Healing Trauma, Preventing Violence: 
A Radical Agenda for Literary Study

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Much of the social and personal destructiveness of trauma is due to its capacity to reproduce itself. In the common understanding, this reproduction is seen as a vicious circle in which abuse produces trauma, and then the traumatized victim becomes a perpetrator in turn, thus producing another traumatized victim who becomes a perpetrator, and so on, ad infinitum. While this vision is not inaccurate, in that most perpetrators have themselves been traumatized, the picture it paints fails to encompass the full scope of the damage done by trauma. Its limitation lies not primarily in its tendency to give the mistaken impression that most victims of trauma become perpetrators (most, in fact, do not [see Grand 3]) but in the fact that the circle of trauma is much wider than just a relation of reciprocal causality between perpetration and victimization. The circle of trauma is more like a vicious spiral or vortex, comprising not only the perpetrators and victims of abuse but also the perpetrators and victims of most other acts of individual and collective violence. Further, trauma also includes within its vortex most supposedly unvictimized, law-abiding citizens as well, whose participation involves a second order of perpetration and victimization that is responsible for perpetuating traumas of the first order and hence violence in general.

My purpose in what follows will be, first, to explain how trauma—by threatening, depleting, or disintegrating identity—is the root cause of cultural, institutional, and structural violence as well as interpersonal and intergroup physical violence. I will then argue that the perpetuation of the physical violence (such as murder, rape, and acts of terrorism) that both produces and results from first-order traumas is also perpetuated by second-order traumas—lower-grade, chronic erosions of identity that are produced by (and in turn function to reproduce) institutional, structural,
and cultural violence, from which virtually no one completely escapes. And finally, I will explore how literary study might help to interrupt this vortex of trauma and violence by promoting certain developments in students' trauma-damaged identities and thus reducing their need to perpetrate either physical or institutional or structural violence in order to protect or restore their identities.

My argument is as follows:

1) Reducing violence requires first recognizing the vicious, spiraling circle that exists between violence and trauma, or identity vulnerability:
   a) A key cause of violent behavior is a vulnerability of identity resulting from significant trauma during the perpetrators' formative years.
   b) Both the trauma and the persistence of the perpetrators' identity vulnerability are due in large measure to institutional violence (harsh prison sentences and harsh prison conditions, for example) and to structural violence (such as economic inequities) that are perpetuated as a means of supporting the vulnerable identities of those in power (ultimately voters such as the angry white men and others who prefer punishment to prevention).
   c) The vulnerabilities of angry white men's (and others') identities are due in part to the threats of criminal violence and structural violence, but an equal if not greater cause is the cultural violence of the socialization process, whereby their identity as American men is constituted through the exclusions of important parts of their selves, together with impositions of contents that have little or no basis in their selves, resulting frequently in identities that need to enact some form of violence in order to maintain themselves.
   d) Literature teachers, theorists, and critics contribute to this traumatization of angry white males and other advocates of punishment to the extent that we criticize and denigrate them rather than recognizing that their position is due to their identity vulnerability.
   e) We cultural workers engage in such criticism because of our own identity needs, which result from our own prior (mostly chronic, low-grade) traumatizations.

2) The fundamental way to prevent violence is thus to
   a) reduce any of these people's identity vulnerabilities—by preventing traumatizing experiences, by helping individuals to restore their traumatized identities, and/or by helping them strengthen their identities so as to make them less vulnerable to traumatizing experiences—all of which will reduce their need to perpetrate physical, institutional, structural, or cultural violence to support that identity, and
b) recognize the causal role played in all forms of violence by their perpetrators' prior traumas, a realization that will help people sympathize with rather than condemn or demonize these perpetrators, which will in turn help them to eschew their hatred and vengeance and engage in behaviors toward the perpetrators that will reduce rather than escalate violence.

3) Literary study, if given a radical reformulation, can make significant contributions to both of these preventive processes.

Trauma as the Root Cause of Physical Violence
The fact that interpersonal forms of violence such as murder, rape, theft, bullying, and insult, as well as intergroup forms of violence such as war, genocide, ethnic cleansing, and terrorism produce trauma is well known. That the perpetrators of such traumas are usually themselves victims of prior traumas, and that these prior traumas are a central cause of their subsequent perpetrations of violence, are facts little acknowledged by policy makers and the general public, though this knowledge is now well established among experts who have studied such perpetrators. What most of these experts, in their turn, fail to recognize is that this refusal on the part of the public and the policy-makers to acknowledge trauma as a central cause of violence is itself due to identity-undermining traumas that have been suffered by virtually all members of the general populace. The reason people reject knowledge of the perpetrator's prior trauma is because of the significant role that hating the demonized perpetrator and inflicting violence on him plays in maintaining their own identity or sense of self: if they were to acknowledge that the violent criminal's prior traumas are the central cause of his violent behavior, they could no longer hold the criminal, or terrorist, or genocide perpetrator fully and solely responsible for his violence and thus could no longer demonize him and justifiably do violence to him. And the need to demonize criminals and make them suffer in order to maintain their own identity is itself the result of the traumas (usually less severe than those of the criminals) that they have themselves experienced. The core of the problem is thus an unending chain of trauma, whereby those who are traumatized inflict trauma on others, who repeat the infliction on victims of their own, ad infinitum—this much has been generally recognized by psychologists and sociologists, but not by the general public—and those (the general public) who could change the circumstances that produce the perpetrators' original traumas fail to do so in large measure because
maintaining their own less seriously traumatized identities relies on having others to hate and do violence to.

There is now abundant evidence indicating that trauma is the critical factor in causing violent behavior, both individual and collective. Trauma functions in two clear and direct ways to produce violence: it renders one’s identity so vulnerable that it must rely on quick fixes like violence in order to sustain itself, and it precipitates violent behavior by injuring or threatening an already vulnerable identity. To understand how this is so, it is necessary to recognize the following points:

1) Maintaining one’s identity—that is, one’s sense of oneself—is the most fundamental human need and thus is the ultimate motive underlying all human behavior, from sexual desire and altruistic love to hatred and violence.

2) Trauma undermines and damages identity in fundamental ways.

3) Violence is the surest, quickest, most inalienable means available—especially for men—to restore or safeguard one’s damaged or threatened identity.

4) Virtually all people who engage in physical violence have fragile identities due to trauma in the form of sustained abuse or neglect that they suffered as children.

5) Virtually all violence is motivated by the need to protect or restore a threatened or damaged identity.

Identity Vulnerability as the Link between Trauma and Violence

Identity is, as Erik Erikson, the psychoanalyst who brought the term to prominence, put it, “a subjective sense of an invigorating sameness and continuity” (19). One experiences identity, Erikson says, “as a sense of psychosocial well-being. Its most obvious concomitants are a feeling of being at home in one’s body, a sense of ‘knowing where one is going,’ an inner assuredness of anticipated recognition from those who count” (165). According to Erikson, “the conscious feeling of having a personal identity is based on two simultaneous observations: the perception of the selfsameness and continuity of one’s existence in time and space and the perception of the fact that others recognize one’s sameness and continuity” (50). As the psychoanalyst Heinz Lichtenstein observes, “loss of identity is a specifically human danger, and maintenance of identity is a
specifically human necessity” (77). In fact, maintaining one’s identity is the most basic human need and thus the deep motive underlying all human behavior (see Lichtenstein 59, 91, 98–99), more fundamental than even homeostasis (115) and the pleasure principle (103). The Freudian drives—libido and aggression—are not ultimate motivating forces but manifestations of the effort to maintain identity (see Lichtenstein 24, 116–17, 267, 274–78), as are the superego (287) and the repetition compulsion (24, 103). “The sexual drive,” according to Lichtenstein, is not an end in itself but rather a means “to achieve an ecstatic climax of the sense of being,” and “the compulsion to repeat the satisfaction of the sexual drive . . . constitutes the only obtainable temporal mode of a primary quest for permanence of being” (41). Sexuality, Lichtenstein argues, “constitutes the primary, most archaic, and nonverbal mode through which the conviction of one’s existence is affirmed as an incontrovertible truth” (275). The identity principle thus “is absolutely compelling, while the drives—even hunger—are only relatively compelling,” and it underlies “the most burning psychological issues,” including “the alienation of our youth, the despair of the black minority, and the threat of violence that hangs over our world today” (Erikson 116, 278). Kenneth Hoover, a political scientist, agrees. “Identity is pervasive and ubiquitous in politics,” he says. “At root, all systems of power involve an accommodation with human identity needs” (8). Hoover suggests that “the psychological imperative of identity formation is universal” and that the “quest for identity achievement is central to all people” (62). “People will sacrifice anything to prevent the death and disintegration of their individual or group identity,” notes Harvard psychiatrist James Gilligan (Violence 97). Violence occurs when maintaining identity, this most fundamental and universal of human needs, cannot be accomplished by any other means. Gilligan, who worked for three decades with violent offenders in the Massachusetts prison system, reports that in virtually all instances, these offenders turned to violence as a last resort in order to prevent the destruction of their identities, the annihilation of their sense of self. Murderers, Gilligan found, “do not perceive themselves as having non-violent means by which to maintain or restore their self-esteem or self-respect. . . . Violence is their last resort in the literal sense that it is their last resource” (Preventing 37). “A man only kills another when he is, as he sees it, fighting to save himself, his own self” (Violence 112). “Murder,” Gilligan says, “represents (for the murderer) the ultimate act of self-defense, a last resort against being overwhelmed by shame,” the sense that one’s self is worthless, one’s identity destroyed (Violence 76).
Lichtenstein makes essentially the same point. "If the more advanced, more cognition-based modes of confirming such conviction are poorly developed or break down," he explains, "the archaic forms are regres­sively revived, and the conviction of one's existence becomes depend­ent on orgastic experiences" (Lichtenstein 267). If these also fail, then aggression is activated: aggression is used to maintain identity “only if the affirmative function of pregenital and genital libidinal satisfac­tion fails” (275).

**Recognition in Identity Maintenance and Trauma**

Recognition, as Erikson’s comments above indicate, is the single most important factor in both the construction and the maintenance of identity. As Charles Taylor puts it, “our identity requires recognition by others” (45). Acquiring recognition is thus a fundamental and universal motivation in its own right, a fact recognized by Adam Smith, Rousseau, and Hegel, among others (see Todorov 10–26). The attainment of recognition, according to Smith, is “the most ardent desire of human nature” (qtd. in Todorov 15), and Todorov concludes that “there is no price we are not prepared to pay to obtain it. . . . The need to be acknowledged is not just one human motivation among others; it is the truth behind all other needs” (15–16). Even wealth and material possessions “are not an end in themselves but a way for us to be assured of the recognition of others” (16).

The absence of recognition is, correspondingly, “the worst evil that could befall us” (Todorov 15). If it is sufficiently severe and persistent, lack of recognition can be just as traumatizing—just as destructive of identity—as the most severe forms of violence. In fact, it is the lack of recognition embodied in violence that makes violence itself traumatic: “violence to the body causes the death of the self because it is so inescapably humiliating” (Gilligan, *Violence* 48).

Since identity vulnerability is the root cause of violence, and since lack of recognition is the most powerful and common cause of identity vulnerability, this lack is—particularly in its most severe forms such as insult, shame, humiliation, and ridicule—the single most important cause of violent behavior. “The emotion of shame,” Gilligan contends, “is the primary or ultimate cause of all violence, whether toward others or toward the self. . . . I have yet to see a serious act of violence that was not provoked by the experience of feeling shamed and humiliated, disre­spected and ridiculed” (*Violence* 110).

But identity vulnerability, and the feeling of shame in which it is manifested, are not the result of lack of recognition solely in the present
situation or life condition in which violent behavior occurs. The absence of adequate recognition during one's early developmental years is also key to later violent behavior, for it can be traumatizing and leave one with an identity so fragile that even the slightest deficiencies in recognition—the apparently most trivial instances of being disrespected—experienced later in life result in recourse to violence as the only effective way to restore or sustain identity. Research has shown that most perpetrators of both individual and collective violence suffer from a fragile identity that is the result of prior trauma, often resulting from chronic abuse or neglect of the perpetrator during childhood. James Garbarino, a Cornell developmental psychologist who studies violent youth, reports that his investigations show "that inside most of the adolescent and adult perpetrators of violence are traumatized children" (Raising 86). This conclusion is supported by the fact "that acts of actual and extreme physical violence, such as beatings and attempted murders, are regular experiences in the childhoods of those who grow up to become violent" (Gilligan, Violence 49; see also Preventing 35). Gilligan reports that the violent offenders he worked with "had been subjected to a degree of child abuse that was off the scale of anything I had previously thought of describing with that term. Many had been beaten nearly to death, raped repeatedly or prostituted, or neglected to a life-threatening degree by parents too disabled themselves to care for their child" (Preventing 36).

Nor does one have to suffer physical injury in order to be traumatized; severe deprivation of recognition can be sufficient, as Gilligan explains:

To suffer the loss of love from others, by being rejected or abandoned, assaulted or insulted, slighted or demeaned, humiliated or ridiculed, dishonored or disrespected, is to be shamed by them. To be overwhelmed by shame and humiliation is to experience the destruction of self-esteem; and without a certain minimal amount of self-esteem, the self collapses and the soul dies. . . . Actions that do not directly cause physical injury or death can constitute the kind of psychological torture that can destroy a human personality in ways that are likely to lead to violent behavior in later life—such as locking a child in a closet, verbally threatening him or her with death or mutilation, ridiculing and taunting the child, and so on. Such actions constitute a form of psychological violence which, even in the absence of physical injury, can kill the self. Thus, people do not need to have been physically attacked in order to become violent. Violent child abuse is not a necessary precursor to adult violence for the simple reason that violence is not the only way in which an adult can shame and humiliate a child. Words alone can shame and reject,
insult and humiliate, dishonor and disgrace, tear down self-esteem, and murder the soul. \((\text{Violence 48-49})\)

Gilligan reports that he “never met a group of people who had been so profoundly neglected and deprived, and who had received so little of either attention or respect, as the prison inmates” he worked with \((\text{Preventing 122})\).

**Identity and Trauma in Collective Violence**

Identity vulnerability and the lack of recognition that is usually responsible for it are also the root cause of collective violence, including war, genocide, and terrorism. The humiliations visited upon Germany following World War I, for example, were a major factor in the German people’s attraction to Hitler (who had himself suffered significant personal humiliation and trauma as well) and their support of his militaristic and genocidal policies \((\text{see Gilligan, Preventing 85})\). A similar identity vulnerability underlies terrorism. Vamik Volkan, a University of Virginia psychoanalyst who studies and works to prevent inter-group violence, reports that his research indicates that terrorist leaders have fragile personal identities resulting from traumas suffered during their formative years: “Because of flawed personal identities, those who become leaders of terrorist cells use their shared ethnic identity as their primary identity” \((162)\). Some experience severe physical abuse, such as beatings and incest, at the hands of their parents. But Volkan, like Gilligan, emphasizes that their traumatization need not be physical to be severely damaging: “It can include being abandoned by a mother at an early age, disappointment over being let down by loved ones, a deep sense of personal failure following parental divorce, or rejection by peer groups” \((162)\).

A similar identity vulnerability is characteristic of the followers of these terrorist leaders, Volkan has found. Many are young and are in one way or another alienated or outcast from mainstream society, and terrorist leaders do various things to intensify their identity vulnerability to the point where the individuals seek refuge and recognition by joining the terrorist group \((164)\). Volkan finds that this profile holds for suicide bombers as well, who are typically unmarried males in their adolescence or early adulthood (a time of maximum identity insecurity, as Erikson observed), whose prospects under current economic and political conditions are dim (that is, who receive little structural recognition), and who have been directly traumatized in some way by ethnic conflict (for
example, have suffered physical injury or lost a loved one in the conflict) (165).

As Volkan’s findings indicate, the identity vulnerability initiated by personal traumas is exacerbated by traumatizing economic, social, and political conditions, a point that Gilligan makes in relation to interpersonal violence. These collective traumatizing conditions are further supported by what Volkan calls the “transgenerational transmission of chosen traumas,” through which individuals are traumatized by the still unresolved traumatic experiences of past generations. A “chosen trauma” is the enduring impact of a calamity sustained by the group’s ancestors, which the group now uses unconsciously to define its identity, thus transferring from one generation to the next a wounded identity embodying the memory of the trauma (48). A chosen trauma is not just a recollection; “it is a shared mental representation of the event, which includes realistic information, fantasized expectations, intense feelings, and defenses against unacceptable thoughts” (48). The transmission occurs not just through stories of the trauma that are told to the young but also through nonverbal messages and patterns of behavior, through which members of elder generations unconsciously externalize their wounded identities onto members of later generations during their formative years, thus making the young into receptacles for the disowned elements of their elders’ selves. As a result, “it becomes the child’s task to mourn, to reverse the humiliation and feelings of helplessness pertaining to the trauma of his forbears” (43). In this process, “the transmissions of traumatized self-images occur almost as if psychological DNA were planted in the personality of the younger generation through its relationships with the previous one. The transmitted psychological DNA affects both individual identity and later adult behavior” (44).

Structural Violence and Trauma
The severe, acute traumas that occur during the formative years of both prison inmates and terrorists are reinforced and exacerbated by lower-grade, chronic traumatization resulting from various forms of structural violence and lack of recognition that these individuals are often subjected to. Recognition and its lack can take numerous forms. Among the most obvious and supportive are explicit and direct statements expressing approval or admiration of one’s nature or actions. Less intense expressions of approval, such as being greeted or addressed by one’s name, also provide valuable sustenance (as indicated by the theme song from the sitcom *Cheers* celebrating the psychologically restorative effects of “a
place where everybody knows your name”). When such seemingly perfunctory and insignificant recognitions are absent, even if only for a few days or weeks, one’s identity can quickly become depleted and one can feel alienated, anxious, or depressed—an experience not uncommon when one relocates or takes an extended trip abroad. And when one is subject to such lack of recognition for longer periods of time—and especially if such lack occurs throughout one’s formative years—one’s invisibility to others can eviscerate one’s identity to the point that one becomes desperate enough to do almost anything, from committing arbitrary acts of vandalism to engaging in “senseless” violence, in order to elicit some acknowledgment from others that one exists.

In such cases, even severely negative recognition is preferable to invisibility. “I’d rather be wanted for murder,” one youthful inmate declared to an interviewer, “than not be wanted at all” (Garbarino, *Raising* 90). As Todorov points out, although admiration is the most intense form of recognition, “hate or aggression is also recognition, ... and it bears witness no less forcefully to our existence. ... We can be indifferent to the opinion others have of us, but we cannot remain insensitive to a lack of recognition of our very existence.... To be ignored gives us the feeling we are being annihilated” (Todorov 82–83). And if negative recognition is all that one can get, the result is what Erikson called a “negative identity”—that is, an identity defined in opposition to rather than accordance with central social values.

The experience of invisibility is not limited to interpersonal encounters. Recognition and its absence are also implicit in economic, political, social, and cultural structures, institutions, policies, and practices. Laws that do not allow women to own property, or black people to vote, or same-sex partners to have the same benefits as heterosexual partners enact an identity-assaulting lack of recognition. The same is true when the economic structures and taxation policies of a society with an overabundance of material resources and a substantial reserve of logistical, technological, informational, and administrative capacity allow millions of citizens, including children, to subsist without adequate food, shelter, health care, education, or personal attention. Such lack of recognition is particularly intense when the policies of a President who proclaims himself compassionate demonstrate greater sympathy for the wealthy stockholders of Enron than for these millions of innocent, suffering children. And the structural nonrecognition of a global economic system that allows 225 individuals to accumulate and keep more combined wealth than the combined wealth of almost half the people (two and a half
billion) on the planet is overwhelming and powerfully depleting of the identities of these two and a half billion people, even if they do not verbalize this fact or even consciously experience it (see Gilligan, *Preventing* 82).

Such lack of recognition produces (often beneath the alienation, anxiety, and depression that are more accessible to consciousness) a profound experience of shame and humiliation, the emotional sense that one’s being is without value or significance. “The poor,” Todorov says, “are those no one notices, who never manage to exist in the eyes of their fellow citizens” (58). “Shame,” Gilligan says, “is spread via the social and economic system,“ and the lower one’s economic status, the greater the humiliation and hence “the more frequent and intense the acts of violence” (*Preventing* 38). That it is inequality rather than material need that provokes shame and violence is demonstrated by the fact that when everyone is equally poor, both shame and violence are at lower levels than when only some people are poor (Gilligan, *Preventing* 44). Relative poverty “exposes people to crippling and disabling intensities of shame” and triggers “senseless” acts of violence such as killing someone to get his sneakers (*Preventing* 100).

Work is also a very important source of recognition, since the fact that others desire and use the fruits of one’s labors constitutes a tacit but powerful recognition of one’s worth (see Honneth 147–48). Conversely, lack of work implies that one is not needed and constitutes a powerful tacit nonrecognition that can result in a type of trauma. “Anyone who has been involuntarily unemployed, even for a short time, knows that it is a psychologically jolting experience,” Frankfurt School philosopher Axel Honneth observes (144). In addition to the fact of unemployment, the way a society deals with people who are unemployed also makes a big difference in the degree of shame that is produced and thus in the amount of violence that is perpetrated. As Harvard anthropologist Katherine Newman explains, American social policies shamelessly shame the unemployed:

Americans have always been committed to the moral maxim that work defines the person. . . . We attribute a whole host of moral virtues to those who have found and kept a job, almost any job, and dismiss those who haven’t as slothful or irresponsible. . . . We express this view in a variety of ways in our social policies. Virtually all our benefits (especially health care but including unemployment insurance, life insurance, child care tax credits, etc.) are provided through the employment system. In Western
Europe this is often not the case: health care is provided directly through the tax system and benefits come to people who are political "citizens" whether they work or not. In the U.S., however, those outside the employment system are categorized as unworthy and made to feel it by excluding them from these systems of support. To varying degrees, we "take care" of the socially excluded by creating stigmatized categories for their benefits—welfare and Medicaid being prime examples. Yet we never confuse the approved, acceptable Americans with the undeserving, and we underscore the difference by separating them into different bureaucratic worlds. (qtd. in Gilligan, Preventing)

Lack of social and economic success produces violence because it constitutes a resounding lack of recognition from the generalized Other. As Todorov observes:

We desire success and yet do not achieve it because we are handicapped from the beginning—poor, ugly, mentally slow—or because of bad luck. So we take to violence, which society stigmatizes under the name of crime. The recognition I cannot get willingly, I will take by force. . . . To achieve the recognition accorded to wealth, [the thief] uses ways not accepted by society. The gang wars in large American cities are carried out in a search for "respect," another name for recognition. (91)

Preventing Violence by Preventing Trauma

Insofar as traumatized or damaged identity is at the root of violence, it follows that the most effective way to prevent violence is to prevent trauma and, where such efforts fail, to help restore the traumatized identity. Empirical studies performed in recent years provide an abundance of evidence that protecting and restoring identity does indeed reduce violence (see Bracher 190, 202–09). Gilligan concurs with these findings, arguing that violence is reduced by preventing shame, the state of identity depletion, and by providing people with the resources necessary to protect and restore their identities (Preventing 81). Following a public-health model of prevention, Gilligan describes three levels of prevention: a primary level, which addresses the entire population; a secondary level, which targets those who are at greatest risk; and the tertiary level, which deals with those who have fallen victim to the malady of behaving violently. At each level, cost-effective strategies have been developed and implemented.

Primary-level interventions for violence prevention involve significant changes in the social, economic, and/or political structures or in the
cultural fabric of a society that reduce their traumatizing consequences. An instance of primary intervention would be eliminating the grotesque disparities in wealth and in income between the richest and the poorest of Americans, as well as between America and other parts of the world. Such an intervention, by dramatically increasing the recognition accorded the poor and reducing their shame, would substantially reduce violence, Gilligan argues: “Cleaning up our social and economic system, by reducing the shame-provoking inequities in social and economic status, will do far more to prevent physical violence than all the police, prisons and punishments in the world, all the prison psychiatrists we could possibly hire, and all the armies, armaments, and Armageddons we could mobilize” (Preventing 99–100). There is substantial empirical evidence to back up this claim, including significant correlations between inequality and violent crime (see Currie 120ff.). Changes in the dominant culture, such as reducing the number and severity of representations of violence on screen and redefining masculinity so that it no longer includes violence or excludes tenderness would also result in a substantial reduction in violence, according to Gilligan (see Preventing 82).

Secondary strategies for violence prevention involve targeting children whose circumstances at home, in school, and in their communities increase the odds that they will suffer traumas that will lead them to violence. Various strategies and programs have been developed to prevent such traumas from occurring. One of the most notable of such programs—the Perry School project, implemented several decades ago in Ypsilanti, Michigan—involved a battery of interventions to help parents provide nurturing, non-traumatic conditions for their children. This program was found to be not only effective in reducing violence but also cost-effective, more than paying for itself by reducing the need that children from the program had for expensive social services (such as remedial education, medical aid, welfare, or involvement with the criminal justice system) when they reached adolescence and adulthood. Reviewing the key findings of an evaluation done years after the interventions when the subjects were twenty-seven, Berkeley criminologist Elliot Currie concludes:

The results were impressive: the Perry students were far more likely to be literate, off welfare, working and earning a decent living. They were only one-fifth as likely as the carefully matched control group to have become chronic criminal offenders (defined as having been arrested five or more times) and only about one-fourth as likely to have been arrested for drug-related crimes. (92)
Tertiary violence-prevention strategies target not society as a whole or at-risk groups, as do primary and secondary strategies, respectively, but rather those who have already committed criminal acts of violence. Here again, the most effective strategies are those that prevent further traumatizing of the offenders and help to restore their identities. The most effective programs are thus those that avoid humiliating and shaming prisoners and making them suffer in other ways and instead offer them opportunities (in the form of education and therapy) to develop identity components that do not entail violence, and then providing them with opportunities (in the form of meaningful activities in prison and after they are released) to enact and thus receive recognition for these prosocial identity components, thus reducing the identity vulnerability that leads to violent behavior (see Gilligan, Preventing 130).

The Trauma-Producing Nature of Violence-Prevention Strategies
Despite compelling evidence that preventing trauma and supporting identity at each of these three levels are the most effective way of preventing violence, our society has for the most part eschewed this strategy. And we have done so despite overwhelming evidence that our present efforts are not only not working but are actually counterproductive—a response that Currie characterizes as “almost schizophrenic” (5). Specifically, while research has increasingly demonstrated that traumatized, damaged identities are at the root of violent behavior, we have persisted in social and economic policies that increase rather than decrease structural violence (inequality) and the trauma (in the form of shame and humiliation) it produces. At the level of secondary prevention, “we understand that childhood traumas may lead to violence, but we draw the line at reliably providing the preventive health care that could address them. We acknowledge the link between child abuse and violent crime, but we starve our child-protective systems” (Currie 160).

And at the level of tertiary intervention, that of the criminal justice and penal systems, our policies are perhaps even more egregiously counterproductive. “Most of the practices of the criminal justice system,” Gilligan laments, “actually increase the rates of violence in a society rather than decreasing them” (Preventing 115). This is due to the emphasis on punishment rather than rehabilitation: “The criminal justice and penal systems have been operating on the basis of a huge mistake, namely, the belief that punishment will deter, prevent, or inhibit violence, when in fact it is the most powerful stimulus of violence that we have yet discovered” (116). Persisting in the conviction that punishment deters
crime and that the harsher the punishment the greater the deterrence, we have increased the shame and humiliation of offenders by incarcerating them more frequently, giving them longer sentences, and subjecting them to more dehumanizing and humiliating prison conditions. An index of the counterproductive nature of this strategy is found in the fact that "our imprisonment rates are five to ten times higher than those of any other developed nation, and our death rates from murder are also five to ten times higher" (24). The reason for this correlation is clear: punishment causes violence, and it does so by increasing shame and humiliation (116). The result of our emphasis on punishment is a vicious circle, which Gilligan describes as follows:

On a day-to-day basis in the prison I saw the effects of punishment. The more severely the prisoners were punished by the prison officers the more violent they would become, and the more violent they became, the more severely they would be punished, in an endless, mutually self-defeating vicious circle that routinely culminated in the inmate's becoming so enraged that he stopped caring whether he lived or died, as long as he could get revenge on those he saw as tormenting him. (116)

The Cause of Counterproductive Violence-Prevention Strategies

Why are we pursuing counterproductive strategies and disdaining strategies whose effectiveness in reducing violence has been demonstrated? "We have relied on the jails and prisons as our first defense against crime; yet we still maintain the developed world's worst level of violence," Currie laments (37). Why? Why do we "spend incomparably more money on police, prisons, punishments and criminal courts than we do on providing the kinds of community services that have been demonstrated to achieve equal reductions in criminal violence for one-fifth of the price?" (Gilligan, Preventing 23). Why have we "systematically depleted other public institutions in order to pay for our incarceration binge—a self-defeating course that helps to insure that violent crime will remain high despite ever more drastic efforts to contain it?" (Currie 37). Why, when it comes to issues like education and poverty, do we decrease funding on the principle that "throwing money at a problem" won't fix it, but then throw more and more money into building and operating prisons, which not only don't fix violence but actually make it worse?

Various plausible explanations have been offered for this self-contradictory, self-defeating social policy. Currie identifies four factors: (1) the failure of political leaders to engage the problem of violence in an
honest and responsible manner, (2) the ignorance and misinformation that permeate the layperson's views of the nature of violence, its causes, and its cures, (3) the benefit such policies provide to special interest groups that profit from high rates of crime and incarceration, and (4) the convergence of these policies with the ideology of the American Dream, whereby one's behavior and circumstances in life are determined solely by one's individual worth and responsibility and not by any conditions beyond one’s control (Currie 6–7). Each of these factors no doubt plays a role in the promulgation of our self-defeating strategies of violence prevention. But political leaders and special interests don't carry the day unless they find broad public support; public ignorance about violence in the information age is not involuntary, but motivated; and the ideal of individual responsibility is easily and readily abandoned by most Americans when they find it to their advantage to do so. The question, then, is why the vast majority of Americans still support massive expenditures for a policy that not only has failed mightily but actually makes things worse. Currie's observation that "the present drift of national policy...reflects a stunning degree of collective denial" points to a deeper reason than the four he mentioned: the need of most Americans to protect a vulnerable identity (159).

This conclusion is supported by UCLA sociologist Jack Katz's finding that even most criminals are motivated by the psychological need to maintain a certain identity—for example, to be a "hardman" or a "badass"—more than by desire for material gain (see Katz 80ff). If the primary motive is identity maintenance rather than financial gain even for such individuals, who have much greater need for money and material goods than do most of the noncriminal population who perpetrate structural and institutional violence, then it is plausible and even probable that a similar psychological need rather than a material need is also motivating the noncriminal perpetrators of (structural and institutional) violence. This conclusion is supported by the enthusiasm with which many people with no financial interest in the practice support the death penalty, as manifested by, among other things, the celebrations that often occur at executions.

Gilligan's analysis leads to the same conclusion: Americans support a failed violence prevention policy because they have a profound need to inflict violence on others in order to protect their own fragile identities. "What emotional gratification are people seeking," Gilligan asks, "when they advocate punishing other people harshly, as opposed to quarantining them in order to restrain them?" (Violence 182). His answer is pride and
power: the “wish or need to dominate and humiliate others is in the service of gaining a swelled sense of pride and power by having dominion over others, including the power to inflict pain on them, punish them” (182). And what this means, Gilligan points out, is that the thirst to punish violent offenders is motivated by the same psychological need that motivated the violent behavior of the offenders themselves: “interestingly, the motive behind such punitive attitudes turns out to be identical to the motive behind the very crimes that many of us are eager to punish—namely, the fear that one will be laughed at, held in contempt, or made a fool of (i.e., shamed), unless one is sufficiently sadistic” (Violence 184). And this fear, and the feeling of shame, as we have seen, are manifestation of a damaged, vulnerable identity.

Gilligan’s analysis here goes further than that of most inquiries into the problem of violence and our failed efforts to solve it. While most other inquiries simply point out the irrationality and folly of our policies and in some cases (such as Currie’s analysis) the special interests these policies serve, Gilligan’s analysis points to identity vulnerability on the part of those who support these policies as the root cause of these policies. Gilligan ends his analysis, however, without following the implications that this understanding has for the possibility of our ever relinquishing these counterproductive policies and instituting more humane and effective violence-prevention measures. In what follows, I want first to pursue these implications and then explore the possibilities that they open up for how literary study might contribute to the prevention of violence.

The key questions raised by Gilligan’s insight into the deep motive underlying people’s need to (indirectly and institutionally) perpetrate violence upon criminal offenders are: where does the identity vulnerability behind this need come from, why do people have recourse to this (indirect, institutional) violence rather than to other means of protecting or restoring their identities, and what might be done to reduce their identity vulnerability and/or direct their attempts to strengthen their identities away from violence and toward more prosocial and productive activities?

**Violence and the Trauma of Socialization**

In answer to the first question, my contention is that the general identity vulnerability underlying the perpetration of violence-producing practices in the name of violence prevention is a consequence of a low-grade, chronic traumatization that victimizes most members of American soci-
ety as a result of their socialization by American culture. The basic trauma produced by socialization results from what Lacan called "symbolic castration," which involves the rejection, via the withholding of recognition, of certain parts of the self as components of one's identity and the imposition on identity, through intensive interpelation and recognition, of qualities that are not part of one's self. But since symbolic castration is produced by any socialization whatsoever and is thus universal and not unique to American society, the mere fact of symbolic castration cannot by itself be responsible for our self-defeating efforts at violence prevention, because violence in other societies, where symbolic castration also (necessarily) exists, is much less severe than in ours. What distinguish American society, and result in our turning to (individual and collective physical, institutional, and structural) violence to a much greater degree than other developed nations are the particular contents that American socialization pressures us to incorporate into our identities, the particular elements of our selves that this socialization forces us to exclude from our identities, and the use of more severely traumatizing techniques (involving shaming and humiliation in homes and in schools) in order to institute and enforce these intrusions and exclusions.

The foundation of the American penchant for violence can be found in the trauma produced by gender socialization. The parts of the self that are most severely cut off from identity as well as those that are most vigorously imposed upon it are those that are related to one's sex and gender identities. In the most severe instances, in some societies, the castration is literal as well as symbolic, involving an actual physical excision of parts of the genitals—clitoridectomy for women and circumcision for men. Such practices ensure that the pleasure and hence identity investment placed in these organs and their activities is limited. Other parts of the body that are excluded (more by lack of recognition than by physical removal) from a central role in one's identity include the mouth and the anus, which are primary sites of stimulation and intercourse with the world during infancy, until these functions are cut off by weaning and toilet training.

In addition to cutting off certain bodily parts and activities, the recognition process of socialization also excludes certain affective-physiological states from the respective identities of men and women: active, assertive, aggressive impulses and feelings for women and passive, submissive, and tender impulses and feelings for men. As the psychologist Terrence Real explains:
Just as girls are pressured to yield that half of their human potential consonant with assertive action, . . . so are boys pressured to yield attributes of dependency, expressiveness, affiliation—all the self-concepts and skills that belong to the relational, emotive world. These wholesale excisions are equally damaging to the healthy development of both girls and boys. . . . Like the myth of the Procrustean bed, like circumcision, the oldest and most common rite of passage throughout the world, boys “become” men by lopping off, or having lopped off, the most sensitive parts of their psychic and, in some cases, physical selves. The passage from boyhood to manhood is about ritual wounding. It is about giving up those parts of the self that do not fit within the confines of the role. (130, 132)

Often this socialization process involves subjecting boys to physical violence. As Real observes, “For most boys active trauma is an integral part of life. . . . Such boyhood injury operates like a fault line in troubled men, coloring their emotional lives, ready, given the right circumstance, to emerge. The wounded boy they think they have long left behind acts like a reservoir of hurt and shame” (113–16). But boys do not have to be subjected to physical violence to be traumatized by the socialization process (105–06). Even relatively mild forms of neglect, Real argues, can be traumatic for children (see 106–09). As Real points out, “These emotional amputations can be effected through active or passive injury in transactions severe or seemingly mild. They can occur with extraordinary drama, . . . [or] they can appear as mundane as dinner non-conversation. . . . Some boys lose their ‘souls’ in great chunks, other find it chipped away in small bits, through the most ordinary interactions” (135, 128).

By thus cutting off certain parts of the self from participating in one’s identity and imposing on identity some elements not included in the self, such socialization processes produce and sustain a low-grade trauma that harms identity in ways that contribute directly to both physical and structural violence. The very process by which boys are supposedly being toughened up and made into men leaves them wounded and insecure, with a greater need to enact their masculine identities. And the simplest way to do so, as we have seen, is through violence. Thus, for men the path from symbolic castration or cultural traumatization to violence is quite direct and paved by the fact that aggression and violence are socially recognized—indeed, insisted upon—in numerous ways as essential components of masculine identity, and violence-suppressing qualities like submissiveness and tenderness are roundly excluded from their identities. “Masculinity,” Gilligan observes, “is literally defined as involving
the expectation, even the requirement, of violence” (Prevention 56). Aggression and violence are encouraged in American boys almost from birth, through, for example, according recognition and honor to boys who perform most violently in violent sports such as football, hockey, boxing, and wrestling and by withholding recognition from, and even shaming, boys who excel intellectually (“computer geeks,” for example) or artistically (“band nerds” and “fairies” who dance, for example). Structural recognition of violent behavior by boys and men is also prominent in American society. Most scandalous, perhaps is the provision of millions of dollars for professional sports facilities and athletes’ salaries while schools are falling into disrepair, teachers are woefully underpaid for doing essential work that is often grueling and thankless, funds for education are being cut, and millions of Americans cannot afford adequate health care or food for themselves and their children. The socializing, castrating effect of such structural recognition on young boys can be seen in the enthusiasm with which they fantasize becoming a professional athlete and the zeal with which they pursue this dream by practicing their skills and emulating their sports heroes’ moves and attitudes, chief among which are violent hits, triumphalist preening, and demeaning taunts directed against the opposition. As a consequence of these and other socializing forces, whenever an American boy’s or man’s identity is damaged or threatened, he, more than his counterparts in other countries, can always gain recognition as a man by engaging in violent behavior.

In addition, the socializing excision from masculine identity of precisely those impulses and emotions of passivity, dependence, and submissiveness that mitigate the violent urges means that whenever a man feels such tender impulses, he feels his identity as a man eroding, and in an effort to prevent further erosion and restore his identity, he often resorts to some form of violence. This violence is often directed against other men who are perceived by him to possess the tender, non-masculine, “feminine” qualities that he fears in himself. By focusing on such (actual or projected) qualities in other men, he can convince himself and others that it is they and not he who possess these non-masculine attributes. The most blatant instance of this identity-supporting tactic is homophobia and the violence—physical, verbal, and structural—that men perpetrate against other men whom they perceive as gay (see Gilligan, Preventing 62–68). But an even more common instance is found in boys’ fathers’ and coaches’ admonitions not to cry, not to be a “sissy” or a “wimp” but to “suck it up” and “be a man.” Thus, as psychologists have recognized,
“being a boy is inherently traumatic in our culture. It requires that a boy cut himself off from the sources of softness, comfort, intimacy, expressiveness, and positive dependency and ‘be a man’” (Garbarino, Lost 160).

Even when the ongoing effort to maintain a masculine identity does not lead directly to criminal violence, it contributes indirectly to such violence by perpetrating structural and cultural violence. Attempts to enact “masculine” identity-bearing qualities such as toughness, control, and dominance fuel many forms of institutional and structural violence, including the “War on Crime” and the “War on Drugs,” which involve being “tough on crime” and responding to drug use, juvenile delinquency, joblessness, and poverty with forms of aggression and violence described as “tough love.”

Since women are (still largely) defined and recognized for gentleness and passivity rather than for aggressivity and violence, it might be assumed that their socialization promotes peacefulness rather than violence. And such an assumption would be valid, insofar as women engage in far fewer acts of violent behavior than men and are generally less socially and politically belligerent and bellicose than men. Yet, the cultural traumatization of women can also play an important role in the perpetuation of violence, although since aggression and violence are precisely what is excluded from women’s identity, the path from cultural traumatization to violence is usually more circuitous and hidden for women than it is for men. Women who are not allowed to make aggressive impulses part of their identities do not simply lose those impulses any more than men lose their tender and passive impulses; rather, they must either suppress them or resort to surreptitious enactments of them. And many do the latter. Some women manage to gratify their aggressive urges by insulting or humiliating individuals (including other women) of lesser wealth, status, or power—such as subordinates in the workplace, servers in restaurants, cleaning personnel, clerks, and groundskeepers—or by morally castigating criminals, often including female prostitutes. But one of the surest and most invisible (and hence identity-maintaining) ways for women to enact their identity-contradicting aggression is by perpetrating institutional, structural, and cultural violence, through voting for and otherwise supporting precisely the sorts of social, political, and economic structures, policies, and institutions that, we have seen, traumatize individuals in ways that lead them, in turn, to engage in physical violence.

In addition to the traumatization produced by gender socialization, American culture perpetrates trauma through its hyperindividu-
ology (as Currie suggested), which celebrates almost gangster-like autarchy and shames those who are not self-sufficient. Assured by parents, teachers, and politicians that in America one can be whatever one wants to be, and challenged by admonitions such as those of the army recruitment ads to “be all that you can be” and to “be an army of one,” American children and youth become convinced, at least when they judge others, that anytime an individual comes up short, the reason is to be sought in that individual’s own character and nowhere else. This message is reinforced by stories, real and fictional, of individuals who become rich and famous through single-minded and aggressive pursuit of their goals. Whenever people watch television or a movie, they encounter living proof in every actor on the screen of the truth of the American dream. The same is true whenever they go to a concert or listen to the radio or a CD, and whenever they attend a professional sporting event or watch one on TV. As a result of such demonstrations that hard work and perseverance can in fact work miracles, most people come to believe that individuals who are not financially successful enough to support themselves and their families simply haven’t worked hard enough and are themselves to blame for their lack of success. And this assumption is powerfully reinforced by American social and economic systems, institutions, and policies: as we noted earlier with regard to unemployment, the resounding message of American social practices, policies, institutions, and structures is, “Your health, intelligence, education, wealth, income, job, success, and general welfare are your own responsibility, and if you don’t measure up to your own or society’s standards in any of these categories, it is entirely your own fault.”

In recent decades, this message of personal fault for any financial shortfall has been reinforced by the changing nature of work in America. Whereas fifty years ago an American man could expect to find a blue-collar or white-collar job that he could keep until he retired, that would pay enough to provide a comfortable life for him and his family, and that would also provide for his retirement and his health benefits (see Faludi), today most men and women can expect that they will have not just multiple jobs but more than one career during the course of their working lives, that their jobs will not adequately provide for their retirement or health benefits, and that they can expect to lose their jobs without warning, as news reports of corporate downsizing, business failures, and business relocations continually remind them. This new structure of work sends a resounding message of nonrecognition to the American worker: it tells them, as Howard Stein puts it, that they are disposable, that they
are not needed to keep the world running. This constitutes a significant blow to their identities.

American socialization into an identity of hyperindividualism is further traumatic insofar as it forces people to disown important parts of their selves—such as the need for mutuality, dependency, and passivity rather than competitiveness, independence, and control. Such socialization is particularly traumatic for boys and men, where the individualist values of personal responsibility and self-reliance are united in a mutually reinforcing way with a masculine ideal that includes values such as toughness, impermeability, inviolability, perseverance, indefatigability, imperturbability, aggressiveness, competitiveness, dominance—values that, to be enacted and recognized as part of one’s identity, require that one deny essential parts of one’s self, such as fear, tenderness, vulnerability, sadness, and any wishes to be passive, dependent, or submissive.

The trauma inflicted by physical violence, then, including murder, rape, and terrorism, is only the visible tip of a much larger iceberg that includes beneath-the-surface layers that are successively broader and deeper, encompassing successively more victims. These layers include:

1. The traumas that the perpetrators of physical violence have themselves suffered, in the form of severe and ongoing physical and emotional abuse and neglect, and that are at the root of their violent behavior.

2. The trauma resulting from institutional violence, such as the harsh, punitive treatment of prisoners, including nonviolent substance-abusers, by our criminal justice and penal systems, which exacerbates the identity-damage done by the original child-abuse and neglect sustained by these prisoners and thus fuels rather than subdues their violent tendencies.

3. The lower-grade traumatization produced by structural violence—including poverty, unemployment, inadequate health care, and an impersonal, mass-production system of education—which victimizes the perpetrators of physical violence in numerous ways and is also experienced by many of the non-physically-violent perpetrators of (that is, ardent advocates of) institutional violence (for example, angry white men) who are often themselves also among the principal (political) perpetrators of this very institutional violence that is traumatizing them.

4. The all-pervasive trauma constituted by the cultural violence inflicted in socializing children into American boys, American girls, and American individualists, which harms everyone (though in differing degrees) through cutting off certain parts of the self on the one hand and, on the other hand,
thrusting alien attributes (such as toughness for sensitive boys and passivity for active girls) deep into children's identities—resulting in the chronic identity dissonance and vulnerability that prompts many behaviorally nonviolent people to seek identity definition and support by perpetrating institutional and structural violence, as well as ratcheting up the cultural violence of socialization by strident enforcement of the very culturally imposed identity categories that they have themselves been traumatized by.

Each type of violence—physical, institutional, structural, and cultural—is thus an effort to protect or repair an identity injured by one or more of the various types of trauma produced by these various types of violence. And in each instance, the particular type of violence at issue is pursued because it offers an individual the best opportunity for maintaining his or her identity, given that individual’s particular identity contents and structure and the identity-supporting resources that are available. Participating in the perpetration of institutional and structural violence, for example, is an easy, readily available, low-cost way to support one’s identity: it is socially approved and hence recognition-garnering (that is, being a staunch advocate of the “War on Crime,” the death penalty, or welfare reduction in American society elicits approval from many people), and it produces an abundance of abject others (“criminals,” “riff-raff,” and so on) onto whom righteous, upstanding citizens can simultaneously project and unconsciously enact their own unacknowledged violent impulses, while convincing themselves and others that their support of harsh punishments and niggardly public assistance is a virtue.

This means that one way to help prevent the physical violence perpetrated by murderers, rapists, terrorists, and the like is to prevent the prior institutional, structural, and cultural violence of recognition-deprivation perpetrated upon them by law-abiding citizens through their voting and other behaviors. But changing the behavior of law-abiding citizens requires more than simply presenting them with rational arguments and evidence, a strategy that has been pursued for some time with little or no result. Before the perpetrators of institutional, structural, and cultural violence can attend to the evidence and heed the rational arguments, their dependence on these forms of violence for identity support must be reduced or eliminated. There are several basic ways to do this:

1) reduce the perpetrators’ need for the identity support provided by these forms of violence, by avoiding further shaming of them and by providing them with alternative sources of recognition;
2) reduce the amount of identity support provided by these forms of violence, by reducing the recognition that the perpetration of such violence provides; and

3) reduce the perpetrators' need for external identity support in general, by strengthening their identities.

What Can Literary Study Do? Avoid Shaming the Perpetrators

The question, then, is how literary study might be able to enact these basic strategies and thus contribute to the prevention of violence by interrupting the vortex of trauma that is the ultimate origin of most violence in America. The first thing we can do is to make sure that literary study is not itself contributing to the problem by exacerbating the wounds of traumatized selves through further shaming them, either behaviorally, institutionally, structurally, or culturally. In the past, all of these types of shaming were common features of education, and we know from the testimony of women, gays and lesbians, African Americans, and members of other minority groups that literary study has historically inflicted upon them the trauma of nonrecognition in each of these ways. Like most other teachers today, literature teachers have largely abandoned verbal and other behavioral shaming practices, and the other (largely inadvertent) types of shaming have also been subject to increasing exposure and discrediting, at least since the beginning of the second wave of feminism. The exclusion of women from the ranks of canonical writers, from the higher echelons of institutional hierarchies (from “higher” as opposed to primary and secondary education, from the field of literature as opposed to composition, and from the subfield of theory as opposed to literature), and as fully developed objects of representation in literary texts are instances of institutional, structural, and cultural nonrecognition that have been exposed and contested by feminists. Similar efforts have occurred for other disenfranchised groups. But while literary study has taken meaningful steps in recent decades to redress this injustice, it is still perpetrating the trauma of nonrecognition in various ways—most notably in withholding recognition precisely for the perpetrators of the four basic forms of violence and the traumas they have suffered. We literature teachers are complicit in the perpetration of all four forms of violence by virtue of our almost total failure to provide, and help our students to provide, recognition for the perpetrators of each type of violence.

This complicity is quite ironic, considering all the recognition that has been accorded “the Other” in literary theory, criticism, and pedagogy.
in recent decades. Beginning with feminist criticism in the 1960s, concern for the Other has grown exponentially in literary studies, becoming a focal point in most literary historical periods and critical methodologies and addressing the status of virtually all demographic groups other than that of the hegemonic white, Euro-American, middle-class, heterosexual, conventionally abled man. Our aim has been to promote greater social justice for these others, who have been traumatized—often severely—by being denied recognition of every sort. Thus, literary study has during the past four decades taken major steps toward providing significant recognition for certain groups that were traditionally marginalized and disrespected by its institutionalized practices as well as by American society and culture as a whole. One of the most visible and progressive of these steps has been the opening up of the canon to (or the rejection of the canon in favor of) authors of marginalized identities such as women, gay, lesbian, and queer writers, as well as African American, Hispanic, Asian American, and other racial, ethnic, and national identities. The inclusion of such writers in the canon constituted in and of itself a significant act of recognition and respect where before there was either lack of recognition or active disrespect of such writers. In pursuit of justice for these Others, we routinely instruct our students about the traumas that these Others have sustained, and we express—and encourage our students to feel—sympathy, respect, and admiration for groups that have been variously deprived of recognition—excluded, marginalized, disempowered, ignored, denigrated—by the (white, male, heterosexual, economically secure American) mainstream. We take particular pains to discern and respect these Others’ differences from ourselves, explaining how failure to do so has led to the imperialistic imposition of parochial categories, values, and beliefs in the name of a universal humanity. It is precisely the Other’s otherness, we say, that must be recognized and respected; if we recognize only those aspects of the Other that are the same as our own, then we are engaging in an act of narcissistic, Other-denying cultural imperialism, social exclusion, and psychological oppression.

Despite this lip service to difference, however, the Others that we literature teachers focus on and sympathize with tend to be much like ourselves—or rather those parts of ourselves that we acknowledge—in their core moral and behavioral characteristics: while their race, ethnicity, nationality, class, religion, gender, and/or sexuality may be quite different from our own, we imagine them, as we imagine ourselves, as being fundamentally humane, benign, nonviolent. Rarely do we express or
attempt to engender sympathy for those individuals and groups—murderers, rapists, child molesters, terrorists, or the perpetrators of genocide and ethnic cleansing—who appear to be the most different from us (generally nonviolent literature teachers), the most fully Other in terms of what we consider to be the basic human qualities. Nor are the identities most responsible for institutional, structural, and cultural violence (for example, angry white males) accorded respectful recognition. In fact, in literature classrooms these identities are more often the objects of criticism and even condemnation than they are the recipients of sympathy and understanding. When racism, sexism, homophobia, classism, imperialism, and militarism are criticized in class discussion or in texts under discussion, students whose identities incorporate these qualities sustain yet another traumatization, however mild it may be, which makes them more rather than less likely to engage in cultural, structural, institutional, and even physical violence.

This shaming process is perhaps most pronounced in the response many of us literature teachers have given to claims by straight, white, Euro-American men that they are the true victims, oppressed by the efforts (like affirmative action) to help various marginalized groups: we have met such claims with consternation, indignation, and even anger and ridicule, as well as categorical rejection. Of course, such responses are in one sense certainly justified, for it is clearly the case that most members of this group have escaped the more obvious burdens and traumas experienced by marginalized groups. The problem is that our dismissal of these claims ignores the traumatic effects that, as we have seen, experiences that appear mild and undramatic can produce. Moreover, by denying recognition to this dominant group’s identity and feelings of vulnerability—while at the same time that we criticize these men for not recognizing and acknowledging their vulnerability—we make members of this group more rather than less prone to continue perpetrating the cultural, structural, and institutional violence that produces the traumas underlying criminal violence. Our refusal to recognize and sympathize with this group’s experiences of vulnerability constitutes another increment of trauma that makes their identities more vulnerable and thus more prone to violence. The refusal of recognition simply reinforces their macho denial of feelings of vulnerability, which itself provides a further impetus to violent behavior. Thus, the ridiculing and dismissing of the angry white male, while morally justified from one perspective, is from another perspective yet another instance of putting the Other down (a milder form, but nonetheless an instance, of traumatizing violence) that
constitutes another turn in the vortex of trauma that produces violence. Hating and demonizing the devil, whether in the form of the violent criminal or of the angry white male, simply makes the devil more diabolical. Recognizing and sympathizing with the devil, on the other hand—whether he be a murderer, a rapist, a terrorist, or an angry white man—provides him with what he needs and is trying desperately to obtain by means of his violent behavior.

I hope it is clear by now that depriving (physically, institutionally, structurally, or culturally) violent others of recognition is not only profoundly unjust but also powerfully self-defeating. By participating (even if only passively, through our lack of opposition) in our society's demonization and punishment of such individuals rather than trying to understand them and provide them (directly or indirectly) with the recognition that would help them sustain their identities and in doing so refrain from violence, we literature teachers and scholars harm ourselves more than we help ourselves. We harm ourselves morally by engaging in precisely the process of othering that we condemn when it is directed toward benign others; we harm ourselves psychologically by activating primitive defense mechanisms like projection and projective identification which diminish both our self-awareness and our sensitivity to Others; and we harm ourselves personally and socially by precluding the understanding and motivation necessary to reduce rather than escalate violence.

In light of the counterproductive, violence-supporting quality of our own critical and pedagogical practices, we need to direct toward ourselves the same questions we have been posing regarding the various other perpetrators of violence discussed above: why have we (literature teachers and scholars) been doing this? The answer, which should be obvious in light of our previous discussions, is that such practices have been an easy, cost-effective way for us to maintain our identities. To verify this conclusion we need only recall the sense of well being we feel when we ferret out and denounce some element of racism, sexism, homophobia, or other injustice in the texts (and sometimes also in the students) we teach, or when we expose to our students the traumatic consequences or the psychological or social dynamics of these forms of violence. We often come away from such moments feeling self-righteous and self-satisfied, confident that we have done more than our fair share to make the world a better place, when in fact we may have done the opposite: by focusing exclusively on the violent behaviors and failing to recognize the traumas underlying and motivating them, we have deprived
these traumatized devils (directly, for those sitting in our classroom, and indirectly, for those outside the classroom, through the more critical manner in which many of our students will engage them) of a benign recognition that might help render their recourse to violence unnecessary.

Thus, when we examine the reasons for our own failure to provide recognition for the traumatized devil in our literature courses, we find our own identity needs, which we may, in light of our previous analyses, suppose to be in large measure the product of American cultural violence that insists on individual responsibility and supports victim-blaming: yet another, prior spiral in the vicious circle by which trauma and violence produce each other. One reason that the traumas sustained by the perpetrators of physical, institutional, structural, and cultural violence are not sympathized with and thus prevented or healed is because most of those who are in the best position both to recognize these traumas and thus help prevent or heal them—cultural workers like artists, teachers, scholars, journalists, poets, novelists, screenwriters, lyricists, and recording artists—are themselves driven by their own identity needs to demonize these Others—murderers, rapists, terrorists, angry white males, and snobs and elitists of all stripes—rather than provide them with the trauma-preventing or healing recognition and sympathy that would reduce their need to perpetrate institutional violence (like the humiliation and punishment of criminals), structural violence (like the perpetuation of poverty and economic inequity), and cultural violence (like the promotion of ideals of masculinity, individualism, independence, self-reliance, and toughness). We literature teachers need to recognize our own needy, traumatized selves and their complicity in the vortex of trauma and violence.

But how can we give up the identity support that we have been getting from demonizing rather than sympathizing with these various types of violent Others? One way is to replace this identity support with what I think of as “recognition from the real,” by which I mean the deep, implicit acknowledgment of our significance that we receive from the beneficial consequences that our actions have. My wager is that if we can formulate practices of literary study that, based on what we have seen to be the traumatic roots of violence, can be demonstrated to help heal trauma and thus eliminate the need for violence, knowing that we have contributed such benefits will constitute a form of recognition that more than compensates for the identity support we will lose when we give up demonizing violent Others and projecting our own disowned violent impulses onto them.
Providing Students with Recognition
The question then becomes, how can literary study reduce violence by providing trauma-healing recognition to the various perpetrators (in addition to ourselves) of the different but mutually reinforcing types of violence? It turns out that there are many ways to provide such recognition through literary study and that—surprisingly, perhaps—virtually all of these ways are already being enacted in literature classes, though often not with the aim of supporting identities and almost never in a systematic, coordinated manner. Outside of those relatively few classes that make empowerment of students their central aim, such recognition-providing practices are usually implemented in piecemeal and desultory fashion with the aim of "getting students to participate" or "getting students to love literature" rather than with the primary aim of helping students to heal, develop, and flourish. Before the more systematic and effective provision of recognition for students can be implemented, we need to fully embrace the reversal of priorities that feminism began in literary studies with its (often tacit) insistence that students do not exist to serve literature (by appreciating it, enjoying it, fetishizing it, or increasing its value by investing themselves in it) but that literature, rather, exists for the purpose of serving students and others, by helping them cope, thrive, and develop into fulfilled individuals and responsible and productive members of society. Students are the ends; literature is but the means.

Recognizing that our aim should be to help our students flourish rather than to help Literature flourish, we then confront the question of what students need in order to flourish. Their most basic need is the most basic need of all humans, which as we saw earlier is the same need that the perpetrators of all four types of violence are trying to satisfy by means of violence: the need to establish and maintain a secure identity. And as we have also seen, the most important factor in developing a secure identity is recognition. Thus, a violence-prevention literary pedagogy and a student-centered pedagogy have the same fundamental objective: providing students with recognition.

Acknowledging recognition as the key to both aims is an important step that will contribute significantly to helping us achieve both ends. It will also be helpful to distinguish three different levels of the self (see Josephs), the recognition of which takes different forms and produces different results. First, there is the public self, which includes those parts of oneself that one acknowledges and freely displays to others in hopes of their being recognized. Then there is the private self, which consists of those parts of oneself that one acknowledges and yearns to have others
recognize and accept but that one hides from others out of fear that others
will not approve of them. And finally there is the unconscious self, which
consists of those parts of the self that one is unaware of possessing
because one has disowned them, excluded them from identity as a result
of socializing pressures of the sort discussed above.

**Recognition for Public Aspects of Identity**

Recognition for the public self is the most common form of recognition
in literature classes as well as generally, and its provision usually
produces an immediate boost to identity. Direct expressions of admira-
tion or approval by the teacher or other students for a student’s knowl-
edge, understanding, insight, or sensitivity are both immediately energiz-
ing and profoundly nourishing for identity. Direct, explicit, second-
person modes of address (“You are very perceptive” or “That’s an
excellent observation”) are the most obvious form of such recognition,
but silent, respectful listening to a student’s comments or questions can
also constitute a powerful form of recognition, particularly when accom-
panied by a respectful gaze, gestures, or facial expressions. Explicit third-
person modes of address (for example, “As Jane noted a earlier in our
discussion . . .”) can have a similar function when made in the presence
of the person being recognized. Such statements demonstrate that one has
been listened to, understood, and remembered—that one has made a
lasting impact on one’s listener—such an impact being a kind of recog-
nition from the real.

Literary study also offers powerful forms of implicit recognition,
which results from reading, discussing, and writing about aspects of a
character or author that are also components of or issues concerning one’s
own identity. Whenever we read or hear others talk about someone
embodying identity attributes that we claim for ourselves as well, those
parts of ourselves are being recognized by the mere fact that they have
been expressed (and hence noticed) by someone else. Any approbation
that may be attached to these attributes provides further recognition for
us. A similar recognition is embodied in any mention a teacher may make
of books, movies, television shows, and popular songs that are important
to students: when someone else acknowledges the importance, or even
the existence, of something that is important to me, my own importance
is affirmed.

Today, literature classes provide greater recognition for the public
selves of many groups that were previously marginalized or entirely
excluded from literary study, including women; gay, lesbian, and queer
individuals; African American, Asian American, and Hispanic people; working class people; and adolescents. Yet, crucial components of the public selves of most of our students are still denied recognition in our classrooms. One such component is hypermasculinity, which manifests itself in public consumption and professions of enthusiasm for violent and brutal sports, movies, video games, music lyrics, and pornography. When such components of hypermasculinity are addressed at all in literature classes, the mode of address is usually ridicule, scorn, and condemnation. There is of course a logic to such nonrecognition: one way to change behavior is to deprive it of the nourishment of recognition. Sometimes this strategy works. But it does so only if all sources of recognition are cut off (which is very difficult to do when some of the sources have been internalized) and if one is simultaneously provided with an alternative source of recognition that adequately compensates for the loss of the first. In the absence of these conditions, withholding recognition can simply heighten the need for it and intensify its pursuit through precisely that identity component—in this case, violent hypermasculinity—that is being deprived of it. A more effective strategy for literary study would be to inquire into and explore these identity components in ways that manifest respect for the identity needs embodied in them and interest in understanding where these needs come from and what consequences they produce. Such a mode of inclusion offers recognition and respect for the individuals who possess these identity components but does not endorse the behaviors that often follow from them. And it sets the stage for providing potentially transformative recognition for the private and even unconscious elements of the self that underlie this public persona of hypermasculinity and that I will discuss later.

Structural recognition for the public self is found in the tacit acknowledgment of one's importance that is present in the ways in which group activities and relationships are organized. For example, as most literature teachers have understood for some time now, different arrangements of desks in a classroom (for example, a circle as opposed to columns of desks with all students facing the teacher) accords different degrees of recognition to students. A traditional seating arrangement, with students all facing the teacher, may suggest that it is more valuable for students to pay attention to the teacher and what the teacher says than it is to engage with other students. The same lack of recognition of students is embodied in the lecture structure, whereas teacher-led discussions and small-group discussions or workshops accord greater structural recognition to the
students. One of the most powerful forms of structural recognition in education generally is the jigsaw method developed by Elliot Aronson, in which students are formed into small groups with each member of the group being given a specific task that he or she must perform successfully for the successful completion of the group assignment. Here, the recognition of each student’s importance is built into and communicated by the structure, which, in addition, makes it necessary for the other group members to provide express recognition in the form of attentive listening and questioning of each student (135ff.). To the extent that such structures can be employed in literary study, it will provide enhanced recognition for students.

We also need to realize how structural recognition and its lack are embodied in our assignments, our grading criteria and procedures, and the relative importance of different factors in determining a student’s final grade. Assignments that are rigidly prescriptive—requiring all students to write about the same text or the same topic and/or to employ the same perspective or methodology—can embody (and be experienced as expressing) lack of recognition, and the poor performance that this lack of recognition may help to produce will itself then elicit another lack of recognition. A Procrustean, one-size-fits-all approach to reading and writing assignments, schedules (due-dates), and grading criteria is often experienced as embodying lack of recognition for students in several ways, including not caring about students’ needs at all, not recognizing individual differences among students and their respective needs, and not believing or trusting students. While it is probably not possible to avoid all Procrustean features in designing a course, awareness of the recognition implications of such design can motivate us to do so where we can.

Literary study also provides and withholds recognition through various institutional forms. Institutional recognition for one’s public self comes in the form of grades, awards (for example, for the best poem, story, or critical essay), and degrees. Equally important in literature classes, as feminists have been emphasizing for decades, is the institutional recognition accorded by the inclusion of components of one’s own identity in the literature deemed canonical. Opening an anthology or reading a syllabus and finding one’s own identity groups present in abundance provides significant recognition of one’s identity, whereas finding one’s own groups absent or under-represented can be identity-depleting. What is true of anthologies and syllabi is also true of curricula and course schedules: the presence of courses on Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton, and Hemingway but not on Emily Dickinson, George Eliot, Toni
Morrison, or Margaret Atwood offers institutional recognition for some identities and withholds it for others. Considerable progress has been made during the past forty years in enhancing the institutional presence of previously marginalized identities. The expansion of the term "literature" to include popular texts of all sorts has made a significant contribution to the expansion of institutional recognition to previously ignored or marginalized identities.

But as is the case with interpersonal recognition, many students' most important identity components—including the components of hypermasculinity—still receive little or no institutional recognition from literary study, apart from a few sporadic efforts to institute "masculinity studies." It is true, of course, that most literature courses, curricula, and anthologies have been and still primarily are masculinist (and white, and Euro-American), but most hypermasculine boys and men today don't experience this institutional recognition of the masculine as including their form of masculinity. In light of this fact, we might consider instituting courses that more explicitly name, and devote themselves to engaging and exploring, such components. Such possibilities might include the literature (including film) of war, of sports, of gangs, of revenge, and other types of aggressivity and violence. In addition to providing recognition for hypermasculine individuals, such courses could also set the stage for exploring the private and unconscious dimensions of hypermasculine identity, which I'll discuss shortly.

Cultural recognition is found wherever the elements and processes of culture manifest in some way the existence of a component of one's identity. In literary study cultural recognition is present most obviously in the topics and attributes foregrounded in texts' agents (characters), actions, and objects. Institutional recognition in literary study, as described above, is partly a function of providing students with access to the specific types of cultural recognition embodied in different texts. Perhaps the most fundamental source of cultural recognition is language itself, where the existence of words for certain categories, states of being, and actions recognizes and validates them while the absence of words for other identity components deprives them of recognition. An example is the way in which the absence of the title "Ms." withheld recognition from women as agents in their own right apart from their marital status (designated by "Miss" or "Mrs."). Finding words for one's experience can in and of itself provide profound recognition, for it indicates that somewhere at some time someone else experienced what one is oneself experiencing. Finding no words for one's experience, or at least none that
anyone has dared to utter in public, constitutes, in contrast, a significant nonrecognition of one's state of being.

Cultural recognition is also distributed through images. Underlying and in part defining identity categories (such as "woman" and "man") are prototypical (largely visual) images of particular physical features, actions, and personal attributes (see Johnson), and these images, as well as providing and withholding recognition themselves, also limit the application of the categories (and hence the recognition the categories confer) to a subset of the entire category. Thus, to the extent that words like "professor," "doctor," "judge," and "colonel" are associated with the prototypical image of a man, women who hold these positions are denied their due cultural recognition. And insofar as the category "man" is associated with images of big, muscular, tough, hard bodies engaging in strenuous, dangerous, and/or violent activities, men who do not possess these attributes will feel themselves deprived of recognition as men, and all men will tend either to suppress (keep private, refrain from expressing) or to repress (render unconscious and thus disown) parts of themselves that fail to conform to those images.

Recognizing for the Private Elements of Identity

A culture also provides recognition for certain emotional components of identity while withholding it from others. Such recognition is embodied not only in the words and discourses a culture has for different emotions but also in the provisions it makes for expressing specific emotions. American culture offers many opportunities for men to openly feel, express, and even act on hypermasculine emotions such as anger, pride, disdain, and triumph but tightly restricts the expression of sadness, vulnerability, dependency, and depression—emotions underlying most displays of hypermasculine behavior and against which such behavior is attempting to defend identity. For example, some candidates for public office have seen their support vanish when they expressed such tender emotions in public, or in some cases even confessed to having had them in the past. Literary study participates in such cultural withholding of recognition for tender emotions through conventions that exclude certain types of emotions and the texts that evoke them from literature courses. Expressions of anger, disdain, ridicule, and even contempt are not uncommon in literature classes, and when they occur any discomfort they may evoke is usually relatively mild. Expressions of sadness, helplessness, and compassion, in contrast, occur much less frequently, and when they do, they evoke more discomfort than their opposites—especially if
they are accompanied by choking, sobbing, tears, or anguished wailing. The silent prohibition of such emotions in the classroom, the embarrassment experienced by both the culprit and the witnesses when this taboo is broken, and the rejection of "tear-jerking" texts (such as the sentimental novels of the nineteenth century) as inferior or bad literature and hence not worthy of inclusion in anthologies and syllabi manifest the more general withholding of cultural recognition from the tender as opposed to the aggressive emotions. A culture that welcomed tears and anguish as much as laughter and anger would not have so many people (mainly men) who feel threatened by the presence of feelings of sadness, weakness, helplessness, and desires to submit to and be taken care of by more powerful others, and who thus feel the need to deny such tender feelings by embracing their opposites. To the extent that we can make our literature classrooms as welcoming of tears and compassion as of laughter and derision, we can begin to change this culture and thus reduce the violence it supports. As a first step in this direction, we might introduce our students to (and refamiliarize ourselves with) alternative conventions, such as that of the eighteenth-century man of sentiment who openly and proudly (if also, inevitably, sometimes histrionically) shed tears of sadness at the plight of characters on stage, or the tradition of the sentimental novel, which has enjoyed something of a resurgence over the past decade or so.

We might also try a more direct approach and engage students in reading literary texts dealing with traumas together with writing and sharing with the class narratives of their own traumas. This is an approach that Jeffrey Berman has used for thirty years now in many of his literature and writing classes at SUNY, Albany. In the four books that he has written on this method, he presents case after case of students who experienced profound healing as a result of the various forms of recognition that the local culture of Berman's classes provides for the feelings and experiences of their original trauma as well as of their ongoing efforts to cope with those experiences. What Berman's pedagogical practices reveal, among other things, is the need of most of his students (and hence of most people, we might assume) for recognition of their private identity components—and in particular their prohibited emotions—as well as their public selves. After finishing Berman's classes, many students report that they had never before disclosed their traumas to anyone and that the most beneficial part of the class was the non-judgmental recognition they experienced from the teacher and the other students when their private autobiographical stories of trauma were read either by Berman
alone or aloud (by either Berman or by the students themselves) to the entire class.

The traumas written about by Berman's students are of the dramatic type—being raped, sexually abused, physically abused, psychologically humiliated or shamed, or traumatized by parental discord or divorce. One of the most remarkable of Berman's findings is that a sizable majority of his apparently confident and well adjusted middle-class students have experienced acute traumas of this sort and as a consequence have identities that are in certain respects quite vulnerable. This fact alone suggests that trauma has a major presence in literature classes and that there is thus a substantial need to provide students with recognition for those parts of themselves that they have kept hidden as a result of these traumas. And when we add to this the virtually universal trauma of socialization and its excision of parts of the self, we must acknowledge that virtually all our students suffer from the nonrecognition accorded components of their private selves. To the extent that literary study can provide such recognition, it can reduce the need for people to seek identity support in violence.

Recognition for Unconscious Elements of the Self
Trauma produces not only a shameful hiding of certain parts of the self (the private self) but also a rejection or disowning of certain parts (the unconscious self), and for trauma to be healed, recognition for the unconscious, disowned parts of the self as well as the private and public parts is essential. Providing recognition for the rejected, unconscious parts of the self is the first step toward reclaiming these parts and integrating them into identity. And integrating these parts into identity is crucial both for personal healing and for the prevention of violence. Human identity is a function of experiences and memories of three different types: affective-physiological, perceptual-imagistic, and conceptual-linguistic. In healthy development, emotions are coordinated with images and action-schemas, both of which are subsequently translated into and integrated with the categories and concepts of language. Trauma disrupts this coordination and dissociates identity components and processes that had previously been integrated. Thus, individuals suffering from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) find the continuity of their states of mind interrupted by intrusive images and affective-physiological states that are associated with the original traumatic experience and that disrupt one's sense of affective-physiological well being and one's sense of bodily integrity and safety—the two most fundamental
levels of one’s identity. These dissociated elements of the self undermine identity even when they don’t become conscious, as is indicated by the sense of insecurity, purposelessness, and general malaise that often plagues individuals with PTSD.

The dissociations resulting from (both dramatic and low-grade) trauma are also prime factors in violence of all kinds. We have already discussed how men in American society are primed for violence by being socialized into masculine identities that have no room for sadness, tenderness, dependency, submissiveness, or helplessness. Such qualities have to be excluded from identity through a continuous effort, and one way of excluding them is to enact their opposites: toughness, hardness, aggressivity, and violence. Another means of keeping them at bay is to focus on their presumed presence in others and attack them there, as occurs when homophobic men project their own “feminine” feelings and impulses onto other men whom they perceive and attack as gay. But “feminine” qualities are not the only ones that American men have to reject; they also have to reject their desire for and enjoyment of aggression and violence. Men are expected to be aggressive and even violent but not to desire or enjoy the violence. To be bloodthirsty, brutal, and sadistic would contradict their identity as human, moral, and sane (as opposed to bestial, criminal, or insane). Thus, in order to satisfy their bloodlust, both men and women must believe that they do not desire or enjoy violence but engage in it only in the cause of self-defense or justice—hence proclamations such as that of George W. Bush that “we are a peace-loving nation” that has no alternative but to invade Iraq, Afghanistan, or another Evil Empire du jour. In men and women who do not recognize and take responsibility for their desire and enjoyment of violence, such desire satisfies itself unconsciously, behind their backs, as it were, and in contradiction of both their public and private selves. For this to occur, the violence has to be either disguised (for example, in the form of institutional, structural, or cultural practices that are not recognized as violence), or directed at targets that are presumed to deserve violent injury, or both. Both individuals and nations provide themselves with such suitable targets in two basic ways. One is by projection, in which they attribute to the Other qualities and intentions that presumably justify attacking the Other but that the Other does not actually possess (for example, the potential to build a nuclear device or to unleash a chemical attack on forty-five minutes’ notice). The other way of providing a suitable target to attack is by projective identification, in which one party provokes the other into actually manifesting the attributed quality, such
as when one nation identifies another as a nuclear threat and hence a potential target of military action and thus provokes this potential target to actually acquire nuclear weapons in order to protect itself from the projected military action of the first nation.

Helping individuals recognize, reclaim, and integrate both their tender and their sadistic qualities into their identities is the only sure way to prevent such vicious circles of violence. Owning one's tenderness will dramatically reduce one's need to demonstrate one's (individual or collective) toughness through (individual or collective) violence of the physical, institutional, structural, or cultural variety. Likewise, owning one's desire for and enjoyment of violence will render projection and projective identification not only less necessary (having owned one's own "evil" qualities, one now has no need of strategies for denying them) but also less feasible, since it is hard to condemn someone else for qualities that one knows oneself to possess as well. Moreover, the knowledge of one's own inner conflicts can constitute the basis for understanding how putatively "evil" Others may be struggling with the same sorts of inner conflicts and self-deceptions regarding themselves, and that the best response to these Others' belligerence may be to avoid being provoked.

To the extent that literary study can help one own and integrate these unconscious parts of the self, it can thus contribute to the prevention of violence of all four types. And there are a number of ways in which literary study can facilitate this process. One is by helping students understand how American men in general have been coerced by socialization to exclude both their tender and their bloodthirsty parts from their identities, how women have been coerced to eliminate all but their tender parts, what the psychological and social consequences of these exclusions are, how these rejected parts can be reclaimed, and what the benefits of such reclamations are. The best way to help students understand these processes is to have them study novels, stories, plays, poems, films, songs, and television shows in which the processes can be discerned. Identifying, exploring, discussing, and writing about characters' unconscious parts and the dynamics of their relation to the public and private parts will familiarize students with such components and processes, which will in turn prime them to recognize their own unconscious parts and to procure recognition from others for those parts as well. Such literary attention constitutes a kind of categorical recognition for any rejected qualities and their attendant processes that are part of the students' unconscious selves. And the presence of such recognition can
begin to render the rejection of the unconscious parts unnecessary. When
students realize that it is safe within the classroom to have tender parts and
also bloodthirsty parts (though it is not acceptable to act on the latter),
they will no longer guard so vigilantly against having or recognizing such
impulses and as a result may sooner or later begin to recognize and own
them. When recognition is provided—whether by a text, a teacher,
classmates, culture at large, or an institution—for elements of one’s self
that are disowned and unconscious, that recognition can help one to own
such elements, because now one acquires through such owning the
recognition accruing to these elements, which can compensate for the loss
of (cultural, institutional, structural, or now internal) recognition that
owning these elements also entails. Thus, providing all sorts of recogni-
tion for parts of the self that socialization forces one to disown can help
repair the traumas of socialization and aid in the development of a secure
identity that has less need of behavioral, institutional, structural, or
cultural violence to maintain itself.

This process can be enhanced by encouraging students to use their
understanding and explorations of characters as a basis for inquiring into,
exploring, and writing about the unconscious, rejected parts of their own
socially traumatized selves—in the same manner as Berman’s students
use reading about dramatic traumas as a basis for exploring and writing
about their dramatically traumatized private selves, and with similar
beneficial results. Reader-response analysis can be used to good effect
here. For example, by presenting students with texts or films in which
villains are punished, made to suffer, and even savaged and then asking
students to describe the emotions they experienced in response to the
violent punishments, teachers can help students recognize their own
desire for and enjoyment of violence. Ingmar Bergman’s film *The Virgin
Spring* produced the dawning of such a recognition in me when I first saw
it as an undergraduate. In the film, set in rural medieval Sweden, an
adolescent girl is brutally robbed, raped, and murdered by a band of
brothers who that night are given shelter from a storm by the girl’s family.
As the brothers lie sleeping, the girl’s father finds his daughter’s cross in
their possession and realizes why she has not returned home. After
methodically purifying himself, he proceeds to kill the brothers one at a
time. Having killed the adult brothers, he turns toward the youngest, a boy
of about six who had nothing to do with the girl’s rape and murder and
who is cowering in terror. Still enraged by what the older brothers have
done, the father kills the boy as well. No sooner has he done so than he
stares in horror at his hands, in anguished realization that he himself
harbors, and has enacted, the same brutality that has killed his innocent daughter. At this point, I realized that insofar as I had been exulting in the father's bloodthirsty vengeance, which had extended to the innocent boy, I possessed the same bloodthirsty impulses as not only the father but also the brutal killers themselves. Dramatic reading or viewing experiences of this sort, in which students recognize parts of themselves of which they had been ignorant, can help students begin to own and integrate unconscious and dissociated parts of themselves that prompt them in various ways to violence. Such reading experiences will not by themselves produce a more integrated identity, but they can serve as a basis for further exploration of the self via writing (stimulated by further reading) in search of other subjective manifestations of such rejected parts of the self, as well as of the causes of the rejection and the behavioral consequences of the unintegrated presence of these parts.

In addition to such synchronic integration of opposing parts of the self, a secure identity also requires diachronic integration, in order to maintain a sense of continuity through time. And diachronic integration, with the aid of the narrative structures that it generates and that in turn facilitate it, reduces one's inclination to violence in several ways. It does so, first, by further reducing the Other as a suitable target of violence, both through contributing to the withdrawal of projections from the Other and through enabling us to see the trauma underlying the Other's violent behavior and thus see the Other as a victim rather than merely a perpetrator. The reduction of projection occurs in two ways. First, diachronic integration renders identity more secure, through strengthening its sense of continuity through time, and this greater security reduces the need for defense and hence for projection. And second, diachronic integration produces an extended chronological structure that provides separate chronological positions for opposing parts of the self, a principle articulated by Ecclesiastes (and The Byrds' song) in the notion that there is a time for everything—a time for love, a time for hate, and so on. This greater capacity for ownership reduces the need to disown certain parts of the self by means of projection.

In addition to facilitating the withdrawal of projections from the Other, diachronic integration also reduces the Other's suitability as a target for violence by enhancing one's capacity to perceive the trauma underlying the Other's violence. When one has a more diachronically extensive identity, one sees not only oneself but also others as diachronically extensive beings rather than as punctual entities and is thus able to recognize (as the father in Pirandello's Six Characters in
Search of an Author insists we must do) the profound injustice of judging a person on the basis of behavior in one moment or period without knowing the previous moments or periods that gave rise to the behavior in question. Applied to oneself, this diachronically more integrated perspective reveals one's present self to be the result of one's past circumstances and the selves that encountered them, and this understanding provides not only additional assurance of continuity but also the basis for absolving oneself of full responsibility for one's past and present failings. A similar understanding of the Other occurs when one is more integrated diachronically: one sees perpetrators of violence not only in terms of their violence but also in terms of the trauma that inclined them toward violence. And insofar as one sees them more as victims than as perpetrators, one feels sympathy more than anger and is more inclined to help them than to harm them.

If one is rigorous, then, in tracing the chains of cause and effect in the perpetrator's history, one will eventually come to a point at which the perpetrator's responsibility for his violence dissolves: the point at which he was traumatized. And at this point, one's emotion of blame dissolves as well, for blame requires the attribution of responsibility. Tracing the violent behavior of characters back to the identity vulnerability that motivates it, and then tracing that identity vulnerability back to the prior trauma that produced it results in a comprehensive vision of the Other as a victim as well as a perpetrator. Such a vision, by altering our appraisals of who is responsible for the Other's action, reduces our hatred and blame and increases our sympathy and guilt for the other. As long as we see only the action and the agent, we hold the agent fully responsible. But as soon as we also begin to see that the agent cannot be held responsible for who or what he is—for the traumas and other experiences that, together with his genetic endowment (for which he is also not responsible), made him what he is—then we can no longer blame the agent and hate him.

And if we connect the dots even further, the line of causality often leads back to ourselves collectively, and the (culturally, institutionally, or structurally violent) policies that contributed to the Other's trauma, and from there to ourselves individually, insofar as we either supported, acquiesced in, or benefited from these policies in any way. If one is rigorous in tracing the chains of cause and effect in one's own history, one will eventually encounter points at which one's own behavior (for example, supporting lower taxes rather than pre- and post-natal care for children who are at risk, or supporting punishment rather than rehabili-
tation for convicted offenders) is revealed to contribute to the conditions that produce the traumas that underlie violent behavior, and when one encounters such points, one will feel not only sympathy but also guilt regarding the Other’s trauma and violence. Seeing the Other’s violence in the context of the other’s trauma, for which we bear some responsibility, changes our emotional response to the violent Other from blame, anger, and hatred to guilt, compassion, and sympathy. While the former emotions motivate us to do violence to the violent Other and thus reinforce the vicious circle of trauma and violence, the latter emotions motivate us to assume responsibility for the Other’s trauma and do what we can to heal it and prevent further traumatization and hence further violence.

In addition to evoking a different emotional response to perpetrators, this seeing oneself as partially responsible for the perpetrators’ victimization also renders violence toward these Others ego-dystonic: we now experience our indifferent and vengeful responses to these Others as contradictory of core elements of our identity, such as fairness, and this lack of internal recognition for (structural, institutional, and cultural) violence toward the violent other will further erode our motivation to perpetrate any of these forms of violence.

How, then, might literary study promote such diachronic integration? One obvious way is simply by reading novels and plays that take readers by the hand and lead them step by step along the multiple chains of cause and effect that link perpetration to victimization. Internalizing such narratives structures students’ perceptions and perspectives, fostering both the capacity and the inclination to view and experience the present in terms of both the past and the future. Indeed, since, as Wolfgang Iser pointed out, the very act of reading both requires and exercises these capacities of retention and protension, any reading of narrative may be deemed to foster such an inclination. But in addition to just having students read narratives, literature teachers can also help them pursue, in class discussions and in writing assignments, those elements of the Other’s experience that are not spelled out by the text (since, as Iser noted, all texts necessarily leave innumerable and substantial gaps in the accounts they present of both characters and their histories and circumstances). By helping students imaginatively infer the existence, the nature, and the concrete moment-by-moment particulars of the other’s traumatic experiences, literature teachers can strengthen students’ capacity for and intensify their habit of perceiving and judging real people as well as characters in this more fully integrated and temporally extended
manner. Such a pedagogical practice might be conceptualized as a particular way of enacting Fredric Jameson’s admonition, “Always historicize!” in regard both to one’s own life and to the lives of characters in texts. Both in reading and in self-scrutiny, this means striving to understand the prior subjective states and circumstances of the Other that give rise to every action of the Other’s, and further, to trace the causal chains of both the Other’s subjective states and his or her objective circumstances back to the point (within or beyond the text) at which trauma occurs and individual responsibility thus dissolves into collective responsibility. In reading, the capacity and habit of such rigorous and meticulous historicizing can be developed by helping students enact systematically and self-consciously the activities of protension, retention, and gap-filling and ask for each character, “How did he or she come to be that way and do that deed?” When one sees how each violent action is linked back to an offender’s traumatization-victimization, one experiences blaming the offender to be both unfair and incorrect, and hence ego-dystonic, in contradiction of an identity that includes fairness and intelligence among its components. In addition, the habit of judging others without first understanding their prior traumas might be reversed by reader-response analyses in which students chart and reflect on their feelings and attitudes toward various violent characters about whose respective traumas they possess varying degrees of understanding. Such experiences can help students recognize how their attitudes and behaviors toward perpetrators of violence are a function of the degree of understanding they possess of the perpetrator’s prior trauma, and this, in turn, can make rushing to judgment without adequate understanding ego-dystonic for them, insofar as it is experienced as antithetical to the same identity components of fairness and intelligence.

A more secure and integrated self—which owns rather than represses its traumatized parts, which owns rather than projects its anger and violent impulses, and which thus grasps its present identity as a function of its past states and experiences—will have a fundamentally different response to violent Others than a less secure and integrated self. Since it no longer has a need to disown its own violent impulses by projecting them onto the Other, since it no longer needs the Other to be violent in order to have an excuse to do violence to this Other, and since it now views an identity in terms of the past forces—particularly the traumas—that constituted it, the integrated self is more able to see the violent Other—whether a murderer, a terrorist, or simply an angry white male perpetrat-
ing institutional, structural, and cultural violence—as a traumatized Other struggling to maintain his identity, rather than as a force of evil that must be destroyed.

**A Radical Agenda**

My title suggests that using literary study as a means of helping students heal traumatized identities and thus prevent violence is a radical agenda, and it is so in several senses. It is radical first in the etymological sense, in that it attempts to address the root causes of violence. Such an approach to social problems, in addition, is nowadays itself radical in the sense of unconventional, since root-cause interventions have been pilloried for several decades by political conservatives who want to maintain the status quo. And third, approaching literary study as primarily a means of healing trauma and preventing violence is also radical in the sense of unconventional in that identity development and violence prevention are not usually seen as legitimate aims of literary study or functions to which it can feasibly aspire. What is not radical are the means by which this radical end is to be achieved: none of the practices of literary study that I have sketched out above is fundamentally innovative; all have been implemented before, and many are quite common. The only thing radical about these practices is the purpose for which they are to be deployed: rather than occasionally employing them as (somewhat whimsical) techniques for eliciting student interest in literature, we should systematically and rigorously implement, adapt, and refine such practices as the means of a radical intervention in identity and violence. Insofar as we can do so, we will produce personal benefits for our students and social benefits for everyone by helping to break the vicious circle of trauma and violence.

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**Notes**

1. As Honneth observes, economic struggles are also struggles for recognition, and economic deprivation constitutes lack of recognition (127).
2. For a more thorough account of these three registers, see Bracher.
3. See Aronson (69ff.) and Currie (108, 120, 125, 149, 162) on the importance of addressing the root causes of violence and Currie (109–13) on the conservative denial of the existence of root causes of crime.


——. *Empathic Teaching.* Amherst: U of Massachusetts P. Forthcoming.


