving knife. In Conrad's *The Secret Agent*, the anarchist *agent provocateur* Mr. Verloc lures his wife's retarded younger brother into trying to blow up the Greenwich Conservatory. The brother stumbles en route and is himself blown to smithereens. Like Tess, Verloc's wife uses the instrument nearest to hand, a carving knife, to take her revenge. In John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*, Tom Joad kills a policeman who has just smashed in the skull of his friend preacher Casy. In Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita*, Clare Quilty helps Lolita escape from Humbert Humbert; in return, Humbert tracks Quilty down and shoots him multiple times. In King's *Carrie*, the town outcast, a teenage girl, is humiliated at the senior prom; she uses her telekinetic powers to slaughter the whole graduating class of the high school, trapping them inside a burning building.

Indignation at personal injury is a close cousin to offended pride. The protagonist of Shakespeare's *Coriolanus* is driven into traitorous homicidal fury by outraged pride. Iago destroys Othello because Othello has passed him over for promotion. In Edgar Allen Poe's "The Cask of Amontillado," the

narrator protagonist Montresor says his acquaintance Fortunato has casually insulted him, so he shackles Fortunato to a wall deep underground and bricks up the niche. The Duke in Browning's monologue "My Last Duchess" has his wife murdered because she shows too little regard for the dignity of his rank. In Dickens's *Bleak House*, the French maid Hortense murders the lawyer Tulkinghorn because he has insulted her.

Harm to kin or lovers is a common motive for revenge. Aeschylus's *Oresteia* consists in a sequence of vengeful murders within a single family. In Shakespeare's first tragedy, *Titus Andronicus*, Lavinia is raped, and her rapists, to prevent her from identifying them, cut out her tongue and cut off her hands. (The source story, the myth of Philomela, appears in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.) Lavinia nonetheless succeeds in identifying her assailants. In the subsequent cascade of vengeful acts, the two rapists are killed, cooked in a pie, and fed to their unsuspecting mother. (The same kind of revenge appears in Seneca the Younger's play *Thyestes*.) Laertes in *Hamlet* stabs Hamlet with a poisoned rapier because Hamlet has murdered Laertes's father, Polonius. Hamlet murders Claudius, his uncle, because Claudius murdered his own brother, Hamlet's father. In one of the earliest English novels, Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa*, Clarissa is abducted, drugged, and raped. After she dies from grief, her uncle kills her assailant in a duel. In F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, Gatsby is murdered because a man mistakenly believes that Gatsby killed the man's wife. In Denis Lehaene's *Mystic River*, a father murders a childhood friend because he believes, mistakenly, that the friend murdered his daughter.

Though often moralistic on other themes, many literary authors display a strikingly tolerant attitude toward revenge as a motive. Revenge looks like a basic form of justice and often gives a feeling of emotional satisfaction to readers. If that were not the case, "poetic justice" would not be so widely used as a plot device. Poetic justice occurs when "good" characters are rewarded and "bad" characters made to suffer. Judging by the relative frequency of plot structures, we could reasonably infer that readers can more easily tolerate a plot in which a "good" character comes to a sad end than a plot in which a "bad" character lives happily ever after.

Blood feuds are a special case. One murder leads to another, but the whole sequence proceeds in a senselessly mechanical way. The deaths of Romeo and Juliet result in an agreement to end the blood feud between the Capulets and the Montagues.

The darkest moments in Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn* involve the murderous feud between the Sheperdsons and the Grangerfords. When Huck asks his Grangerford friend what started the feud, the boy cannot provide an answer, but he nonetheless falls victim to the feud. Twain clearly expects readers to register the sad futility in killing of this kind.

DEATH BY LAW

Legal execution is partly instrumental—it aims at deterrence—and partly a form of collective revenge. When it serves the purposes of "poetic justice," legal execution can be neatly folded into the emotional satisfaction with which a story concludes. Even Billy Budd's hanging, in Herman Melville's *Billy Budd*, is presented as a tragic sacrifice to the necessities of naval discipline. At other times, though, legal execution is presented as the medium of a malign fate, an unjust social order, or both. At the end of Stendhal's *The Red and the Black*, Julien Sorel is guillotined for shooting his former mistress. He and Stendhal both seem to regard his fate as an indictment against an aristocratic social order that provides no career open to talent. When Tess of the d'Urbervilles is hanged for stabbing her rapist to death, Hardy explicitly protests against some cosmic principle of injustice. In Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*, the retarded giant, Lenny, accidentally kills a woman. His friend and protector, George, shoots him before he can be lynched. In *The Grapes of Wrath,* Steinbeck explicitly protests against social injustice. In *Of Mice and Men*, he seems less interested in protesting against injustice than in stimulating the reader's compassion for the plight of an itinerant male underclass. In Ambrose Bierce's "Incident at Owl Creek Bridge," a Southern civilian is hanged by Federal troops. The bulk of the story consists in depicting his fantasized escape, as the rope breaks and he falls into the water under the bridge. At the end of the story, he is snapped back to reality, with a broken neck, swinging beneath the bridge. The story focuses emotional attention not on retributive satisfaction, social protest, or simple compassion. Instead, it evokes the love of life and the horror of death. It also captures the sharp contrast between the victim as a mere object, for his executioners, and his own intense inner consciousness, frantic with terror and yearning.

HUMAN SACRIFICES

Along with "A Good Man Is Hard To Find" and "A Rose for Emily," Shirley Ann Jackson's "The Lottery" is one of the most frequently anthologized

short stories. In a quiet farming village, somewhere in mid-century America, the local people gather for the annual lottery, selecting slips of paper from a box. The "winner," Tessie Hutcheson, is stoned to death. Her own family members, including her toddler, take part in the stoning. Stories do not become canonical merely because they are shocking and bizarre. "The Lottery" has a deep symbolic resonance; it suggests that even within civil society, in a time of peace, there is a force that subjugates individuals and family relationships to the collective identity of the social group. The coercive power of the social group is given symbolic form also in William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*. A group of English school boys, stranded on an island by a plane crash, quickly revert to savagery. The three boys who retain civilized values—Piggy, Simon, and Ralph—are sacrificed to the cohesion of the savage band. In *1984*, George Orwell locates coercive social force in a totalitarian regime. At the end of the novel, the protagonist Winston Smith is being tortured by an agent of the government. To end the torture, he must betray the woman he loves, begging his torturer to hurt her rather than him. During the torture, he is required to guess the right answer to a question about what motivates the totalitarian government. The right answer, as it turns out, is a desire for power, as an end in itself. The final stage in Winston Smith's subjugation is to come to feel, sincerely, that he loves the totalitarian regime that will soon, as he knows, murder him.

The totalitarian regime in *1984* is essentially psychopathic. Its practices are a collective equivalent of the psychopathic cruelty that animates novels such as *A Clockwork Orange* and *American Psycho*. Unlike Burgess and Ellis, Orwell does not invite readers to participate vicariously in the enjoyment of cruelty. *1984* is designed to create a sense of angry outrage in its readers. It is a symbolic indictment of totalitarianism, not a peep show. In that respect, it adopts a stance similar to Alexandr Solzhenitsyn's realistic depiction of the Gulag in *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*. A tacit indictment of the psychopathic political culture of Stalinist Russia also informs Vasily Grossman's *Life and Fate*.

War

There are only two primate species in which coalitions of males band together for the express purpose of making lethal raids on neighboring bands of conspecifics: chimpanzees and human beings (Jünger, 2010; Potts & Hayden, 2008; Wrangham, 1999). This behavior has evidently been conserved from the last common ancestor shared by humans and chimpanzees some 7 million years ago, and specifically human forms of evolutionary development gave an extra impetus to coalitional violence. Early in their evolutionary history, humans gained "ecological dominance" (Alexander, 1989; Flinn, Geary, & Ward, 2005); that is, they became the dominant predator in their environments. The most dangerous creatures they faced were members of other human bands. Male coalitional violence thus became a primary selective force in human evolution. Highly organized modern warfare is an extension of the coalitional aggression that characterizes most bands and tribes in preliterate cultures.

War has figured as a main subject of literature for every phase of history, from the ancient world, the medieval period, the Renaissance and Enlightenment, to the 19th and 20th centuries. War forms the subject matter of verse epics, plays, prose fiction, and lyric poetry. Much war literature blends closely with autobiography and history: lightly fictionalized memoir and accurate historical reconstruction that includes many actual historical persons.

We have no surviving narratives from prehistory, but William Golding's *The Inheritors* offers a powerful reconstruction of lethal interaction between Neanderthals and Cro-Magnons. The *Iliad* and the Bible evoke the warrior ethos of barbarian cultures; and Flaubert's *Salammbô*, like Golding's *The Inheritors*, raises historical reconstruction to the level of high literary art. Steven Pressfield's *Gates of Fire* reconstructs the Battle of Thermopylae.

The oldest surviving classic of French literature, the *Song of Roland*, describes an 8th-century battle in which the protagonists, like the Greek warriors at Thermopylae, are all killed. Scott's *The Talisman* locates its action in the Crusades. In the classic Japanese medieval epic, *The Tale of the Heiki*, two clans struggle to dominate Japan. A 14th-century Chinese novel, Luo Guanzhong's *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, also focuses on dynastic struggles. Shakespeare dramatizes the English Wars of the 15th century. The Thirty Years' War—the religious war that devastated Germany in the 17th century—provides the setting for Hans von Grimmelshausen's semiautobiographical tale *Simplicissimus*. The protagonist in Friedrich Schiller's dramatic trilogy *Wallenstein* is a general in the Thirty Years' War.

Eighteenth-century wars include the first and second Jacobite uprisings (rebellions aimed at restoring the Stuarts to the throne of England), the Seven Years War (the struggle among the main European

powers that spread into the American continent in The French and Indian War), and the American War of Independence. Thackeray's protagonist in *Henry Esmond* joins the first Jacobite uprising, and Scott's protagonist in *Waverly* joins the second. Henry Fielding's protagonist in *Tom Jones* sets off to fight in that same military venture, though he never arrives. Thackeray's Barry Lyndon fights in the Seven Years War, which also forms the background to Major von Tellheim's plight in G. E. Lessing's play *Minna von Barnhelm*. James Fennimore Cooper's *Last of the Mohicans* is set in the French and Indian War. In Thackeray's *The Virginians*, two brothers, grandsons of Henry Esmond, fight on different sides in the American War of Independence. Children's novels about that war include Esther Forbes's *Johnny Tremain* and James Collier's *My Brother Sam Is Dead*.

The Napoleonic Wars dominated European politics in the first 15 years of the 19th century. Different phases of that war figure prominently in *War and Peace* and Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*. Bernard Cornwell's Sharpe series of novels and Patrick O'Brian's Aubrey-Maturin series chronicle this period with gritty military and naval detail. Cornwell's *Waterloo* offers a brilliant fictional reconstruction of the Battle of Waterloo. Thackeray gives a short but rhetorically powerful description of the same battle in *Vanity Fair*. The protagonist in Stendhal's *Charterhouse of Parma* witnesses Waterloo from the fringes, though without understanding the course of the action.

European wars between 1815 and 1914—from the Battle of Waterloo to the beginning of World War I—include the Crimean War, the Franco-Prussian War, various Balkan conflicts, and the small imperial wars on the fringes of the British Empire, including the Boer War. Tennyson's poem "Charge of the Light Brigade" chronicles an episode in the Crimean War. Several of Maupassant's short stories are set in the period of the Franco-Prussian War. The protagonist of G. B. Shaw's play *Arms and the Man* is a mercenary Swiss soldier serving in the Serbo-Bulgarian War. Several of Kipling's early stories depict British military actions in India, what is now Pakistan, and Afghanistan. Kenneth Ross's play *Breaker Morant*, which provides the basis for the Bruce Beresford film of that name, is set in the Boer War.

Conrad's *Nostromo* depicts a South American revolution that transforms the lives of the characters, including English and Italian expatriates. Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *100 Years of Solitude* takes up similar themes from a South American perspective.

The major American war of the 19th century was of course the Civil War, which produced a crop of contemporary novels and a steady flow of historical reconstructions, including Stephen Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage*, Michael Shaara's *The Killer Angels*, Shelby Foote's *Shiloh*, and Charles Frazier's *Cold Mountain*. Children's novels about the American Civil War include Harold Keith's *Rifles for Watie* and Irene Hunt's *Across Five Aprils*.

Among the many novels about World War I, Erich Maria Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front* holds a special place as one of the greatest of all war novels. The last scene of Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain* presents its philosophical protagonist charging across a battlefield in World War I, with limited prospects for survival. Henri Barbusse's *Under Fire* gives a French perspective on the war. American novels about World War I include Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms*, William March's *Company K*, John Dos Passos's *Three Soldiers*, and Dalton Trumbo's *Johnny Got His Gun*. British novels include Ford's *Parade's End*, Jennifer Johnston's *How Many Miles to Babylon*, and Pat Barker's *Regeneration Trilogy*. Some of Faulkner's and Kipling's best short stories are set in World War I. Charles Harrison's *Generals Die in Bed* gives a Canadian perspective on the war. For Russians, World War I merges into the Bolshevik Revolution and the Russian Civil War. That period forms the background for Michail Sholokhov's *And Quiet Flows the Don*, Boris Pasternak's *Doctor Zhivago*, and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's series of novels included in *The Red Wheel*. In addition to novels and short stories, the war generated a large body of fine lyric poetry by poet-soldiers such as Wilfred Owen, Siegfried Sassoon, and Edmund Blunden.

World War II produced major novels in several national literatures. American novels include Heller's *Catch-22*, Norman Mailer's *The Naked and the Dead*, James Jones's *The Thin Red Line*, Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse 5*, and James Dickey's *To the White Sea*. *Everybody Comes to Rick's*, an unpublished play by Murray Burnett and Joan Alison, was the basis for the film *Casablanca*. The Spanish Civil War, a prelude to World War II, is the setting for Ernest Hemingway's *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. Colin McDougall's *The Execution* is the most important Canadian novel about World War II. German experience in the war forms the subject of Günter Grass's *The Tin Drum*, Willi Heinrich's *Cross of Iron*, Russ Schneider's *Siege*, Heinrich Gerlach's *The Forsaken Army*, and Theodor Plievier's *Stalingrad*. The greatest Russian novel of the war, Vasily Grossman's *Life and Fate*, is designed to cover multiple theaters of

the war and to interweave politics, combat, the Holocaust, and civilian terror in the Soviet Union. Curzio Malaparte's *Kaputt* gives an Italian perspective on the war. British involvement in the war forms the background for Evelyn Waugh's *Sword of Honour* trilogy and J. G. Ballard's *Empire of the Sun*. Ian McEwan's *Atonement* reconstructs the British retreat to Dunkirk. Japanese novels about the war include Ashihei Hino's *Wheat and Soldiers*, Tatsuzō Ishikawa's *Soldiers Alive*, and Ooka Shohei's *Fires on the Plain*. The international order in Orwell's *1984* includes a perpetual world war.

Novels of Vietnam include Larry Heinemann's *Close Quarters*, James Webb's *Fields of Fire*, John del Vecchio's *The Thirteenth Valley*, and Tim O'Brien's *The Things They Carried*. Báo Ninh's novel *The Sorrow of War* offers a Vietnamese perspective. Francis Ford Coppola's film *Apocalypse Now* takes the core of its plot from Conrad's *The Heart of Darkness,* which is set in the Belgian Congo, and transposes the plot to Vietnam. The script writer, Michael Herr, incorporates episodes from *Dispatches*, his own journalistic memoir about his experiences as a reporter in Vietnam.

In science fiction, war is often projected into a fictional future and extended to conflicts between humans and other species. H. G. Wells's *War of the Worlds* provides a prototype for this genre. More recent examples include Robert Heinlein's *Starship Troopers*, Joe Haldeman's *The Forever War*, and Orson Scott Card's *Ender's Game*.

Fantasy worlds are as likely to be riven by war as actual worlds. John Milton's *Paradise Lost* depicts the war in heaven between the good and bad angels. (They use cannons with gunpowder, as in the English Civil War, but to little effect, since they are immaterial beings.) J. R. R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* trilogy culminates in an epic conflict among the inhabitants of Middle Earth. Though written in the interwar period, Tolkien's account of this war looks like an eerie forecast of World War II. C. S. Lewis's *The Lion, the Witch, and The Wardrobe* chronicles a war in Narnia between the forces of good and evil—and indeed most fantasy wars, compared with real wars, are more easily reducible to ethical binaries. J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series culminates in a bloody battle between the protagonists, practitioners of benign magic, and the minions of Voldemort, the Dark Lord.

Though deeply ingrained in genetically transmitted human dispositions, war puts exceptional stress on men's minds. Combat elicits instinctive fight-or-flight responses but channels them into highly disciplined patterns of behavior regulated by rigidly hierarchical social structures. Shared danger creates a bond among soldiers that many describe as the most intense and intimate they have known. At the same time, war systematically dehumanizes the enemy in ways that make it easier to breach the psychological inhibition most people feel against doing violent bodily harm to other people (Baumeister, 1996; Grossman, 2009; Smith, 2007). Some fictional treatments of war, and some lyric poetry inspired by war, adopt emotionally simple stances: heroism and patriotism, or protest and revulsion. Most evoke an ambivalent swirl of emotions that include terror, rage, exultation, resentment, pride, horror, guilt, and self-pity. Authors seldom stand wholly outside the emotions they evoke. Readers can easily enough adopt ideological principles that either justify war or condemn it, but the conscious formulation of explicit ideological principles is not the same thing as an imaginative poise that reflects genuine emotional mastery. Psychopaths have the least difficulty accommodating themselves to the emotional challenges of war (Baumeister, 1996; Grossman, 2009). For most people, war remains a troubling and sometimes traumatic experience. The quality of that experience varies from individual to individual and from war to war. The perspectives of authors and characters are often heavily conditioned by the nature and outcome of the war. Most novels about World War I and about Vietnam register a dreary sensation of futility mingled with horror and revulsion. Novels about the Napoleonic Wars, the American Civil War, and World War II have a much wider emotional range. The total emotional trajectory of World War II was very different for Americans, British, Russians, Germans, and Japanese. Such differences necessarily enter into authorial perspectives on the emotional significance of the violence they depict.

Conclusion

When we think of literature, we tend to think of quiet, civilized activity: writers sitting at a desk, pen in hand; readers sitting in poised contemplation over the pages of a book; the solemn hush of a library; the mellow leisure of a bookstore. At first glance, then, literature would seem to have little to do with violence—with men beating or raping women; people stabbing or shooting each other; individuals poisoning, shooting, drowning, or hanging themselves, cutting their own throats, or throwing themselves out of windows; or with large masses of men caught up in the frenzy of mutual slaughter. And yet, as this

survey suggests, violence is pervasive in literary representation. William Wordsworth defines poetry as emotion recollected in tranquility (1800/1957). Is literary violence, then, just a form of sensationalistic emotional self-indulgence? No. Freud (1907/1959) made a great error in supposing that literature consists in wish-fulfillment fantasies. Most of the instances of violence cited in this essay are ugly and painful. Very few people have ever enjoyed watching as Cornwall gouges out Gloucester's eyes, or have felt pleasure listening to Lear's howls of grief after Cordelia is hanged. Most depictions of murder and suicide produce discomfort, at the mildest, in readers' minds. The satisfaction of revenge and the lust of battle offer partial exceptions, but such pleasures are hardly pure. Revenge is at best a bitter satisfaction (Baumeister, 1996). The warriors of the *Iliad* who exult in a momentary victory also have a despairing consciousness that they will probably die a similar death, and soon (Gottschall, 2008b).

The painful character of violence in literature points us toward what is, in the present author's view, the central adaptive function of the arts. We do not read stories primarily because they produce vicarious sensations of pleasure; we read them because they give us a deeper, more complete sense of the forces that motivate human life (Carroll, 2011b). Humans do not operate by instinct alone. They have a uniquely developed capacity for envisioning their lives as a continuously developing sequence of actions within larger social and natural contexts. Affective neuroscientists have shown that human decision making depends crucially on emotions; we are not simply "rational" creatures (Damasio, 1994; Linden, 2007; Panksepp, 1998). Literature and other emotionally charged imaginative constructs—the other arts, religions, and ideologies—inform our emotional understanding of human behavior. The arts expand our feeling for why other people act as they do, help us to anticipate how they are likely to respond to our behavior, and offer suggestions about what kind of value we should attach to alternative courses of action.

Fictional violence delineates extreme limits in human experience. We do not necessarily enjoy reading about violent acts, but we do enjoy finding out about the extreme limits of experience. That is a kind of information for which we have evolved an adaptively functional need.

Future Directions

For many scholars and scientists, in both the humanities and the social sciences, literary experience seems hopelessly outside the reach of empirical scientific knowledge. Such scholars and scientists might acknowledge that biographical information about authors and facts about plots can be determined in a reasonably objective way. They might also acknowledge that the demographics of literacy can be assessed with the statistical methods of the social sciences. But the heart of the matter—the meaning authors build into plots and the effects such meanings have on the minds and emotions of readers—all of that, many scholars and scientists feel, must always remain a matter of vague speculation, subjective at best, fanciful or absurd at worst, in any case not accessible to scientific inquiry.

I am confident that this set of assumptions is mistaken. Outside the now obsolete behaviorist school, mental events—images, thoughts, and feelings—are the standard subject matter of psychology. Pen-and-paper tests, experimental designs with live subjects, and neuroimaging give access to mental events. Mental events also form the substance of literary experience. Mental events in the responses of readers are as accessible to empirical inquiry as any other mental events, and the responses of readers provide an opening to the intentions of authors and the psychosocial functions of literary works (Carroll et al., 2008, 2010).

To make major advances in empirical knowledge about literary experience, two main changes in attitude need to occur. Social scientists need to recognize how large and important a place every kind of imaginative experience holds in human life; and literary scholars need to recognize that incorporating empirical research into scholarly study will give their research a kind of epistemological legitimacy it desperately needs. Integrating humanistic and empirical methods of inquiry will also vastly expand the scope of literary inquiry, making it possible to locate literary study in relation to multiple contiguous disciplines.

Literary meanings and effects like those described in this chapter are complex phenomena. To make them accessible to objective scientific knowledge, we have to break them down into components and devise empirical methods for analyzing each component. We should start with recognizing that literary meaning is a form of communication, an intentional meaning created by an author who anticipates responses of readers. At the base of empirical literary research, then, we need to tease apart the relations between mirror neurons, empathy, emotional circuits, and mental images (Baron-Cohen, 2005; Decety, 2011a, 2011b; Rizzolatti & Fogassi, 2007).

We also have to work out the relations between responses to actual events and "offline" responses to fiction—that is, emotional responses "decoupled" from immediate action (Tooby & Cosmides, 2001). Neurocognitive research on the way people process emotionally charged information will make it possible to produce empirical knowledge about the formal aspects of fiction: narrative structure, syntax and prose rhythm, word choice, modulations of tone, and symbolic imagery.

To locate neurocognitive findings within comprehensive explanatory sequences, we have to link the highest level of causal explanation—inclusive fitness, the ultimate regulative principle of evolution—to particular features of human nature and to particular structures and effects in specific works of art. Human life history theory offers the best available framework for analyzing the components of human nature (Kaplan, Hill Lancaster, & Hurtado, 2000; Low, 2000; MacDonald, 1997; Wrangham, 2009). Gene-culture coevolution offers the best available framework for understanding how specifically human mental capabilities interact with basic motives and emotions (Carroll, 2011a). Gene-culture coevolution also provides a framework for analyzing the way specific cultures organize the elements of human nature.

A comprehensively adequate explanation of a given work of art would stipulate the character and causes of its phenomenal effects (tone, style, theme, formal organization); locate the work in a cultural context; explain that cultural context as a particular organization of the elements of human nature within a specific set of environmental conditions (including cultural traditions); register the responses of readers; identify the sociocultural, political, and psychological functions the work fulfills for specific audiences (perhaps different functions for different audiences); locate those functions in relation to the evolved needs of human nature; and link the work comparatively with other artistic works, using a taxonomy of themes, formal elements, affective elements, and functions derived from a comprehensive model of human nature.

In addition to locating individual works in evolutionary explanatory contexts, scholars and scientists must also deal with groups of works, organized by period, national literature, and features of formal organization and style (genre). These are standard categories in traditional literary research, and for a good reason: They constitute conventions within which authors encode meanings and readers decode those meanings. All such traditional categories of literary scholarship should now be studied with an eye toward generating explanations integrated with principles of human life history and gene-culture coevolution.

Evolutionary study tends toward an emphasis on human universals. That is an indispensable starting point. It gives access to basic motives and basic emotions. Identifying cross-cultural regularities makes it possible to isolate the elements that enter into complex cultural configurations. But the particular character of those cultural configurations does in fact substantially alter the quality of lived and imagined experience. We are only just beginning to understand gene-culture coevolution at a rudimentary theoretical level (Carroll, 2011a). To advance in our understanding, we need highly particularized studies of specific cultural moments focusing both on macro-structures of social dynamics (Turchin, 2007) and also on the neurophysiological character of experience within given ecologies (Smail, 2008). Cultural analysis is a necessary middle level in literary research.

The study of individual identity is yet another level at which literary scholars need to work. They have to understand individual differences in personality as those differences apply to authors, characters, and readers. Evolutionary psychology took a wrong turn, early on, in deprecating the adaptive significance of individual differences (Tooby & Cosmides, 1990). That wrong turn is now being corrected (Figueredo et al., 2005; Nettle, 2007a, 2007b). That correction will make the evolutionary standpoint much more valuable both to psychologists studying live subjects and to literary critics studying fictional subjects (Johnson et al., 2011; McCrae, in press).

Substantial progress has already been made in many of the research areas recommended here (Boyd, 2009; Boyd, Carroll, & Gottschall, 2010; Carroll, 2011a, 2011b; Gottschall, 2008a, 2008b). But in truth, we have only just begun. In physics, "dreams of a final theory" involve integrating the weak nuclear force, the strong nuclear force, electromagnetism, and gravity (Weinberg, 1992). In all areas that concern human behavior, integrating the humanities and the social sciences presents a similarly fundamental challenge. The opportunities are immense. Violence is only one topic within the broad field of evolutionary literary research, but it is such an important topic that advances in understanding literary violence will almost certainly open out into generalizable principles across the whole range of human behavior.

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