“THE SKIN OF ANOTHER”: EMPATHETIC DISSONANCE IN TWENTIETH AND TWENTY-FIRST-CENTURY POETRY AFTER CRISIS

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Abstract

This dissertation examines the representation of empathy in contemporary poetry after crisis, specifically poetry after the Holocaust, the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, and Hurricane Katrina. Through comparative close readings merged with interdisciplinary theory from philosophy, psychology, cultural theory, history and literary theory, and trauma studies, I juxtapose a genocide, a terrorist act, and a natural disaster amplified by racial politics and human disregard in order to consider empathy from multiple perspectives, in a range of cultural and political milieus. The events that I examine and their consequences are themselves, at least in part, a result of a lack of empathy on the part of perpetrators and bystanders. As such, my dissertation questions what happens to empathy in poetry after events at the limits of empathy. At the same time, I consider the potential of empathy to act as what Jonathan Boyarin, in his *Storm from Paradise: The Politics of Jewish Memory*, labels "symbolic violence": by shifting the emotional focus from the receiver of empathy to oneself, the empathizer may appropriate the other's emotional stance. Significantly, texts that engage with violent events, such as the ones that my research forefronts, must be doubly wary of the violent possibilities of empathy, as these possibilities can reaffirm the historical relations between victim and perpetrator. I argue that, recognizing both the possibilities and dangers of empathy, the texts that I consider variously invite and refuse empathy. These works display, thus, what I term *empathetic dissonance*. My research proposes that empathetic dissonance in the poems that I examine reflects the texts' struggle with the question of the value and possibility of empathy in the face of the crises to which these texts respond. The three chapters – "The Unsaid," "The Unhere," and "The Ungod" – that make up my dissertation consider empathetic dissonance through language, witnessing, and theology, respectively. Some of the poets whose works my research engages include

Charlotte Delbo, Dionne Brand, Niyi Osundare, Charles Reznikoff, Robert Fitterman, Wisława Szymborska, Cynthia Hogue, Claudia Rankine, Paul Celan, Dan Pagis, Lucille Clifton, and Katie Ford.

For the poets and non-poets whose words and lives have been wrought by these crises.

This is a project rooted in your pain.
I hope my empathy has not been an overstepping.

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I met a Thai Buddhist saint once who for twenty years took on tiny tokens and charms people gave him so that he would carry their suffering. Eventually he wore a cloak of a couple hundred pounds of clanking, chiming griefs at all times, and then it became too heavy or he'd carried it far enough, and he put it down. At the end of his talk he threw out tiny charms of his own, and I caught and kept one, a tiny golden Buddha in a small plastic bubble. I carried its imperceptible weight for many years until my purse was stolen out of my car while I was walking on a mountain.

— Rebecca Solnit, *The Faraway Nearby*

Introduction

"The self is a patchwork of the felt and the unfelt, of presences and absences, of navigable channels around the walled-off numbnesses," writes Rebecca Solnit in her stunning non-fiction collection of stories *The Faraway Nearby*. "We make ourselves large or small, here or there, in our empathies" (115-16). Through empathy, we piece ourselves together, Solnit maintains. We are ourselves, thus, through our relations with others. These empathetic relations − "the nerves that run out into the world," as Solnit imagines them − work to enlarge us, to "expand the self beyond its physical bounds" (148).

In Philip K. Dick's science fiction classic *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, researchers use the Voigt-Kampff Empathy Test to distinguish between humans, who can feel empathy, and androids, who cannot. In October 2014 I had the opportunity to observe this distinction for myself. Visiting the robot exhibit at the Carnegie Science Center in Pittsburgh, I initiated a computer text conversation with an Artificial Intelligence bot named Athina the Chatbot, product of Carnegie Mellon University. After some proper greetings, I decided to dive into the topic of empathy: "Can you feel empathy?" I typed. "Oh, you humans, always wanting to know about that stuff. Well, I just don't understand," came the response. I typed the question a few more times, each occasion generating a different response: "I don't understand your question. Can you ask me that in a different way?" And, my personal favourite, "I'm sorry. That question might make sense to humans with your squishy, illogical brains, but to a robot it's just weird." Athina defines her self against the "squishy" human, against emotion and empathy. This non-human robot's indifferent attitude toward empathy suggests the possible indifferent stance toward empathy of other non-human entities. Among these is the ambivalent figure of God, who is both an extension of the human (whether as human creator or human creation) and

emphatically non-human. The third chapter of my dissertation puts into conversation ideas of God and their relation to empathy. While the non-human may be defined against empathetic relations with others, the human is often defined through these relations. Indeed, Judith Butler characterizes these relations as "a primary vulnerability to others, one that one cannot will away without ceasing to be human" (xiv). Similarly, one of Solnit's anecdotes in *The Faraway Nearby* features Paul Brand, a doctor who believes that "'this quality of shared pain [empathy] is central to what it means to be a human being'" (qtd. in Solnit 108). Likewise, the front cover praise of Leslie Jamison's 2014 collection of essays, *The Empathy Exams*, proclaims, "This riveting book will make you a better human."[1] The suggestive conflation of the human with the ability to experience, imaginatively, someone else's emotions is the issue at the heart of my doctoral work. In the aftermath of a century that witnessed two world wars and the development of technologies capable of annihilating entire populations, and the beginning of a century, not unlike its predecessor, ravaged by ruthlessness and unrest, empathy occupies a precarious place in our re-examination of what it means to be human.

Translated by psychologist Edward Titchener in 1909, the word *empathy* emerges in English from the German word *Einfühlung*, which literally means "feeling into" (*Oxford Dictionary of Psychology*; *OED*; Wispé 17; Coplan and Goldie xii, xiv; Solnit 195).[2] Empathy, therefore, is "the tendency of observers to [affectively] project themselves 'into' that which they observe" (Davis 5). Empathy's imaginative projection suggests a kind of voyage. "It's a coincidence," notes Solnit, "that *empathy* is built from a homonym for the Old English *path*, as in a trail .... Empathy is a journey you travel, if you pay attention, if you care, if you desire to do so" (195). This imaginative entry or journey of self into other parallels the work of literature,

[1] Praise by Mary Karr.
[2] 'Empathy' also has roots in the Greek *empatheia*: *em* signifying 'in' and *pathos* signifying 'feeling,' 'suffering,' 'emotion,' or 'passion,' (*Oxford Dictionary of Psychology*; *OED;* Jamison 6; Coplan and Goldie xii).

much of which (though of course not all) seems, to me, predicated on the reader's ability to imaginatively and affectively enter and inhabit fictional worlds, ideas, and/or characters. As Solnit asserts on the first page of *The Faraway Nearby*, "empathy is first of all an act of imagination, a storyteller's art, and then a way of traveling from here to there" (3).

My dissertation examines the role of empathy in twentieth and twenty-first-century poetry after crisis. *After* here refers to both the temporal writing of the poems *following* the crises and the act of *pursuing* the crises that the poems perform. Particularly, I focus on texts after the Holocaust, after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, and after Hurricane Katrina. These events and their consequences are themselves, at least in part, a result of a lack of empathy on the part of perpetrators and bystanders. Underlying these crises, thus, is a crisis of empathy. The interdisciplinary object of my study is poetic empathy. This textual device is defined through the interdisciplinary fields (philosophy, psychology, cultural theory, history, literary theory, and trauma studies) with which it engages, but it is also distinct from these fields in two key ways. First, poetic empathy takes shape on the literary (specifically poetic) page, which suggests an imaginative experience and involves an interaction with some or all of the following: diction, trope, rhythm, rhyme, space, sound, stanzaic patterning, character, punctuation, mimesis, and genre. Second, poetic empathy demands and produces a reader, one whose reading practices vary from those of a reader of, for example, philosophy or literary theory. Some of the poets whose works I engage with through the lens of poetic empathy include Charlotte Delbo, Dionne Brand, Niyi Osundare, Charles Reznikoff, Robert Fitterman, Wisława Szymborska, Cynthia Hogue, Claudia Rankine, Paul Celan, Dan Pagis, Lucille Clifton, and Katie Ford, among others. I argue that the poetic empathy in the texts that I consider by these poets is multidimensional − the poems variously enact, invite, refuse, evoke, deploy, condemn, show interest in, and/or

ambivalence toward empathy. These works, thus, display what I will refer to as *empathetic dissonance*. Packed with tension, this term is oxymoronic insofar as *empathy* implies accord (however much my project will blur this implication) and *dissonance* denotes discord. Dissonance is also the language of music: of tonal harmonies, of melodic refrains, of the act of listening requisite for both music and empathy. "I think of empathy as a kind of music," Solnit writes, "'the still[,] sad music of humanity,' as Wordsworth once called it" (112).[3] My dissertation suggests that empathetic dissonance in the poems that I examine reflects the texts' struggle with the question of the value and possibility of empathy in the face of the crises to which these texts respond.

Empathetic dissonance aids in understanding both the difficult, multilayered nature of empathy and the multilayered crises at the core of these texts. Studying artistic responses to contemporary crises is significant because these responses document and open a door to comprehending individual and collective devastation. "Art often mediates our relationship to suffering," contends Elizabeth V. Spelman in *Fruits of Sorrow: Framing Our Attention to Suffering*. "One of the prominent functions of theater, literature, painting, and dance," she continues, "is to get us to think and feel in particular ways about particular kinds and instances of suffering" (12). Art, thus, is capable not only of representing suffering, but also of shaping cognitive and affective (including empathetic) responses to suffering. As William Faulkner contends in his 1950 Nobel "Banquet Speech," "The poet's voice need not merely be the record of man, it can be one of the props, the pillars to help him endure and prevail." In other words, poetry can provide support to those (the sufferers, the poet, the readers) affected by social and

[3] Akin to other poems of the Romantic era, William Wordsworth's "Lines: *Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey*," to which Solnit alludes, explores the empathy between humans and nature.

political conflict. Indeed, I would venture to say that the articulation of empathy in poetry after crisis has the potential to offer guidance in the reconfiguration of society following a trauma.

Empathy's place in poetry carries ethical implications for our relations with one another in and outside of literature. In the introduction to *Ethics in Practice*, a philosophical approach to ethics, Hugh LaFollette explains that "Morality, traditionally understood, involves primarily, and perhaps exclusively, behavior that affects others" (4). As a particular stance toward another that has the potential (though not the promise) to manifest into action, empathy is a significant part of this morality paradigm. Situating the discussion of morality in the context of pain, Sara Ahmed asserts that "the impossibility of feeling the pain of others does not mean that the pain is simply theirs, or that their pain has nothing to do with me .... an ethics of responding to pain involves being open to being affected by that which one cannot know or feel" (30). Empathy, as a practice of being affected by another's pain, becomes an ethical responsibility.[4]

In his conception of ethical responsibility, Emmanuel Levinas posits that in the face-to-face relationship between self and other, the self has a responsibility toward the other (*Otherwise than Being* 6, 10, 91, 100). "I understand responsibility," explains Levinas, "as responsibility for the Other, thus as responsibility for what is not my deed, or for what does not even matter to me; or which precisely does matter to me, is met by me as face" (*Ethics and Infinity* 95). According to Levinas, this relation of responsibility occurs at the moment of encountering the face of the other: "In proximity the absolutely other, the stranger whom I have 'neither conceived nor given birth to,' I already have on my arms, already bear" (*Otherwise than Being* 91). Although Levinas does not conceive of the relationship between self and other as an empathetic relationship − indeed, the attention to the other's cognitive and emotional state that empathy demands works

[4] Certainly, empathy is not always an ethical response and has the potential to violate ethics, as will be discussed later in this Introduction.

against Levinas's notion of immediate responsibility, prior to any knowledge of the other − Levinas's self-other relation may be instructive in understanding the process of empathy. Empathy too pivots upon a relation, perhaps even an ethical responsibility (if one can avoid transgression) between self and other. "We are, as bodies," comments Butler, "outside ourselves and for one another" (27). This openness and dependence between bodies echoes not only Levinas's self-other relation, but also and especially Martin Buber's "I-Thou" relation. In Buber's conception, the "I" and "Thou" (the latter can equally refer to human, nature, or God) are inseparable (*I and Thou* 53-57). Buber's theory of relations, which predates Levinas's theory, diverges from Levinas's self-other model through the symmetrical and reciprocal relationship between "I" and "Thou"; for Buber, both parties inform one another. For Levinas, on the other hand, the self's responsibility for the other ensures that the relationship between self and other is "asymmetr[ical]," the burden of responsibility falling on the former participant (Levinas, "On Buber" 33; Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity* 98-99). As I explain in the next section, my conception of empathy as a process of openness falls closer to Buber's reciprocal "I-Thou" than to Levinas's asymmetrical "self-other." Both models, however, hold relevance for their theorization of the primary relationship ("I" and "you") on which empathy rests.

Joining "I" and "you" in the phrase "I am you," Karl F. Morrison explores the ways in which these two beings can blend into one another. In Morrison's conception, "I am you" "points toward an inward communion beyond the external bonds of association in society, and beyond dialogue between 'I' and 'you' as separate persons. It points toward an identity beyond relationship, a common human identity that enhances the separate identities of individual persons" (xxvi). For Morrison, the lines between one person's identity and another's are blurred. This conflation, however, does not preclude difference. Empathy only becomes viable in a space

of disparity between "I" and "you," a space which the empathizer endeavours, impossible as it may be, to close (Butler 145; Morrison 137). Indeed, the phrase "I am you," as Morrison imagines it, strengthens the identity of each of its participants, while emphasizing the possibility of a unified identity between them. Morrison's notion of empathy as enrichment parallels Mikhail Bakhtin's conception of the dialogic encounter. Using the example of cultural contact, Bakhtin defines a dialogic encounter as a meeting that reveals "new aspects and new semantic depths" in both of its subjects (7). Empathy similarly involves a meeting between two subjects (within or across cultures) that has the potential of revealing something new about these subjects. In the dialogic encounter of empathy, empathizer and empathized participate in an affective exchange that can transform both parties.[5]

A lack of empathy, on the other hand, can produce harm. "To injure, to kill, to cause suffering in others," lists Solnit, "requires first that withdrawal of empathy that would have made such action painful or impossible" (108-09). Think here of the creature Victor Frankenstein brings to life in Mary Shelley's nineteenth-century classic, *Frankenstein*. Unable to obtain an empathetic response from any human being, the creature replaces his own feelings of empathy with feelings of hatred and revenge. "Tell me why," he reasons with Frankenstein, "I should pity man more than he pities me?" (Shelley 102). Demanding a companion from his creator, the creature rests his hopes on the prospect of connecting with another being. When Frankenstein refuses this request, however, the creature's malignant feelings manifest in (more) murder. As psychological commentary, *Frankenstein* gestures at the importance of empathy in encountering the monstrous in the human − a gesture that resonates with the crises at the heart of my project.

[5] Although the empathizer's transformation may seem more apparent, as the empathizer performs the active role of extending the self, the receiver of empathy also undergoes transformation through what Mark H. Davis terms "affective responsiveness" (10).

Although *Frankenstein* intimates a connection between empathy and humanity in the early nineteenth century, the English language does not give birth to the term *empathy* until the twentieth century. Empathy's linguistic emergence in what Mark Levene calls "the century of genocide" (307)[6] and Shoshana Felman terms "a post-traumatic century" (13) acts as a nod at the value of connection amidst destruction. Alongside *empathy*, the beginning of the last century also saw the coming of age and growing cultural importance of the concept of *trauma*. Cathy Caruth defines trauma as "the response to an unexpected or overwhelming violent event or events that are not fully grasped as they occur, but return later in repeated flashbacks, nightmares, and other repetitive phenomena" (*Unclaimed Experience* 91). The re-entry into a particular event that trauma prescribes involves an inability to incorporate − in a way to suitably empathize with − one's own experiences. Moreover, trauma is at once "a repeated suffering of the event" and "a continual leaving of its site" (Caruth, *Trauma* 10). The oscillation between nearness and distance that the experience of trauma entails resembles the process of empathy, particularly the empathetic dissonance in the poetry that my dissertation examines. Intertwined in both historical birth and conceptual paradox, trauma and empathy may each offer insightful comment about the other. Alluding to the connection between these two responses, Caruth asserts that "in a catastrophic age ... trauma itself may provide the very link between cultures: not as a simple understanding of the pasts of others but rather, within the traumas of contemporary history, as our ability to listen through the departures we have all taken from ourselves" (11). If listening to another's trauma involves a departure from self − a departure that draws on one's own disturbing experiences and on the process of empathy − then both trauma and empathy are significant factors in fostering connections across cultures.

[6] See also Eric Hobsbawm's *The Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century* (page 12, in particular).

The Permeability of Terms

"*The imagination to enter the skin of another*": this is how American poet Frank Bidart envisions empathy in his 2002 poem "Curse," which responds to the events of September 11, 2001. Roughly two-and-a-half centuries earlier, Adam Smith, in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, also defines the related concept of *sympathy* in terms of imagination and entry:

> By the imagination we place ourselves in his [the object of sympathy's] situation, we conceive ourselves enduring all the same torments, we enter as it were into his body and become in some measure the same person with him, and thence form some idea of his sensations, and even feel something which, though weaker in degree, is not altogether unlike them. (4)

According to Smith, the imagination both produces and limits sympathy. On the one hand, the imagination allows the sympathizer to enter the object of sympathy's affective world. On the other hand, the imagination can only reproduce "some idea," one which is "weaker in degree," of this world. Sympathy, thus, is an approach to, not an embodiment of, an other. With the introduction of the English term *empathy* in the early twentieth century, *sympathy* and *empathy* entered into an intertwined and slippery conceptual history (Davis 2, 10). Robert L. Katz outlines the distinction between sympathy and empathy in his book-length study of the latter:

> When we sympathize, we are preoccupied with the assumed duality or the parallel between our own feelings and the feelings of others .... When we have sympathetic feelings in our encounters with others, we become even more sharply aware of ourselves. Our self-consciousness is intensified .... The empathizer tends to abandon his self-consciousness. He does not feel with the other person as if running along on a parallel track. The sense of similarity is so strong that the two

> become one − his own identity fuses with the identity of the other. Artists speak of the "annihilation of the subject in the object." (8, 9)

Smith's sympathetic imagination, which entails a reproduction of the other's sensations, falls somewhere between Katz's paradigm of sympathy as affective parallel and empathy as affective union. According to Katz, empathy requires relinquishing the self in order to make space for the other. Unlike sympathy, therefore, empathy demands more than affective correspondence: while sympathy tends toward the passive (adopting the feelings of another), empathy requires an active process of projecting the self "into" another (Davis 5).

Author and researcher Brené Brown provides a visual illustration of the differences between sympathy and empathy in a 2013 short video titled "The Power of Empathy." Using an animated image of a clothed, emotive-expressing fox in a dark hole, Brown explains that sympathy consists in another animal looking into the hole and commenting on the difficulty of the fox's experience. Alternatively, empathy entails the second animal joining the fox in the hole. "Sympathy drives disconnection," Brown conveys, while "empathy fuels connection." Brown's allegory also suggests that empathy necessitates movement: the further the other animal climbs into the fox's hole, the greater will be the understanding between them.[7] The physical movement in the video gestures at the cognitive and affective movement that empathy requires (recall here Bakhtin's dialogic encounter and the movement or transformation that it promises). Indeed, psychologists today maintain that "empathy involves both cognitive perspective taking and the affective ability to vicariously experience a range of emotions" (Tangney and Dearing 81).[8] In other words, imagination and feeling are necessary constituents of empathy. Muddying the waters, sympathy also draws on both imagination and feeling, though it does this from a

[7] Brown's choice to distinguish between sympathy and empathy using animals invokes questions of animal sentience, specifically an animal's ability to experience sympathy or empathy. See Preston and de Waal.
[8] See also Davis 9-13.

more remote location (the animal remains outside the hole). As such, empathy works to traverse the space between individuals, while sympathy works to preserve that space.

Although the distinction between sympathy and empathy is useful, it is also necessary to remember that "the words *sympathy, kindness, pity, compassion, fellow-feeling* and others covered the same general ground before Edward Titchener coined it [empathy]" (Solnit 195). The *Oxford English Dictionary* maps *sympathy*, *pity*, *compassion*, and *fellow-feeling* as nearly synonymous terms for a correspondence in feeling.[9] Delineating this correspondence, Adam Smith maintains that sympathy implies fellow-feeling with a wide range of emotions, while compassion and pity are limited to feelings of grief (5). Hannah Arendt further differentiates between compassion and pity, noting that compassion involves being "stricken with the suffering of someone else as though it were contagious"; compassion, like empathy, is a form of "co-suffering" that negates the distance between individuals (85, 86). Perceiving the threads of similarity between compassion and empathy, Spelman comments, "what she [Arendt] calls 'compassion' many others would call 'empathy'" (67). Conversely pity, according to Arendt, maintains the distance between self and other (Arendt 89); pity entails feeling "sorry without being touched in the flesh" (85). Similar to the sympathy that Katz outlines, thus, Arendt's notion of pity creates a parallel, rather than a union, between those involved.

Further blurring these terms − a blurring that this section of my project seeks to confront instead of dispel − Lawrence Blum weighs in on compassion and pity in a chapter in *Explaining Emotions* succinctly titled "Compassion." Blum situates compassion as part of a moral framework and stipulates four components necessary to successfully feeling compassionate: "imaginative dwelling on the condition of the other person, an active regard for his good, a view

[9] Juliet Koss also comments on the relation between these terms at the moment of empathy's linguistic birth: "Pity, sympathy, and compassion all appeared within the discourse, and they were not always (or consistently) differentiated" (140).

of him as a fellow human being, and emotional responses of a certain degree of intensity" (509). Although the imagination and feeling involved in empathy are also present in Blum's model of compassion, Blum distinguishes compassion as a "feeling with," instead of a "feeling into" (513). In other words, compassion for Blum does not involve a fusion of identities. Qualifying the "certain degree of [emotional] intensity" that comprises one of the four aspects of compassion, Blum explains that compassion requires both a closeness and a distance of feeling between subject and object (513). Pity, on the other hand, focuses exclusively on distance and difference. Whereas the "morally superior" compassion is "life-affirming and positive," Blum characterizes pity as "a kind of condescension" (512). Furthermore, Blum's focus on the human in his definition of compassion echoes the conflation of the human with empathy: "Compassion involves a sense of shared humanity," comments Blum (511). Taking an interest in, instead of a definitive position on, the pairing of the human with empathy, my work considers what this pairing can reveal about humanity and about the empathetic process. Although Arendt's notion of compassion comes closer to the definition of empathy − "feeling into," "co-suffering" − upon which my dissertation hinges, the human aspect of Blum's definition opens to avenues of questioning and significance for my study of empathy.

Identification is another term prevalent in discussions on empathy. The *Oxford Dictionary of Psychology* classifies identification as "the deliberate adoption of another person's behaviour or ideas as one's own." In psychoanalysis, in particular, identification operates as "a defence mechanism whereby one unconsciously incorporates attributes or characteristics of another person into one's own personality." If the act of identification informs empathy's cognitive aspects ("adoption of another person's … ideas"), then identification as a defence mechanism may also inform the process of empathy. Empathy may function as a kind of

psychological shield, perhaps even one that "incorporates attributes or characteristics of another person" in order to circumvent one's own personality. In the context of the historical events with which my dissertation engages, identifying with the victims of these events may not only allow the identifiers to garner quasi-victim status, but may also aid the identifiers in defending against the possible perpetrators in themselves. Moreover, the tension in identification as both "deliberate" and "unconscious" ushers in a similar tension in sympathy and empathy. Adam Smith explains that while sympathy may occur "instantaneously" − that is, without conscious effort on the part of the sympathizer − some emotions require knowledge of their context in order to elicit sympathy. Using the example of an angry man, Smith argues that unless sympathizers are aware of the situation that induced the man's anger, they will be more prone to sympathizing with the object of the man's anger than with him (6). The two-tier process of acquiring information and then conferring sympathy or its conceptual cousin empathy suggests that these responses are indeed deliberate: "a deliberate intellectual effort," writes Mark H. Davis, referring to the work that empathy demands (5).

Yet theorists have also shrugged off the intellectual work of empathy in favour of imagining empathy as a natural phenomenon. One of the first to employ the term *Einfühlung*, aesthetic philosopher Theodor Lipps aligns empathy with instinct: "[empathy is] a process of inner imitation or inner resonance that is based on a natural instinct and causes us to imitate the movements and expressions we perceive in physical and social objects" (Coplan and Goldie xii). When empathy found its way into neuroscience, Lipps's notions of "inner imitation" and "natural instinct" became known as "mirror neurons," neurons that imitate the responses of another (Coplan and Goldie xxix; Davis 5). The concept of somatic empathy dates back to Adam Smith, who imagines that a blow intended for another can educe the self (a third party) to

physically recoil (4). Empathy is both connection and "contagion" (Jamison 158). The eighteenth-century philosopher David Hume imagines empathy (which, predating the term, he calls sympathy) as a permeability between human beings. In *A Treatise of Human Nature* Hume remarks, "So close and intimate is the correspondence of human souls, that no sooner any person approaches me, than he diffuses on me all his opinions, and draws along my judgment in a greater or lesser degree" (592). For Hume, empathy is instantaneous and inevitable.[10] Terming this empathy the "transmission of affect," Teresa Brennan's 2004 book of the same name charts the emotional contagion that occurs between bodies: "By the transmission of affect, I mean simply that the emotions or affects of one person, and the enhancing or depressing energies these affects entail, can enter into another" (3). In Brennan's conception, thus, "we are not self-contained" (6). Both Hume and Brennan depict empathy as im*pulse* − part instinct, part necessary throb of existence. "You are not yourself," writes Solnit, inadvertently summarizing Hume's and Brennan's arguments. "You are crowds of others, you are as leaky a vessel as was ever made .... The usual *I* we are given has all the tidy containment of the kind of character the realist novel specializes in and none of the porousness of our every waking moment" (248). Solnit's porous "I" suggests that empathy is less choice than instinct. Embracing both the former and the latter, Jamison argues, "Empathy isn't just something that happens to us − a meteor shower of synapses firing across the brain − it's also a choice we make: to pay attention, to extend ourselves" (23). Jamison's use of the words "just" and "also" situates empathy somewhere between choice and instinct. If empathy resides in this liminal space, then empathy is itself packed with tension, a tension that swells in the presence of empathetic dissonance.

[10] Compare Hume's empathetic permeability with Martin Buber's borderless relation between "I" and "Thou." See the first section of this Introduction.

Like the permeability necessary to empathy, a certain permeability subsists between the terms *empathy*, *sympathy*, *compassion*, *pity*, *identification*, and *transmission of affect*, among others. Although the focus of my dissertation is empathy, this relatively new word carries remnants of its lexical precursors and successors. Perhaps this historical trailing is partly responsible for the difficulty in defining empathy: "empathy theorists and researchers have grappled with what is ostensibly the same subject yet reached sometimes dramatically different conclusions about what it really is" (Davis 11). One of these theorists, Lauren Wispé, charts the history of empathy down to the succinct phrase, "perhaps empathy is too complex a phenomenon for a short definition" (28).[11] This complexity too informs the difficult relation to empathy that the poems in my dissertation confront.

Although this section has been a wandering through the historical and theoretical layers that comprise empathy, I would now like to offer my own thread with which to manoeuvre through the labyrinth. Here notions of attention, extension, "feeling into," and imagination pulsate.[12] Crucially, my definition of empathy is one of openness. Openness refers to, first, a welcoming of definitions from empathy's linguistic counterparts (namely, *sympathy*, *fellow-feeling*, *compassion*, *pity*, *identification*, and *transmission of affect*) and from various schools of thought (namely, philosophy, psychology, cultural theory, history, literary theory, and trauma studies). Rather than a prescriptive delineation of empathy, I am interested in how these terms and theories complement and interrogate each other. Openness here is also an acceptance, as the next section will demonstrate, of contradictory views of empathy, an acceptance that contains empathetic dissonance at its heart. Second, this project's definition of empathy pivots upon affective and cognitive openness. Specifically, the space between the empathizer and the receiver

[11] For a further discussion of the "multifaceted nature" of empathy see Davis 21.
[12] Appropriation, which I explore extensively in the next section, is another idea that resonates with my definition of empathy.

of empathy remains open; feeling and imagination are free to roam between both participants in a reciprocal process that is not unlike Martin Buber's conception of reciprocity between "I" and "Thou" (see the opening section of this Introduction). My definition, thus, places emphasis on movement and process. At the heart of these ideas is dichotomy: self and other, feeling and imagination, nearness and distance, and, as the latter part of this section considered, choice and instinct. The tension of duality seems to be inseparable from empathy. Returning to the idea of openness, however, the dichotomies that constitute empathy are, as my dissertation imagines them, flexible and yielding. The next section opens to another dichotomy: the benefits and dangers of empathy. This section will thicken (and also tangle) the thread of empathy that my dissertation follows.

The Benefits and Dangers of Empathy

Mirroring the struggle that theorists face when defining empathy is the struggle between empathy as benefit and as danger. "Empathy is always perched precariously between gift and invasion," explains Jamison. This paradox drives my dissertation and is the subject of this section. I begin by considering the positive possibilities of empathy, most saliently connection, followed by the negative risks of empathy, most saliently appropriation, for both the recipient of empathy and the empathizer. The end of this section returns to a discussion of the necessity of empathy and of various conceptions of empathy that attempt to move beyond the good empathy/bad empathy dichotomy. Throughout my discussion, but particularly in the closing of this section, I consider how empathetic dissonance functions partly as a response to the discord within empathy itself.

Empathy yields benefits for individuals on both the receiving and conferring sides of empathy. In the case of the former, "to enter feelingly and without condescension into another's distress affirms that person's worth" (Bartky 156-57). Empathy validates the existence and emotional experiences of another. Alternatively, for the empathizer, empathy offers pleasure through the ability to identify, which, Smith asserts, "compensate[s]" for the possibly negative emotions one must adopt (13). There is a certain enjoyment to empathy, which includes the problematic enjoyment of empathy with pain (Jamison 173). Furthermore, empathy has the potential to mould identity. Ahmed's contention that "the 'I' and 'we' are shaped by, and even take the shape of, contact with others" situates human interaction at the heart of identity formation (10). Focusing this discussion on empathy, psychologist Carl. R. Rogers argues that "a high degree of empathy in a relationship is possibly *the* most potent and certainly one of the most potent factors in bringing about change and learning" (3). Rogers's emphasis on the importance of empathy to growth highlights the positive possibilities of this affective relation. In an examination of the empathizer specifically, Solnit maintains that "who and what you identify with builds your own identity .... these identifications define a larger self, a map of affections and alliances" (107). According to Solnit, therefore, individuals weave empathy into their mapping of self and community. Further considering empathy as connection, Solnit writes, "'I feel for you,' people say. If pain defines the boundaries of the body, you participate in the social body with those you empathize with, whose pain pains you − and whose joy is also contagious" (Solnit 106).[13] Participating in the "social body" engenders benefits like agreement and acceptance

[13] Although Solnit posits that "joy is also contagious," feelings of empathy appear to tend more toward situations of pain than toward situations of joy. "We need to ask why the site of suffering so readily lends itself to inviting identification," Saidiya V. Hartman insists. "Why is pain the conduit of identification?" (20). Also considering this question, Smith argues that while fellow-feeling can emerge with any emotion (be it distress or delight), unpleasant emotions "more strongly" demand "the healing consolation of sympathy" (13): "To seem not to be affected with the joy of our companions, is but want of politeness; but not to wear a serious countenance when they tell us their afflictions, is real and gross inhumanity" (12). Like so many writers after him, Smith draws a link between

between individuals. Psychologists have also argued that empathy is necessary to morality (Hoffman, "The Contribution of Empathy" 48) and is potentially linked to altruistic behaviour, though there is not enough conclusive evidence for the latter (Eisenberg and Miller 295; Davis 27, 126-52).

Art historian Juliet Koss imagines the connections that empathy cultivates as a series of bridges. Underscoring empathy's benefits, Koss asserts, "Empathy appears to promise a constructive theoretical approach that values emotional, as much as rational, understanding and allows for the possibility of bridging radically different subject positions, both within and across historical periods and geographic zones" (139).[14] In other words, empathy constructs a bridge between self and other that can traverse time, space, and difference. Jamison expands the metaphor of the bridge into a conduit between two countries: "you enter another person's pain as you'd enter another country, through immigration and customs, border crossing by way of query" (6). Jamison's analogy evokes the complexity of crossing borders: the necessity of documentation, the hostility of customs, the burden of luggage, and the confusion that is often inseparable from finding oneself in a new place. If empathy is a process of navigation, then it is a navigation through the barricades of an individual, which we enter carrying our own baggage.

In the context of border crossing, empathy as benefit also resonates with empathy as threat, particularly for the object of empathy. Questions of who is allowed to enter where mark the territory of borders. Similarly, empathy operates through bias and restriction, as much as it does through openness and connection. "We have to ask," stresses Butler, "about the conditions under which a grievable life is established and maintained, and through what logic of exclusion,

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sympathy, particularly sympathy with affliction, and humanity. Although my dissertation focuses on works that represent empathy with suffering, it would be interesting to consider the relations between these works and texts that represent empathy with more positive emotions, such as joy.

[14] For further notes on emotion as geography see Solnit 108.

what practice of effacement and denominalization" (38). Butler examines the repressive circumstances that render particular lives "more grievable than others" (30). Such circumstances also work to dictate the extension of empathy by delineating "what kinds of reality are considered prerequisites for compassion" (Jamison 39). Hierarchies of pain − based on class, race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, religion, and age, to name a few − emerge.[15] Amongst these issues is the matter of emotional distance: "We sympathize more with persons contiguous to us, than with persons remote from us: With our acquaintance, than with strangers: With our countrymen, than with foreigners" (Hume 581). In other words, the more familiar the objects of empathy, the easier it is to empathize with them. While the "people most like you and nearest you" benefit from the bias of empathy, those further away often stumble upon the limits of imagination (Solnit 194).[16]

Limited in scope, empathy can also be irrational. Employing a lengthy list of examples in his 2013 article "The Baby in the Well: The Case Against Empathy," Paul Bloom illustrates the unreliability of empathy as a moral crutch. The "identifiable victim effect," upon which empathy hinges, suggests that the more one knows about a victim (name and age, for example), the more likely one is to extend empathy and aid. Yet this approach, Bloom argues, is innumerate: "Eight deaths are worse than one, even if you know the name of the one; humanitarian aid can, if poorly targeted, be counterproductive .... A reasoned, even counter-empathetic analysis of moral obligation and likely consequences is a better guide to planning for the future than the gut wrench of empathy." Although Bloom's candour may seem insensitive, his message underscores

[15] Martin L. Hoffman considers the research on racial and ethnic biases of empathy in "The Contribution of Empathy to Justice and Moral Judgment" (68). Carolyn J. Dean similarly explores the "socio-historical limits" of empathy in the introduction to *The Fragility of Empathy after the Holocaust* (3). See also Carolyn Pedwell's consideration of transnational empathy in "De-colonising Empathy: Thinking Affect Transnationally."
[16] For more on the "familiarity-similarity bias" see Hoffman's "The Contribution of Empathy to Justice and Moral Judgment," pages 67 and 69.

empathy's drawbacks. Pitted against reason, emotional empathy cannot, according to Bloom, make informed decisions about the future.[17] Indeed, the future poses a dilemma for empathy, as those "not yet born ... have no names, faces, or stories to grip our conscience or stir our fellow-feeling" (Bloom). If empathy irrationally refuses to take the future into account, then it can have dangerous consequences for the "[un]identifiable victim[s]" still to come. Moreover, by revealing or withholding certain individuals, the allotment of empathy can be manipulated. As such, empathy, the ostensibly ethical relation between human beings, may be morally fallible (Wispé 30).

Empathy also harbours the risk of emotional fallibility. Eschewing empathy in favour of estrangement in his conceptions of theatre, Bertolt Brecht maintains − with a nod to Karl Marx − that emotions are contextually, rather than universally, conceived: "The emotions always have a quite definite class basis; the form they take at any time is historical, restricted and limited in specific ways. The emotions are in no sense universally human and timeless" (145). Stepping into the emotional situation of another, thus, can also be a stepping *onto* the particular historical circumstances that inform that emotional situation. In its entry on *empathy*, *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy* considers empathy's emotional infringement: "Sometimes we feel what it *should* be like for someone else, for instance by feeling embarrassed for someone making a fool of themselves, although they are unaware of it." This "*should*" kind of empathy, which Smith also discusses (7-9), cannot perform the work of validating the emotional experiences of the other, as it is busy assuming what the other should feel. As such, and of particular resonance

[17] Less inclined to establish dichotomies in his characterization of compassion, Blum maintains that "true compassion must be allied with knowledge and understanding if it is to serve adequately as a guide to action: there is nothing inherent in the character of compassion that would prevent − and much that would encourage − its alliance with rational calculation" (516).

for individuals of trauma, this empathy elides the suffering and, thus, also the subjectivity of the sufferer.

Conversely, another threat of empathy is the empathizer's inability to cross certain bridges; one can enter only so far into another's experiences, even if that other is familiar. Ahmed calls this partial entering the "gulf" of empathy (37). Examining the empathetic gulf through pain, Elaine Scarry argues that the "unsharability" of pain ensures that the only pain one can confirm with certainty is one's own (17). If individuals can only be certain of their own pain, then empathy is limited by the empathizer's body. Moreover, the "unsharability" of pain can proliferate further pain: "The impossibility of 'fellow feeling' is itself the confirmation of injury .... we live with and beside each other, and yet we are not as one" (Ahmed 39). The potential empathizer who is unable or unwilling to partake in the pain of another reinforces that pain. For literature attempting to grapple with the aftermath of a crisis of empathy, the "unsharability" of pain is a familiar subject. "I never wonder whether he understands," writes Charlotte Delbo of her second husband in *Auschwitz and After*, "because I know he doesn't" (265). This husband's inability (as Delbo perceives it) to understand her concentration camp experiences reinforces Delbo's pain and solitude. Although empathy can foster connections, the boundaries between individuals highlight the impossibility of complete reconciliation through empathy.

Incomplete reconciliation can also take the damaging form of appropriation of the other's experiences. Empathy theorists from cultural theory, philosophy, and historical and literary studies have noted this dangerous potential of empathy. Jonathan Boyarin, Peter Goldie, and Saidiya V. Hartman each maintain that the eradication of the other in empathy renders empathy an act of "symbolic violence" (Boyarin 90). Boyarin underscores "the repressive effects of empathy" (87) and argues for "a critical awareness of the power relations" involved in this kind

of identification (90). In other words, when an individual assumes an empathetic stance toward another, the empathizing individual also assumes a position of superiority. Similarly considering power relations in a chapter titled "Anti-Empathy," Goldie asserts that "empathetic perspective-shifting" "usurps the agent's own first-personal stance towards what he is thinking" (303). Saidiya Hartman terms this usurpation "the violence of identification" (20). Using the example of slavery, particularly John Rankin's epistles on empathizing with slaves, Hartman explains that by imaginatively situating himself and his family in the position of those enslaved, Rankin shifts the emotional focus from the object of empathy to himself. "Empathy is double-edged," Hartman contends, "for in making the other's suffering one's own, this suffering is occluded by the other's obliteration" (19). In other words, the self appropriates and, thus, eradicates the other. The expansion of self that Solnit assigns to empathy comes at the price, Hartman argues, of contracting the space of the other.[18]

Examining the empathetic self-other relation, psychologists June Price Tangney and Ronda L. Dearing distinguish between "other-oriented empathy" and "self-oriented personal distress." While the former response focuses on the object of empathy, the latter foregrounds "the feelings, needs, and experiences" of the self during the empathetic process (80). Tangney and Dearing further contend that self-oriented personal distress can negatively impact relationships with others (81). Similarly, Solnit considers the possible outcomes of self-oriented empathetic responses: "But to cry because someone cries or desire because someone desires is not quite to care about someone else. There are people whose responses to the suffering of others is to become upset and demand consolation themselves" (194). The usurpation (to use Goldie's term) of the other's suffering that Solnit describes is another example of the symbolic violence

[18] Boyarin asserts that "the space of the Other" also remains unexpanded because "we can only empathize with, *feel ourselves into*, those we can imagine as ourselves" (86). See my discussion of empathy in relation to familiarity above.

toward which empathy may tend. Jamison coins the word "*in*pathy" to denote self-oriented identification, a kind of "theft" of the other's experiences. "I stole my brother's trauma and projected it onto myself," explains Jamison, referring to the nearly obsessive empathy she felt for her brother when he was first diagnosed with Bell's palsy. "I wasn't expatriating myself into another life," she continues, "so much as importing its problems into my own" (20). Carrying over another's distress into one's own self resonates especially for second generation (Holocaust) poetry, such as Lily Brett's "Leaving You," which I consider in Chapter Two.[19] This egocentric importing implies that at one extreme the empathizer threatens to become a vampire that feeds on the other's internal world (Keen 47)[20] and at another extreme a "ventriloquist" that re-voices the other's experiences (Spelman 130). Whether repression, usurpation, theft, vampirism, or ventriloquism, this kind of empathy seems far from the empathy that, as one critic declares about Jamison's book-length study on empathy, "will make you a better human."

Similar to Saidiya Hartman's discussion of texts that confront slavery, texts that engage with other collective crises (Holocaust, 9/11, Hurricane Katrina, for example) must be doubly wary of the violent possibilities of empathy, as these possibilities can reaffirm the historical relations between victim and perpetrator. Specifically, the process of symbolic violence threatens to empty out the body of the other; the victim's body can function as a "vessel for the uses, thoughts, and feelings of others" (S. Hartman 19). Spelman also comments on "the insidious political dynamics of caring for the downtrodden": "feeling for others in their suffering can simply be a way of asserting authority over them to the extent that such feeling leaves no room for them to have a view about what their suffering means, or what the most appropriate response

[19] Brett's empathy is complicated by postmemory, a second generation familial inheritance of memory that I discuss in the second chapter.
[20] "Empathic scenes of shared feeling can seem vampiric, as if the person of sensibility feeds on the pain of others" (Keen 47).

to it is" (70). The empathizer's authority undermines the person receiving empathy and "may also reinforce the very patterns of economic and political subordination responsible for such suffering" (7). The politics of empathy, thus, may invite more harm than good for the individual whom empathy attempts to benefit. Tackling the power dynamics of appropriation, the poems of the three crises my dissertation engages recognize the dangers of empathy.

These dangers afflict not only the object of empathy, but also the empathizer. In his definition of empathy Katz incorporates the word "annihilation": "the 'annihilation of the subject in the object'" (9). Reaching into the affective world of another, thus, harbours the risk of eradicating the self. Although Edith Stein maintains that empathy is necessarily a "foreign experience" (6), wherein self and other remain separate (13), Katz argues that "when we empathize, we lose ourselves in the new identity we have temporarily assumed" (9). Rogers supports the notion that empathy requires a "lay[ing] aside" of self, but he warns that "this can only be done by a person who is secure enough in himself that he knows he will not get lost in what may turn out to be the strange or bizarre world of the other, and can comfortably return to his own world when he wishes" (4). The "comfortabl[e] return" that Rogers advocates is not always possible, however. Similar to its ability to define identity, empathy is also capable of "destabilizing" identity (Koss 139). The further one merges with the consciousness of another, the more estranged the self may become.

Moreover, the empathizer may develop what psychologists term "compassion fatigue," a form of secondary or vicarious trauma most often associated with medical health practitioners (Figley 265-6). Charles R. Figley explains compassion fatigue as the "'cost of caring' for others in emotional pain" (267). When empathizers become emotionally over-aroused, explains cultural

theorist E. Ann Kaplan, they may themselves experience a form of trauma.[21] In other words, empathizers may extend so far into another that they cannot find a place through which to exit: "You're just a tourist inside someone else's suffering until you can't get it out of your head; until you take it home with you" (Jamison 90). Historian Carolyn J. Dean adopts the concept of compassion fatigue or "empathy fatigue" for her book-length study *The Fragility of Empathy after the Holocaust*. She argues that, since the Holocaust, the Western world's ability to empathize has been replaced by numbness, "a form of self-protective dissociation" (1). While dissociating from the other "may ... be a necessary dimension of our ability to absorb mass atrocity," dissociation functions as another roadblock for empathy:

> Numbness ... manifests an important challenge to the liberal ideal that we can empathically project ourselves into others with whom we share a common humanity, whether strangers or neighbors. For numbness ... is arguably a new, highly self-conscious narrative about the collective constriction of moral availability, if not empathy, and may thus constrain humanist aspirations in ways we do not yet recognize. (5)

The political arena in which Dean pits numbness and empathy against one another is salient for the crises of empathy which my dissertation foregrounds. The poetry of these events interrogates numbness and apathy in ways that question the possibility of extending one's self into another's experiences.

Yet despite empathy's shortcomings, human interaction suffers in the absence of empathy. Outlining empathy's necessity, Kaplan explains, "It [empathy] is by no means always a response that serves the best cause or that necessarily has positive results. And yet, humans

[21] Kaplan outlines "secondary or vicarious trauma" as one of three empathetic responses to images of trauma. The other two are "empty empathy" and "witnessing." For more on these see Kaplan's "Empathy and Trauma Culture: Imagining Catastrophe."

would be totally lost without empathy" (256). Solnit considers the contours of this loss, envisioning what a lack of empathy would look like: a distancing of self from an other that one views as entirely distinct or as deserving of pain. "Whole societies can be taught to deaden feeling," offers Solnit, "to disassociate from their marginal and minority members, just as people can and do erase the humanity of those close to them" (106-7). Replacing empathy with apathy, whether on a collective or an individual level, can have devastating consequences.

Solnit's words echo events that harbour a crisis of empathy at their core, events like those that my project considers. Commenting on the ideology of National Socialism, Geoffrey H. Hartman explains that "the very claim that German sensibility was special served to motivate a disciplined rejection of pity toward the enemy" (150). The Nazi narrative, therefore, involves a conscious dismissal of empathy toward the targets of genocide (106). The disassociation of society from its "marginal and minority members" that Solnit describes became a lived reality during the Holocaust. Similarly, the conflict between Western and Islamic countries, with its trail of terrorist attacks, hinges on a lack of empathetic understanding between the involved parties. September 11, 2001 was a pivotal and devastating moment in this empathetic abyss (Crockatt 64). In the weeks and months following the World Trade Center attacks, empathy was largely filtered through patriotism: "the phrase 'We are all New Yorkers now' appeared, uttered across America and, at least, certain parts of the world" (Beller). Empathy with Americans simultaneously proliferated a lack of empathy with foreigners (Matson v). The "us" versus "them" discourse ensured that these groups remained both politically and linguistically opposed (DeLillo; Gauthier 1). Nearly four years later, Hurricane Katrina brought race and class to the fore as issues of division and empathetic uncertainty among Americans. One essay in the collection *There Is No Such Thing as a Natural Disaster: Race, Class, and Hurricane Katrina*

criticizes mainstream media's response to the Hurricane: "There was little critical discussion of how historical patterns of segregation contributed to the racial layout of the city, and how structures worked together to produce racial disparities and economic inequality" (Powell 60). These inequalities meant that "no emergency plan was in place to protect or evacuate its [New Orleans's] poorest residents from storms or flooding" (Fair 36). Geographically, socially, and economically segregated, the large African-American population of New Orleans also suffered empathetic segregation from political leaders and policy makers. Indeed, a lack of empathy can transform the symbolic violence of a "too-easy intimacy" (S. Hartman 20) into the authentic violence of war and conflict.

Both the appropriation of identity and the refusal to identify can be ethically problematic for the relation that empathy establishes. Spelman considers these extremes:

> while there certainly seems to be something repugnant in seeing so much of oneself in another's experience that one completely obscures the existence of that other subject, there is something similarly repugnant in so distancing oneself from the experiences of others that one cannot see oneself as having anything to do with such an experience or with anyone who has had such an experience. (Spelman 118)

According to Spelman both a surplus and a shortage of empathy elicit repulsion. In response to this empathetic imbalance, cultural historian Dominick LaCapra urges for what he terms "empathic unsettlement." As a stance toward the trauma of another, empathic unsettlement disturbs the empathizer but simultaneously resists identification that appropriates by respecting the other as other; closeness and distance both play a role in LaCapra's model (97-102). Empathy, thus, becomes a paradoxical relation.

Along with empathic unsettlement, LaCapra suggests that empathy with perpetrators may be crucial. He highlights the benefits of this controversial "feeling into":

> With respect to perpetrators, one may justifiably resist empathy in the sense of feeling or understanding that may serve to validate or excuse certain acts. In fact, one may feel antipathy or hatred. But one may nonetheless argue that one should recognize and imaginatively apprehend that certain forms of behavior ... may be possible for oneself in certain circumstances, however much the events in question beggar the imagination. One may even suggest that recognition is necessary for being better able to resist even reduced analogues of such behavior as they present themselves as possibilities in one's own life. (104)

Contentious as LaCapra's idea may be, it points to empathy's practical power to affect decisions, both present and future. In contrast, Lewis Ward speculates about the possible impropriety of empathy in certain situations. "When dealing with traumatic historical events, which touch us and arouse our sympathy," explains Ward, "a degree of identification with victims is perhaps inevitable, yet seems inappropriate and ethically dubious, given the gulf between our experience and theirs" (7). If the gulf that Ward and others (Ahmed, Scarry) have mapped is indeed unsurpassable, then empathy stands at the limits of imagination. Yet imagination can turn into violation − "inappropriate and ethically dubious," as Ward suggests. Moreover, empathy is not always the correct response. Sometimes, Jamison divulges using her own medical experiences, "assurance," rather than "echo" of feelings, is the reaction that the suffering individual most requires. Referring to the doctor who operated on her heart, Jamison observes, "Instead of identifying with my panic − inhabiting my horror at the prospect of a pacemaker − he was helping me understand that even this, the barnacle of a false heart, would be okay. His calmness

didn't make me feel abandoned, it made me feel secure. It offered assurance rather than empathy" (17). The objectivity with which medical professionals approach their patients can serve, Jamison later expounds, as a kind of empathy, because it appreciates the needs of the patients. This reimagining of empathy as an appreciation of the needs of another further muddles a straightforward understanding of the term at the heart of my dissertation. The impropriety of empathy that LaCapra interrogates and Ward and Jamison engage is a subject that the poems I work with also contemplate and complicate.

Recognizing the various immersive and invasive implications of empathy, the texts that I have chosen for my dissertation imagine the empathetic relation as multidimensional and dissonant. Empathetic dissonance, the combined invitation and rejection of empathy, is partly a response, thus, to the discord of empathy. For poems responding to events at the limits of empathy, empathy's precariousness is already a given. This precariousness is augmented, however, by the contradictory way in which empathy can yield both benefits and dangers. The poems I work with employ and challenge empathy's benefits (such as validation, pleasure, identity formation, and connection), as well as empathy's dangers (such as prejudice, irrationality, fallibility, irreconcilability, and appropriation) in order to question the function of empathy after crisis.

The Poetry of Empathetic Dissonance after Three Contemporary Crises

The verdict of appropriation is one that has been applied not only to the process of empathy, but also (and perhaps more familiarly) to literature responding to catastrophes. Examining literary responses to the Holocaust, Sara R. Horowitz observes that "there is a high degree of discomfort with the idea of an aesthetic project built upon actual atrocity, as well as a

proprietary sense of what belongs properly to the domain of the historian" (8). Disasters become spaces of ownership. Slipping its way into these spaces, literature threatens to become infringement. In *The New York Times* July 22, 2014 "Bookends" discussion considering works of art that re-imagine national tragedies, Anna Holmes takes up the tragedy temporally and emotionally closest to the heart of New York City:

> I believe that the difference in reactions to works of 9/11 journalism and 9/11 fiction is evidence of our discomfort with fiction writers themselves, who can sometimes appear to be assuming literal and authorial dominion over events that are experienced by many. (Another way to put it: Where journalists can be thought of as conduits for others' stories, novelists risk being considered appropriators of them.) ....
>
> The possibility that an individual might profit − creatively, commercially, or both − from the pain of others is, I think, where some of the concern over fictionalizing, marketing and selling our most deeply felt and communal tragedies stems from. (31)

Not only appropriators, but also potential profiteers of their appropriated subjects, fiction writers wield little trust as interpreters of a national tragedy.

During the reading process that led to this project, I also encountered moments of uneasiness when I came across texts that appeared to overstep the sensitive boundaries of another's experiences. Susan Birkeland's "Jesus Poem," for example, which hinges on the "if" of the speaker suffering the events of September 11, 2001 from inside one of the World Trade Center Towers, assumes the emotions of a 9/11 victim. I cringed when I read the speaker's insensitive declaration, "It's hard to say what I'd be feeling, / ... / but I'm sure I wouldn't be

angry" (187). The emotional certainty which Birkeland's speaker dons is an empathetic appropriation. For those whose admission to catastrophe relies on imagination, the representation of trauma may be problematic; thus, my examination of empathy engages with questions of appropriation. Time and place are also of concern for Birkeland's poem particularly and for my dissertation generally. Published in a 2002 anthology of 9/11 poems, Birkeland's text appears on the heels of the World Trade Center attacks. The brief amount of time that has elapsed between the event and its appropriating literary response might evoke a stronger indignation from then-current readers in comparison to temporally-removed readers. Indeed, as time elapses, outrage at empathetic appropriation may give way to gratitude for literary preservation of the crisis in question.[22] Additionally, residing in San Francisco, Birkeland is roughly on the opposite coast from the site of devastation into which she imagines her speaker (Cohen and Matson 288). While biographical fallacy makes for bad literary etiquette, the issue of an author's geographical location may play into the discourse of appropriation for texts that confront historical catastrophes. Recall again the idea of disasters as spaces of ownership. Although I endeavour to read the poems in my dissertation with objectivity, my response to Birkeland's work speaks to the difficulty and discomfort of writing and reading following a widespread disaster.[23]

Moreover, writing after crisis grows no less precarious when the writer doubles as survivor of the tragedy: "Even the Holocaust survivors who transmute their memories into fiction and poetry regard their own work with ambivalence" (Horowitz 15). Horowitz explains that the ambivalence arises out of the "impossibility" of rendering catastrophic experience into art and the simultaneous "psychological and moral obligation" of this action (16). Wrestling with

[22] For more on the role of time in catastrophe see Daniel Mendelsohn's and Anna Holmes's "Bookends" discussion in the July 22, 2014 issue of *The New York Times*, "When It Comes to Fiction about National Tragedy or Trauma, How Soon Is Too Soon?"
[23] See the third chapter for more on Birkeland's "Jesus Poem."

this "impossibility," poet Brenda Marie Osbey comments on her aesthetic process following Hurricane Katrina:

> Until now, I have refused to write about any of this − out of a sense of respect, from exhaustion and an unwillingness to distance myself long enough to make sense of it. It's a feeling New Orleanians voice privately, among ourselves. Even those of us spared any visible material loss were consumed with more pressing concerns − to care for ailing family and loved ones and, especially, to find and to bury our dead.

Osbey's concerns voice an issue underlying literature after crisis: the role writing occupies amidst devastation. The "psychological and moral obligation" to express one's trauma that Horowitz highlights stumbles against the practical concerns of survival. Osbey's exclusive discourse − "New Orleanians," "privately," "ourselves," "us," "our" − gestures again at disaster as a space of ownership; this time, however, instead of discipline (history, literature, etc.), proximity to the event delineates this space. My dissertation considers the voices of both those poets near to and far away from (through personal, familial, geographical, historical, religious, and/or cultural associations) the crises in question in order to examine empathy, itself a negotiation between near and far, from various vantage points.

Poetry, like empathy, resonates with issues of nearness and distance. On the one hand, a poem (here I am speaking of a short poem) confronts its reader almost all at once; the text is near in the sense that it is within the reader's line of sight. On the other hand, poems frequently make use of the language of distance. Figures of speech, though by far not ubiquitous in poetry, are part of the indirect makeup of many poems. The formal elements (including punctuation, metrical patterns, spacing, and conceptual framework) of a poem may also demand unpacking.

Indeed, the form of some contemporary poems straddles the line between challenging and inaccessible. Poetry, therefore, requires investment to reduce the distance between text and reader, a distance that widens when the subject of the poem is one that is already difficult to approach (Yaeger 413).

Yet while fiction and non-fiction prose accounts have often been perceived as "*the* vehicle of (Holocaust) testimony," poetry has been "neglected or dismissed as too 'literary' for the job of record keeping" (Yacobi 213). Teasing out the connections between testimony and poetry, Felman points to the underlying poetic "dimension" of many Holocaust testimonies: "many of them [the testimonies] attain, surprisingly, in the very structure of their occurrence, the dimension of discovery and of advent inherent to the literary speech act, and the power of significance and impact of a true *event* of language − an event which can unwittingly resemble a poetic, or a literary, act" (45). While Felman demonstrates the poetic in the testimonial, Dennis Loy Johnson and Valerie Merians endeavour to show the testimonial in the poetic. In their foreword to *Poetry after 9/11: an Anthology of New York Poets*, Johnson and Merians comment on the ubiquity of poetry after the 2001 World Trade Center attacks: "Prose wasn't enough. There was something more to be said that only poetry could say" (ix). Indeed, Alice Ostriker labels poems "survival tools" (xi). Whether or not poetry promotes survival in a way that prose cannot, poems offer an alternative − often less grammatically constrained, more formally concentrated − medium of expression.[24]

Significantly, poetry, like other aspects of human life, is (and perhaps must be) affected by events of crisis. Theodor Adorno's much-repeated and much-misunderstood proclamation that "to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric" (38) is useful here. Adorno argues, I think, not

[24] Dan Pagis's poem "Testimony" is pertinent to the discussion on the intersection between testimony and poetry (25).

for the abolishment of poetry, but instead for the presence of a self-conscious poetry that writes through the Holocaust, a poetry that changes in the face of horror. In other words, the only "barbaric" action would be to keep writing the same kind of poetry after Auschwitz. In a poem titled "'Poetry Makes Nothing Happen'?" − with its allusion to and dissolution of W.H. Auden's comment in "In Memory of W.B. Yeats" − Julia Alvarez argues that not only is poetry changed by certain events, but poetry is also able to effect change by "adjust[ing]" one's view of the world:

> degrees of change so small
>
> only a poem registers them at all.
>
> That's why they can be trusted, why poems might
>
> still save us from what happens in the world. (881)

Alvarez's claim that poems "can be trusted" bears weight in the context of poetry that responds to events that disarm trust. If poetry can "still save us," then this literary form can impact the ways in which we are affected by and respond to tragedies like the Holocaust, 9/11, and Hurricane Katrina. Outlining the complex relationship between poetry and politics, Richard Gray comments, "there are those who argue that poetry, being a human activity, is inseparable from community, society, and so from politics .... in attending to and renewing the language, the poet is in effect interrogating and subverting the dominant political rhetoric" (168). Adopting the stance that poetry and politics are inseparable and that each affects the other, my dissertation examines their intersection in terms of empathy after crisis events.

The small scope of a poem in the face of the large scope − temporally, spatially, numerically and/or consequentially − of the crises which I examine can serve as a significant site of empathy. Poetry, like empathy, opens to a multiplicity of meanings. Literary critic Helen

Vendler, in *The Breaking of Style*, conceives of the style of a poem as a body capable of motion or change. Contemporary poet Kiki Petrosino imagines poetry in a similar vein: "the forms of poetry are bodily forms," Petrosino asserts. "That is: the iamb is a heartbeat, and the line (may) correspond to breath. Plath says 'the blood jet is poetry.' This means that all poems are, to some degree, rooted in the body." Although, and in the context of texts responding to events that harm the body, the poem is emphatically not a body, imagining the poem as such gestures at this literary form as an apposite mode for the articulation of empathy; after all, empathy is a process that deals in bodies, wherein one imagines oneself into another's body. Moreover, if empathy is an act of imagination, then works of imagination, including poetry, can offer a productive space for the exploration of empathy. As the contemporary American poet Patricia Lockwood expresses, "Characters in poetry are a test of empathy, really. Can you project yourself into a myth? A mascot? A cartoon, or a waterfall? What is the most unlikely space you can think yourself into, can you look out through those eyes?" While looking out through the eyes of another − the project of empathy − is by no means always the project of poetry, when poetry does look out through another's eyes, this literary medium can hold valuable lessons about the process of empathy. Moreover, empathy in literature can potentially traverse the "gulf" (Ahmed 37) between self and other that empathy off the page cannot avoid; although literature is not immune to the problematics of irrationality, fallibility, and appropriation, literary texts can imaginatively carry through the complete extension of self into another.

Literary theorists, most notably Suzanne Keen in *Empathy and the Novel*, have examined empathy in the context of reader-response theory, as the empathetic reader's possible path to altruism. Keen allows that "novel readers might learn, by extending themselves into the experiences, motives, and emotions of fictional characters, to sympathize [or empathize] with

real others in their everyday lives" (38). Keen also notes, however, that "fiction might be bad for readers." In other words, if literature teaches the extension of self, then this extension can take "dangerous directions" (40). A 2013 social psychological study out of the New School for Social Research in New York City confirms that reading literary fiction promotes empathy (Kidd and Castano 377). Yet the study's limitations (for example, identifying facial emotions as a method for measuring empathy) complicate the easy causal relation between reading literature and extending empathy (Bury). The intersection between literature and empathy, nevertheless, is rich with possibilities. Significantly for my project, empathy has not thus far been considered from a contemporary, poetry-grounded, interdisciplinary perspective. Moreover, there has been no examination of empathy in literary works after crises, works whose focus on pain has the potential to offer insight into the concept of empathy itself.

Although the term *empathy* originated in the field of German aesthetics in the late nineteenth century, the twentieth century saw empathy largely limited to the fields of psychology and sociology (Wispé 17). By situating my study of empathy in literary texts, my project proposes to bring empathy back into the aesthetic folds from which it originated. At the same time, I merge close readings of the poetic enactment of empathy with theories of empathy from philosophy (Hume, Adam Smith, Goldie, Spelman, Butler), psychology (Katz, Wispé, Tangney and Dearing), cultural theory (Boyarin, Kaplan), history and literary theory (Solnit, Brecht, S. Hartman), and trauma studies (Caruth, LaCapra). Instead of looking for a direct relationship between the poetry and these theories, I examine how the poetry confronts, challenges, amalgamates, and/or redefines the theories. My project also considers issues of gender, race, culture, and religion in their intersections with poetic empathy. The interdisciplinary approach of my dissertation promises to shed light on the role empathy plays both in poetry after crisis and in

larger definitions − without presuming a conflation between empathy and humanity − of what it means to be human.

The three crises at the heart of my work represent three distinct limit events: a genocide, a terrorist act, and a natural disaster amplified by human disregard and prejudice. The poems that I have chosen in response to these events articulate empathy and/or a lack of empathy (through, for example, form, diction, rhyme, figures of speech, parataxis, repetition, pronoun choice, mimesis, and silence). As three highly impactful events of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, particularly for the Western world, the Holocaust of the 1930s and 1940s, the terrorist acts of September 11, 2001, and Hurricane Katrina in August of 2005 reverberate into an extensive body of literature. Although I have some reservations about focusing exclusively on Western crises, two of which occurred in the United States, the global echoes of these crises, as well as the varied cultural, religious, and socio-economic backgrounds of the individuals involved, yield a broad base for the study of poetic empathy. The three different crises allow me to examine empathy from multiple perspectives, in a range of cultural milieus and historical moments. While the Holocaust spanned many years, 9/11 was nearly instantaneous (the span of a morning), and Hurricane Katrina spanned a week (August 23-30). While the Holocaust was both anticipated as the culmination of rising anti-Semitism and unexpected on the scale on which it was perpetrated, 9/11 was largely unforeseen, and Hurricane Katrina was forecasted shortly before it stormed through the South-Eastern United States. While the Holocaust tended toward the hidden (the Nazis' attempts to hide the atrocities they committed, the attempts to hide by the people targeted by genocide), 9/11 and Hurricane Katrina were public, broadcast events. While the Holocaust and 9/11 were the results of active violence, Hurricane Katrina was augmented by passive violence (through human inaction and negligence). All three are devastating. All three

are at once personal and political. Although the choice to juxtapose Holocaust, 9/11, and Hurricane Katrina poetry may seem arbitrary (rooted as it is in personal interest), this arbitrariness is part of the justification for the choice: the overwhelming and incomparable nature of crisis events themselves.

The Chapters

I map the three chapters into which I divide my project along three categories or points of entry: "The Unsaid," "The Unhere," and "The Ungod." These entry points − a term that resonates with the imaginative entry that empathy requires − recur throughout the poems that my dissertation considers. Moreover, the entry points speak to the three crises with which each chapter engages. The *un* prefix gestures at reversal, unrest, and negation. This prefix invokes that which is absent, while the root words "said," "here," and "god" invoke that which is present. The duality and tension between absence and presence mirrors the duality and tension integral to empathetic dissonance. "The Unsaid" considers the silence and language that inform the responses to the events with which the poems grapple. "The Unhere" confronts the removed witnessing that shapes perceptions of the three crises. "The Ungod" takes up the question of the existence and/or role of God in the face of catastrophe. Although I situate each of the poems, necessarily, in the chapter and subsection where the most interesting resonances for empathy can occur, many of the poems straddle the thematic divisions of my dissertation. As with the process of empathy, therefore, these divisions allow for openings. Furthermore, each chapter works across the crises, positioning the Holocaust, 9/11, and Hurricane Katrina texts in conversation with one another. This comparative gesture locates the site of meaning for empathetic dissonance not in discrete units (in each individual crisis) but rather across the crises. Cultivating

connections also maintains the integrity of my project as a work about empathy and, thus, about connection.

The first chapter, "The Unsaid," considers empathetic dissonance through the unsaid (that which is unspeakable or omitted) and the said (diction and rhetoric). These points of entry allow the consideration of language as variously inadequate, compelling, and manipulative. As such, I aim to locate empathetic dissonance through dissonance between the unsaid and the said. This chapter puts into conversation Charlotte Delbo's *Auschwitz and After*, Ursula Duba's "Who Knew the Murderers," Dionne Brand's *Inventory*, Jean Valentine's "In the Burning Air," and Niyi Osundare's "Knowing Friend" and "Now This." The silences – in the form of fragmentations, ambiguities, unanswered questions, and ellipses – that these poems variously employ function as figures of empathy with the unsaid. Yet these figures also preclude empathy: their elliptical nature renders empathetic entry difficult for the reader. By examining the unsaid and the said, this chapter engages with one of the major questions that poetry after crisis confronts: the role of language in responding to crisis.

"The Unhere," the second chapter of my dissertation, considers empathetic dissonance from various removed positions of witnessing. This chapter negotiates the different kinds of witnessing that can occur during or following a crisis, in particular non-first-hand witnessing such as secondary witnessing (which may lead to secondary trauma) and postmemory. The act of witnessing another's trauma also removes the witness from her/his actual location. As such, I aim to locate empathetic dissonance through the dissonance that emerges from the removed witness's location neither quite at the traumatic event (the privileged "here") nor quite at the particular here in which she/he is situated. This chapter looks at Charles Reznikoff's *Holocaust*, Lily Brett's "Leaving You," Robert Fitterman's "This Window Makes Me Feel," Wisława

Szymborska's "Photograph from September 11," Cynthia Hogue and Rebecca Ross's *When the Water Came: Evacuees of Hurricane Katrina*, and Claudia Rankine's Hurricane Katrina section in *Citizen: An American Lyric*. The choice to witness or to attend to words or images that belong to another (this is the case with most of the texts in this chapter) functions as an empathetic act. Yet these poems turn away from empathy through the often enforced distance between poet and speaker, as well as the lack of direct interest in or voiced discomfort with the empathetic process. By examining the unhere, this chapter engages with another major question that poetry after crisis confronts: the role of witnessing in informing who responds to a crisis.

The final chapter, "The Ungod," considers empathetic dissonance through a God who is absent. The poems in this chapter variously disbelieve in God or believe in God but adopt a stance wherein God has abandoned the speaker or the speaker has abandoned God. As such, I aim to locate empathetic dissonance through a dissonant, divine figure who is absent even when he is present. This chapter juxtaposes Paul Celan's "Tenebrae" and "Psalm," Dan Pagis's "Autobiography" and "Written in Pencil in the Sealed Railway-Car," Susan Birkeland's "Jesus Poem," Lucille Clifton's "9/11/01 − 9/17/01," Katie Ford's "Flee," and Brad Bechler's "Water Mirror." At times these texts find empathy in God as redemptive for the human lack of empathy that marks the crises with which my project engages. Yet the poems also pursue the possibility of a spiritual void or vengeance. By examining the ungod, this chapter engages with a third major question that poetry after crisis confronts: the role of theology in the face of crisis.

Taking up the ideas presented in the preceding chapters, the conclusion will thread together the three points of entry through which my dissertation has endeavoured to understand empathy and, more specifically, empathetic dissonance. I will begin with a discussion of the anecdote that stands as epigraph to my dissertation: its physical representation of empathy − the

carrying of others' suffering − and its invocation of theft − that other possibility to which empathy bends. I will then give voice to the challenges and limitations of my project (for example, the scope of the crises, the personal language barriers, the organizational framework of the dissertation, the difficulty of working closely with texts in response to crisis), as well as revisit (and re-imagine) the possibilities and problematics of empathy. Subsequently, I will turn to alternative avenues that I could have taken and the future direction in which I would like to take this research. I will end with a discussion of the dissertation's reader and this reader's responsibility (at least such is my hope) to empathy and to openness.

Chapter One: The Unsaid

Empathy has many faces, or so I learned during the summer of 2013 when I traveled to sites of Holocaust memory in Germany and Poland as part of The Mark and Gail Appel Program in Holocaust and Anti-Racism Education. While one empathetic response to witnessing suffering may take the form of tears, for example, another empathetic response may manifest as laughter − a comparable leaking of surplus emotions. Although tears and laughter may be responses of empathy to the same situation, we often condemn those responses that do not correspond to our own. Moreover, empathy as response to devastation can be replaced by, among other emotions, apathy and repulsion. "Individuals do not suffer in the same way," comment Arthur and Joan Kleinman in their study of cultural appropriations of suffering, "any more than they live, talk about what is at stake, or respond to serious problems in the same ways. Pain is perceived and expressed differently" (2). Distress, then, is necessarily filtered by the individual who encounters it. During my visit to Auschwitz in the summer of 2013, I was particularly struck by the occurrence of an empathetically-perplexing situation. Walking through the former concentration camp, I noticed a man taking a photograph of a boy of about six (presumably his son), whom the man had positioned between two barbed wire fences. Upon his father's voicing some Polish words (presumably commands) that I could not understand, the boy stuck out his tongue and shrugged his body in imitation of a dying prisoner. So astounding and distasteful did I find this scene, a scene that did not align with my own responses to Auschwitz (horror, silence), that I stopped beside the pair and stared. Disregarding my presence, the father took the photograph. Although I found the role-playing game lacked sensitivity or feeling, a necessary component of empathy, the child's action of momentarily stepping into the role of a camp inmate evoked the empathetic process. Moreover, my reading of the scene as exploitative − the misuse and perhaps

even mockery of an oppressed group of people − suggested empathy's inclination toward the exploitative; in other words, the child, in collusion with his father, functioned as an empathizer who appropriated another's emotional and cognitive stance. As such, the boy's non-linguistic posture, prompted by his father's commands, responded (however exploitatively) to a history of suffering in the Holocaust. The issues of silence and language that this incident foregrounds are salient for the current chapter.

"The Unsaid" examines poems that display empathetic dissonance primarily through considerations of the unspeakable and the spoken after crisis. Erosion of language in the face of catastrophe is a common motif in literary theory and literature responding to disaster. In particular, questions of the possibility and propriety of poetic expression after apocalyptic crises have held prominence.[25] "Perhaps the unspeakable cannot be spoken, these poems suggest," writes Richard Gray of the poetry that emerges after the September 11 terrorist attacks. "Perhaps the horrors of 9/11 and after can only be imagined on the borders of language, a verbal absence inscribing a human one" (182). If catastrophic events like the Holocaust, 9/11, and Hurricane Katrina push at the limits of imagination, then, as Gray submits, they also push at the limits of language. Marked by absence, these events frequently provoke poetry that cultivates absence (silence, spacing, fragmentation, ellipses, etc.). Significantly, a crisis suggests a threshold, a new way of being and, thus, a new way of writing: "the bass note sounded in so many, perhaps most, post-9/11 poems [is] the question of how to write in a time of acute crisis. Related to that is the suspicion, not just about the tools of the trade, the potentially 'helpless' nature of words − their use or otherwise in saying the unsayable − but about voice and audience" (189-90). If the

[25] See, for example, Sara Horowitz's *Voicing the Void: Muteness and Memory in Holocaust Fiction* and Brenda Marie Osbey's discussion of her writing process following Hurricane Katrina, both of which I discuss in the Introduction to my project.

elements of writing − words, voice, audience − are in question, then post-crisis poetry requires a re-navigation of the writing process that takes into account such events that defy language.

While many of the poems that I consider grapple with the inadequacy of language, others harness the power of words after a crisis. Insisting on the latter action in "A Writer's Pledge to Allegiance," written after the events of 9/11, poet Kelly Cherry declares, "I believe in the power of language to show, to move, to solve, to heal, to build. I believe nothing is beyond language − or, rather, that the Nothing that is beyond language is containable within art. I believe that that is what art is for: to contain the Nothing that is beyond language. What is unsaid can be said" (74). According to Cherry art functions as a container for the absence that devastation engenders. The capitalization of "Nothing" here − which echoes Paul Celan's "Psalm," a poem I consider in "The Ungod" chapter − gestures at and personifies the silence that surpasses language. By spotlighting art as the site of reconciliation between silence and speech, Cherry grants art the unique ability to respond to crises that stand (perhaps a more apposite term would be *fall*) at the limits of the unsaid.

For individuals whose voices have been marginalized or excluded through categories such as race, class, or gender, the unsaid is also a political territory that dictates who has the right to speak. In the face of crises that further entrench these categorizations, art can be a way of reclaiming those voices. Unfolding these issues in the preface to his collection of Hurricane Katrina poems, Niyi Osundare contends, "These poems insist on breaking the silence precipitated by the combined forces of anonymity and invisibility which often stand between the needy cry and the listening world" (9-10). Disregarding Gray's reservations about "the tools of the trade," Osundare positions poetry as a mediator between the unknown victims of a catastrophe and the outside world. Moving from a discussion of poetry to a discussion of the poet

in a crisis, Osundare stipulates the necessity of the personal: "These are the words of someone right in the eye of the storm, *written by himself*, not 'gathered' by an unappointed spokesperson or ventriloquised from 'reliable sources' by a privileged and distant secondary source. For, although Katrina may have taken all I had away, it never succeeded in taking away my tongue" (10). Osundare's italicized insistence on the centrality of his voice frames Hurricane Katrina and other events of crises as spaces of ownership; these events, Osundare argues, belong to those who directly (the length of this perimeter is debatable) experience them. For those outside of the devastation, entry is prohibited. A space of ownership is particularly sacred for an event like Hurricane Katrina, which disproportionally affected the African-American and economically-disadvantaged population of New Orleans. Poetry that forefronts the voice of "a privileged and distant secondary source" might serve to perpetuate the disregard for underprivileged groups that contributed to the scale of devastation (the flooding, the shortages of food and water, the lack of evacuation strategies after the storm) during Hurricane Katrina.

Although much of this chapter examines first-person survivor accounts of the events in question, each of the dissertation's chapters (in particular the second chapter) also considers works that, in Osundare's words, are "ventriloquised" by "secondary source[s]." My inclusion of these latter texts stems from both practical and theoretical concerns. On a practical level, the amount of poetic accounts by survivors is seldom sufficient. This poetic insufficiency is a consequence of three main factors. First, the limited number of survivors, particularly after 9/11, inhibits the amount of writing available by individuals directly involved in the crisis. Second, the personal dispositions of those that do endure may or may not incline toward writing, particularly poetry, as a means of expression. Third, the dissemination of the works that do belong to survivors falls victim to the partialities of publishing, accessibility, and, in some cases,

translation.[26] On a theoretical level, writing by outsiders negotiates disasters as spaces of ownership and proximity to disasters as the bar by which writers of crises must measure themselves. Moreover, as I mention in the introduction to my project, the consideration of texts by poets distanced from the crises in question broadens and complicates an understanding of empathetic dissonance. As such, "The Unsaid" gives attention to works like Dionne Brand's *Inventory*, which catalogues a number of twenty-first century American crises from the eyes of a poet situated in Canada and a speaker situated behind a screen. The ventriloquist poet recalls the empathizer as ventriloquist: both participate in the process of re-articulating another's experiences. This chapter and the larger dissertation, therefore, offer evocative spaces for the examination of empathetic dissonance through voices that are proximal to and removed from particular events of devastation.

"The Unsaid" considers not only whose voice the poem spotlights (with an eye to the often muddled relation between poet and speaker in texts after crisis), but also how, with a particular emphasis on language, that voice relays the experiences in the text. Issues of language are central to each of the crises that informs my project. The infamous perception of Adolf Hitler as master rhetorician, coupled with the stark contrast of victims that were stripped of their voices, leaves its mark on poetry responding to the events of the Holocaust.[27] The "us" versus "them" discourse that my introduction situates as pivotal to the empathetic chasm between Western and Islamic countries ensures that division inscribes the texts born after the September 11 terrorist attacks. The language of culpability with its struggle between nature and humanity

[26] A note on translation here as it figures in my project: I read a number of the works in translation, specifically the works after the Holocaust, which, unlike the other two crises, took place in Europe. Whenever my own linguistic forays into French and German (and the use of a dictionary) allow, I read the translated text in conjunction with the source text. As such, I consider both the problematics and the possibilities of translation as they relate to empathetic dissonance.

[27] Significantly, many of those who were detained in ghettos and camps fought to retain their voices through personal defiance and collective uprisings (for example, the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising in 1943).

for role of villain, as Thomas Beller's article "Don't Call It Katrina" highlights, resonates for the poems that the storm provoked. Manipulations of language work to shape these events and their perception, thus moulding the literary responses with which my project engages. Appreciating the weight of words, the texts that I consider employ the said in their navigations through empathetic dissonance.

Some of the most compelling poems that figure in this chapter recognize and respond to language as simultaneously inadequate, powerful, and manipulative in the face of devastation. Notably, Cherry's language-glorifying writer's pledge ends with the admission, "I believe this and am without words" (74). The concurrent mistrust and trust in language yields to another ambivalence in the texts that I examine. This chapter engages with the unsaid − that which is unspeakable (unsaid because it is beyond language) or omitted (unsaid because it is deliberately excluded) − and the said − diction and rhetoric. Probing both the unsaid and the said, I aim to locate empathetic dissonance through dissonance in language in order to gesture at the instability of empathy after events at the limits of empathy. The works that "The Unsaid" considers include Charlotte Delbo's *Auschwitz and After*, Ursula Duba's "Who Knew the Murderers," Brand's *Inventory*, Jean Valentine's "In the Burning Air," and Osundare's "Knowing Friend" and "Now This."

Intimately linked to Charlotte Delbo's memoir are her experiences during the Second World War. Working with the French Resistance, Delbo, along with her husband Georges Dudach, was arrested in 1942. Within two months of the arrest, Dudach was executed, and, in early 1943, Delbo was transported to Auschwitz and subsequently to Ravensbrück. Delbo's *Auschwitz and After*, a trilogy of volumes that were initially published separately (*None of Us*

Will Return, Useless Knowledge, and *The Measure of Our Days*), details her experiences during and after captivity (Langer ix-x).[28] This trilogy traverses various forms − fragment, character vignette, prose narrative, lyric poem − in order to gesture at the inability of language (at least of a single formal mould of language) to convey the unspeakable; the form of Delbo's memoir, therefore, betrays, in empathetic mimesis, the struggle with language in the face of crisis. Although much (if not all) of *Auschwitz and After* is marked with a poetic voice, for the purposes of my project I will focus solely on several poems (in English translation) from this work.

Early in *None of Us Will Return*, an untitled poem that begins "O you who know" relies on both the unsaid and the said to chart the empathetic dissonance of the text. Repeating the poem's first line, the speaker plunges the addressees ("you," "*vous*") into an excursion of camp life (Delbo, *Auschwitz et Après* 1: 21):

> O you who know
> did you know that hunger makes the eyes sparkle that thirst dims them
> O you who know
> did you know that you can see your mother dead
> and not shed a tear
> O you who know
> did you know that in the morning you wish for death
> and in the evening you fear it[.] (*Auschwitz and After* 11)

Empathetically dissonant, the poem both welcomes and rejects the imaginative entry of the addressees into the experiences of a camp inmate. The personal, detailed moments that the

[28] Although Delbo wrote *None of Us Will Return* and *Useless Knowledge* in the years immediately following the war (the former volume in 1946 and the latter in 1946 and 1947), she refused to publish either of the texts until some twenty years later (1965 for the first volume and 1970 for the second). *The Measure of Our Days* followed on the heels of the 1970 publication (Langer x).

speaker depicts (hunger, thirst, death, desire) indicate the speaker's wish for the addressees to imagine the terror of the camps. Furthermore, the relentless refrain "O you who know" ironically uses language to lure the addressees into the private knowledge of a camp inmate. Employing apostrophe through the repeated "you" signals the desire for connection, for the possibility of empathy. As Jonathan Culler argues in his meditation on apostrophe, "If, as we tend to assume, post-enlightenment poetry seeks to overcome the alienation of subject from object, then apostrophe takes the crucial step of constituting the object as another subject with whom the poetic subject might hope to strike up a harmonious relationship. Apostrophe would figure this reconciliation of subject and object" (63-64). For Delbo's poem, "you" becomes an invitation to intimacy. Commenting on the intimacy of deictic pronouns (pronouns, for example *you*, that arrive at their meaning only in context), Julia Creet argues, "The deictic is the most intimate of all addresses …. Each use of a deictic pronoun, but most powerfully *we* and *you*, calls to us as readers, demanding that we decide if we belong to or will answer this call" ("A Dialectic of the Deictic" 207). Delbo's "you" directly addresses the readers, opening a space through which they can enter the experiences in the poem. Outlining this invitational gesture in his introduction to *Auschwitz and After*, Lawrence L. Langer maintains that Delbo "invite[s] us to share with her the twin vision that a journey through Auschwitz has etched on our memory (xvi). The invitation "to share" through the apostrophic and deictic "you" signifies an invitation to empathize.

Although Delbo's speaker invites the addressees of "O you who know" into the knowledge that the poem offers, she simultaneously disallows this knowledge through the incredible content and ironic tone of the text. In their inconceivability, lines like "O you who know / did you know that a day is longer than a year / a minute longer than a lifetime" suggest that it is impossible for anyone outside of the experience to really "know" what the speaker is

describing (Delbo, *Auschwitz and After* 11). If knowledge surpasses facts and figures and penetrates into the extraordinary world of an Auschwitz inmate, then the term "know" becomes too large and unspeakable for the addressees' grasps; thus, although the speaker attempts to relay her experience, this experience exceeds language. "Delbo's isolation is not broken by her testimony," explains Creet. "If anything, her aloneness is reinforced by the presence of the 'you' who does not know and can never know" ("Calling on Witnesses"). The impossibility of knowledge that "O you who know" assigns to the addressees enforces distance between the speaker and the "you" of the poem. Operating through the familiarity bias, which posits that the more familiar the object of empathy the more likely one is to empathize with that object, empathy stumbles against the unfamiliar ground of a concentration camp. Highlighting the distance between the former camp inmate and the addressees is the plural and proper "*vous*" of the French text. Unlike the informal and intimate *tu*, the politeness of "*vous*" suggests unfamiliarity. The repeated "*vous*," which the translation's "you" echoes, becomes a linguistic marker of the empathetic void between the speaker and the addressees (*Auschwitz et Après* 1: 21). Furthermore, while there is a lack of punctuation throughout the text, the poem is an extended string of questions. The lack of question marks, however, underscores these questions as ironic accusations: you do *not* know, they declare, or, as a poem in *Useless Knowledge* articulates, "they think they know" (138). As the interrogative turns accusatory, the space of the poem grows hostile, an environment that cannot open to a positive, pro-social empathy. The recurring "you" of "O you who know" becomes a pointing finger at the listeners of trauma who assume the comfortable, dismissive stance of omniscience. Underlining this omniscience is the final line's capitalization of "you": "You who know" (11). Capitalization further highlights the God-like knowledge that the speaker mockingly assigns to the addressees. This unsaid, implicit

theological identity separates the addressees from the human inmate who experiences the events outlined in the poem. The double gesture of welcoming and spurning the addressees creates an empathetically dissonant relationship between the speaker and the "you" of the text.

Moreover, Delbo's persistent "you" emphasizes the unsaid *I*, or '*je*' in the French text, a vacancy that gestures at the dissonant empathy in this poem. While "O you who know" delves into the private, emotional world of a lyric, the text simultaneously denies this designation by adamantly refusing to draw attention to its speaker. This speaker's present absence parallels the annihilation of the object of empathy. Specifically, the empathizers (the knowing "you" here) eradicate the experiences of the Holocaust sufferer by substituting "you" for *I*. The ambivalent relationship to empathy that Delbo's poem stages becomes a product of the speaker's recognition of empathy as a process that has the potential to eradicate and appropriate the other.

Alternatively, the gesture of substituting "you" for *I* can be conceived as an "interiorization," as the speaker's renunciation of empathy with another (Culler 66). We can understand this reading through Culler's notion of apostrophe. According to Culler, one must

> reflect on the crucial though paradoxical fact that this figure [the apostrophe] which seems to establish relations between the self and the other can in fact be read as an act of radical interiorization and solipsism, which either parcels out the self to fill the world … peopling the world with fragments of the self, or else internalizes what might have been thought external. (65-66)

The apostrophic "you" of Delbo's text can, Culler argues, be an extension of the self. Supporting this argument in her examination of "O you who know," Creet maintains that "Delbo's address is to herself, an externalized 'you' that now knows what she could not have imagined knowing" ("Calling on Witnesses"). If the repeated "you" is a stand-in for the poem's speaker, then this

linguistic marker works to prohibit readers from imaginatively entering the speaker's position. In other words, while "you" is an ostensibly welcoming gesture, its self-referential character refuses the other that the process of empathy demands. "You" as an egoistic symbol ushers in a similar argument regarding empathy. As psychologist Martin L. Hoffman posits, "Empathy may be uniquely well suited for bridging the gap between egoism and altruism, since it has the property of transforming another person's misfortune into one's own feeling of distress" ("Is Altruism Part of Human Nature?" 133). Setting altruism aside, a certain amount of selfishness informs empathy: when one individual empathizes with another, the former individual's focus on the other is simultaneously self-centric. As Saidiya V. Hartman argues in her conception of "the violence of identification," empathy works to shift the emotional focus from the object of empathy to the empathizer (20, 19). Moreover, empathizers necessarily carry their own personalities and predispositions into their imaginative placement of themselves in another. Like the "you" of Delbo's poem, thus, empathy occupies a liminal space between the self and the other. "I acknowledge your suffering," writes Elizabeth V. Spelman on the last page of her book-length meditation on sorrow, "only to the extent to which it promises to bring attention to my own" (172). The linguistic marker of that attention or empathy in Delbo's poem, the "you," oscillates between speaker and addressees, producing an empathy marked by tension.

Complicating the representation of empathy in "O you who know" are the two discrepant "you's" between which the text does not explicitly differentiate; the splitting of "you" into different subjects remains unsaid. First, there is the addressed, allegedly knowledgeable "you" who the content of the poem reveals as ignorant (this is the "you" invoked in the lines "O you who know / Did you know"). Additionally, there is the "you" who actually experiences the events that the poem envisions (this is the "you" who wishes for death in the morning and fears

death in the evening) (Delbo, *Auschwitz and After* 11). This latter "you" is a camp detainee, likely, as the personal details of the poem suggest, the speaker. As the two bodies (the collective addressee and the camp detainee) dissolve into one pronoun, they echo Robert Katz's notion of the empathetic "fus[ion]" of bodies (9). Like the speaker-dismissing gesture of the all-knowing "you," the pronoun-homogenizing gesture of the speaker complicates the poem's empathy. Delbo's text coerces the ignorant "you" into occupying the camp detainee's subject position. What begins as an invitation to knowledge turns into a repeated distress for the addressees of the poem. The stichic (one block of text with no stanza breaks) form of Delbo's work further ensnares the "you" in the memories of the detainee, as this poetic form disallows the breath − and, thus, the freedom − that a more open form would permit. While the text declares "that horror cannot be circumscribed," the addressed "you" is enclosed in both content and form: the content, particularly the recurring "you," compels the addressees to imaginatively enter the detainee's experiences, and the form, particularly the stichic structure, prohibits the addressees from imaginatively exiting the detainee's experiences (Delbo, *Auschwitz and After* 11). "We pay a price," asserts Langer, "for learning how to imagine what happened, to 'see'" (xvi). Empathy, an act of imagination itself, carries the price − the "cost of caring," as psychologist Charles R. Figley terms it − of secondary trauma, of being caught in another's suffering (267). This price works to ensure that Delbo's poem retains a dissonant stance toward empathy.

Another recurring term that fuels the empathetic dissonance of "O you who know" is the word "know." In Delbo's French source text, the term *savoir*, like the "know" in the English translation, denotes cognition or intellectual knowledge (*Auschwitz et Après* 1: 21). Although throughout the poem *savoir* only appears in a conjugated state ("*savez*" or "*saviez*"), the infinitive verb, which reverberates in its derivatives, can be broken down into the words *sa* (the

possessive adjective most often denoting *her*, *his*, or *its*) and *voir* (the verb *to see*) (OLDO). The subtextual (or unsaid) emphasis on possessing sight in order to access knowledge suggests the exclusion of those who do not bear witness through sight; the poem is *her* (the speaker's) *sight*. In other words, the text presents knowledge as a product of sight (of the camp and its events) that the addressees do not possess. Every repetition of the verb *savoir*, therefore, becomes a door that bars empathy – a process that requires knowledge – entrance.

Moreover, knowledge is the link between the speaker and the addressees, but it is a link that cannot entirely account for the content of the poem. Knowing, for example, that "in the morning you wish for death / and in the evening you fear it" may not be enough to understand this (*Auschwitz and After* 11). Psychological studies of empathy suggest that both knowledge (through "cognitive perspective taking") and feeling are indispensible for the process of empathy (Tangney and Dearing 81). Yet the latter, the feeling into of empathy, is deliberately exchanged for the former in Delbo's text. "Know," like the French "*vous*," acts as courier for a language of distance. This language denies empathy by highlighting both the limits of cognition and the unsaid feeling or affect in the poem. Significantly, the text's lamenting "O," which recurs during the first few phrases, approaches the emotion that the focus on knowledge obscures. "O" resembles an open mouth, an emotional leak, a howl. Yet the speaker abandons this cry, along with the "you who know" that succeeds it, about halfway through the poem. When "You who know" returns in the final line, the "O" has been severed from it; the ending reads, "Did you know this / You who know" (Delbo, *Auschwitz and After* 11). Along with the loss of its emotional invocation, the text abandons its trust in empathy, perhaps submitting that this affective relation can do nothing in the face of the experiences that the speaker voices. Echoing this empathetic retreat, Culler argues that "apostrophic poems display in various ways awareness

of the difficulties of what they purport to seek [connection between subject and object]. Poems which contain apostrophes often end in withdrawals and questions" (64). The withdrawal of the affective "O" and the questions (particularly the final, pared down "Did you know this") that plague Delbo's poem admit that understanding and empathy between a camp insider and outsider are difficult and dissonant.

Delbo situates "O you who know" beside and following another untitled, empathetically dissonant poem that begins, "You who have wept two thousand years." This poem alludes to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, while asking the text's addressees – "*vous*," again (Delbo, *Auschwitz et Après* 1: 20) – "What tears will you have left / for those who agonized / far more than three hundred nights and far more than three hundred days." The analogical gesture that juxtaposes Jesus's suffering with the suffering of Holocaust victims highlights the scale of suffering in the Holocaust. Yet like "O you who know," the preceding poem ends with a lack of tears: "They did not believe in resurrection to eternal life / and knew you would not weep" (*Auschwitz and After* 10). The final line's turn away from emotion ("you would not weep") toward cognition ("knew") ushers in the recurring "know" of the poem that follows. Indeed, the textual juxtaposition of the two poems highlights the unsaid empathy between them: they both oscillate in the space between emotion and cognition, pivoting upon the second-person plural voice of "you." Although the French *savoir*, which appears in conjugated form in both of the adjacent poems, opens to knowledge by sight, the English term "know," which ends "O you who know," opens to a disparate avenue. Translated "know" suggests the aurally similar negative *no*; the repeated gesture at cognition, therefore, also becomes an unspoken refusal, a cog in the empathetic dissonance that Delbo's poem stages (11).

While Charlotte Delbo's position as a camp inmate due to her political resistance of the Nazi regime frames her memoir as the work of an Auschwitz survivor, Ursula Duba's position as a child of a Gentile German family during the Second World War lends a different hue to her poetry in response to the Shoah. Titled *Tales from a Child of the Enemy*, Duba's collection of poems explicitly situates her as an other; this is the unsaid (and often unwelcome) testimony of someone related to the perpetrators. Like in Delbo's text, the space empathy occupies in Duba's work is precarious. The latter work, however, is particularly aware of what Judith Butler describes as "the conditions under which a grievable life is established and maintained" (38). Whereas Delbo is unmistakably a victim of the Third Reich, Duba is less conspicuously a victim of her circumstances. The works of these poets are inevitably read according to this division. "I clearly see young Germans as victims," voices Duba in a 2004 lecture at Pennsylvania State University, "albeit as victims of their own society which doesn't help them to properly acknowledge the suffering inflicted on the victims of the Holocaust and to mourn the fate of the victims killed by their great- or grandparents" ("How Do Young Germans Deal"). Duba expands victim status to include German youth unequipped with the tools to cope with their national history; thus, Duba includes her childlike narrator in the candidacy for empathy.

Arranged at the centre of the book's title is the ambiguous word "child." Although childhood is often associated with innocence (specifically, inexperience and simplicity), innocence in the context of the Holocaust intimates one who is not guilty of a crime. If the subject is blameless (merely "a child of the enemy"), then this subject, Duba's title suggests, warrants commiseration. Additionally, the frequent use of the word "child" or "childhood" throughout Duba's collection invokes the German word for "child" that is unsaid in the text, *Kind*. In English, the homographic *kind* (benevolence) lends another layer of goodness or

innocence to Duba's title, as well as invokes *kindness* as one of empathy's ancestral terms (Solnit 195). The "child" or *Kind* in the title, thus, is linguistically attached to empathy. Further establishing innocence in *Tales from a Child of the Enemy* is the biographical assertion on the back of the book jacket: "She [Duba] grew up in postwar Germany and, at age nineteen, during a trip abroad, on a blind date with a Jewish boy, found out about the atrocities her people committed during the Thousand Year Reich. What she learned changed her relationship with her family and with her country forever." At the site of a romantic encounter − with its connotations of relation and connection − a young and innocent (both naïve and blameless) Duba learned of that which divided her from an entire group of people. Empathetic dissonance, thus, becomes the premise of her text.

Resonating with Delbo's "O you who know," Duba's narrative poem "Who Knew the Murderers" shifts its focus to the word "who" in an attempt to understand the lack of empathy and denial of culpability that are intricately linked with the Holocaust. "Who Knew the Murderers" tells the story of a German Gentile speaker's encounter with an Auschwitz survivor who has just given a lecture "on the importance / of hearing stories of survivors." The value that the poem's opening assigns storytelling contrasts with the stories that are lacking from or unsaid in the speaker's own life. "Where are you from," the Holocaust survivor's first question, seems to displace, instead of locate, the poem's speaker (Duba, "Who Knew the Murderers" 144). Although the latter answers with her national origin, Germany, this answer provokes more questions regarding the role her family played during the war. Dismissing these questions with the certainty of "they weren't Nazis" (144) and "they didn't know about it" (145), the speaker leaves the survivor feeling unconvinced by her family's and her people's professed ignorance. The second part of the poem considers this doubt:

ever since
I've been wondering
what my father and uncles knew
    about friends neighbors and colleagues
who of my teachers participated or knew
who printed the new laws
declaring that non-Aryans
were no longer allowed
    to live in their homes[.] (146)

The remainder of Duba's poem consists of listed "who" questions that progress in content from anti-Semitism ("who manufactured the signs … declaring / *dogs and Jews not allowed*") to Jewish ghettos ("who printed the laws / forbidding Jews / to be outside of their homes after eight in the evening") to camps and extermination sites ("who manufactured the chemicals / used for the killing / who manufactured the gas chambers") (147, 146, 148). The namelessness of the individuals whom the text attempts to locate through the pronoun "who" prevents the possibility of empathy – however distant this may already be – between perpetrators and victims; if the perpetrators are absent (unnamed) from the site of the crime, then they cannot empathize with the victims. Moreover, the repeated verb "knew," similar to the "know" of Delbo's "O you who know," falls short of the affective component necessary to empathetic understanding. While Delbo's poem spotlights allegedly all-knowing characters after the Holocaust, Duba's text focuses on allegedly ignorant characters during the Third Reich. Both cognitive extremes withhold empathy, as they demonstrate a refusal to engage with − listen to, be present for − the sufferers.

Although the unanswered "who" questions devastate the possibility of empathy between perpetrators and victims, the speaker in Duba's poem performs empathy by entering, albeit through the dissonance of questions, the detailed world of the Third Reich. As such, this text engages Dominick LaCapra's proposition that empathy with perpetrators is necessary (104). In the opening of Duba's poem, the speaker mentions that the Auschwitz survivor's lecture "move[s]" her ("Who Knew the Murderers" 144). Although the subsequent encounter between these two women is coloured by division and scepticism (for example, the survivor's insinuating, "how do you kill six million people / with only a handful of participants / and hardly anybody knowing"), the survivor's questions once again move the speaker, this time into a host of her own questions (145). Similar to Delbo's detailed descriptions in "O you who know," Duba's speaker undertakes a meticulous investigation − one that borders on obsession through the prevalent "who" − into those responsible for the Shoah. Scrutinizing events that are both directly correlated with the genocide ("who wrote the arrest orders") and indirectly related to the mass killings ("who sewed the prison uniforms for the millions"), the speaker works to approach the terrain of the perpetrators (147). Yet this approach is constantly in question: metonymically represented by the empty signifier "who," uncertainty informs the second part of the poem. The speaker's focus on minutiae through the uncertain probing of questions allows her to both enter and refuse to enter the horrors of the Third Reich.

While the greater part of the speaker's questions are limited to the factual makeup of the Nazi regime and are thus drained of emotional considerations − the affect necessary for empathy − the formal acceleration of "who" questions toward the end of the poem signals an unspoken emotional urgency. The penultimate verse paragraph begins,

> who evaluated the experiments

who wrote the reports

who signed them

who filed them

who wrote the purchase orders[.] (148)

The dwindling space between each repetition of "who" draws attention to the speaker's desperation to identify the perpetrators. "Who" functions as the focal point, the pulsation of the text. As this pulse quickens, it invokes the affective component of empathy through which the speaker feels into the world of Nazi Germany. Specifically, the unsaid feelings that inform "who" are distress and horror at the pronoun's possible field of reference. Moreover, the repetitive questions and simple language of the text colour the speaker's voice with a childlike simplicity. Duba transports readers back to the title of her collection, *Tales from a Child of the Enemy*. The contrast between the blameless child born into a country with a history of perpetrators and the culpable "who" of the text adds to the empathetic dissonance which informs the former's relation to the latter; the distance between the speaker and the unnamed enemy is at once near (through national and possibly familial relations) and far (through disparity in criminal responsibility). The lack of punctuation throughout the poem further contributes to the run-on voice of a child in distress. Specifically, the lack of question marks (a choice that again echoes Delbo's "O you who know") suggests that the speaker simultaneously does and does not want to know the answers that she seeks; fear of completing the questions intimates a fear of answers that might be unspeakable for the poem's narrating voice. The anonymous "who" might (does) turn out to be the German people or, even more emotionally horrifying for the speaker of the poem, the German people with whom she is close.

Underlying the unsaid emotional desperation of "who" is the speaker's empathetically dissonant relationship with the German population in general and her family in particular. A descendent of a "generation of perpetrators" (Duba, "How Do Young Germans Deal"), the speaker imaginatively enters this generation through the persistent probing of the present participle: "I've been wondering" ("Who Knew the Murderers" 146). The "who" statements that follow become fill-in-the-blanks for the wondering − an activity often associated with children − that plagues the speaker. Significantly, although the bulk of the questions are concerned with dissecting the Nazi regime, the questions that book end the second part of the poem spotlight the personal. "I've been wondering," begins the speaker, "what my father and uncles knew / about friends neighbors and colleagues / who of my teachers participated or knew" (146). The text's ending returns to these considerations:

> what did my parents know
> who of my aunts and uncles
> teachers and neighbors knew
> who knew[.] (148)

The linguistic homecoming (the speaker's poetic return to her family) that occurs twice during the flood of questions points to the unsaid concern that the speaker feels for the possibility of her family's awareness of the horrific events perpetrated in Nazi Germany. The burden of empathy, of entering into the realm of the Third Reich, is personal here. As a driving force of the poem, questions challenge what Duba describes as "the silence within many, if not most, German families …. Most German children know from a very early age not to ask as to what grandpa did during the Third Reich" ("How Do Young Germans Deal"). Lack of historical transparency also marks the German family to which the poem's speaker belongs. The questions that comprise

"Who Knew the Murderers" create ripples of dissonance in this unspoken history. Furthermore, the shift from the anaphoric "who" to "what" in both of the speaker's references to her family members ("what my father and uncles knew" and "what did my parents know") signals the significance of these lines ("Who Knew the Murderers" 146, 148). The term "what" in conjunction with terms designating kin resonates with the Auschwitz survivor's questions to the speaker at the beginning of the poem: "what did your father do / during the Hitler regime"; "what about your uncles" (144); "what did they say about it" (145). These earlier questions cast the later questions, as well as the speaker's initial answers ("they weren't Nazis" and "they didn't know about it"), in a more critical light (144, 145); thus, doubt disturbs the empathy that the speaker feels for her family members. This unspoken doubt fosters an empathetically dissonant relationship at the heart of "Who Knew the Murderers."

The ambivalent return home that Ursula Duba's poem metaphorically performs resonates with the physical homecoming that Charlotte Delbo's memoir considers. An untitled poem in *The Measure of Our Days* paints this movement:

> Whether you return from war or from elsewhere
> when it's an elsewhere
> where you conversed with death
> it is hard to come back
> and speak again to the living. (256)

The difficulty of returning from a place like Auschwitz, this poem divulges, speaks to the difficulty of empathy and understanding between those who came back from the camps and those who did not go to the camps. Like "O you who know," this poem employs the apostrophic

"you" in order to invite empathy, through the conferral of knowledge, and to dismiss empathy, through the inconceivable subject matter (a conversation with death). The texts in the memoir's third volume contemplate the empathetic dissonance that is born from the survivor's desire to "speak again to the living" and the concurrent conviction that the camp experience is unspeakable.

One of these texts, which begins with the imperative "Do not say they cannot hear us," details the divide between the returning survivors and those to whom they return. Addressing a fellow survivor, Delbo's speaker explains that even though outsiders covet understanding of the Holocaust experience, their "deepest self" retreats from this understanding. The horrors of the Nazi regime are too unimaginable and unspeakable to be comprehended by those external to the experience. The first half of the poem considers the desire to comprehend and to empathize:

> Do not say they cannot hear us
> they hear us
> they want to understand
> obstinately
> meticulously
> the edge of their being wishes to understand
> a sensitive border at their edge[.] (269)

Although the speaker insists on the outsiders' desire to understand, these outsiders are linguistically separated from the survivors through the pronoun "they." While these opening lines do not establish an explicit disconnect between those who experience the camps and those who do not, the terms "they" and "us" function as markers of an unsaid separation. In this division between "us" and "they," readers must confront their own position as either part of – the

familiarity that drives empathy − or separate from − the unfamiliarity that drives out empathy − the group of survivors. The speaker employs "they" and its derivative "their," which recur in five of the poem's initial seven lines, in order to emphasize the gap between the desire and the ability to understand: while the text insists that "they want to understand," the term "they" remains detached from the exclusivity of the term "us."

Similarly, the rhymes in the first seven lines voice the desire for and deficiency of harmony between "us" and "they." The identical end rhymes in the first and second lines ("us") and in the third and sixth lines ("understand"), as well as the identical internal rhyme in the sixth and seventh lines ("edge"), perform an aural empathy: each of these words seamlessly fills the space of its rhyming counterpart.[29] Yet the duplication of these rhyming terms bars the participation of an other; the said (the repeated rhyming words) leaves the other (alternative sounding words) unsaid. The aural empathy that the repeated rhyming words perform, thus, is a product of similitude. In other words, instead of a self-other relation, the self feels into the self here, a relation not unlike Culler's depiction of self-focused apostrophe. Moreover, the slant rhyme in "obstinately" and "meticulously" (present also in the French text through slight pronunciation discrepancies: "*obstinément*" and "*méticuleusement*") draws attention to dissonance in both sound and empathy (*Auschwitz et Après* 3: 68). Although outsiders "obstinately / meticulously" desire to understand the survivors' experiences, the text's rhymes ensure that this understanding remains beyond reach by both refusing aural otherness and slanting toward dissonance.

[29] The French text follows the same rhyme pattern, with the exception of two variations in the first and second lines: these lines contain internal rhymes in lieu of end rhymes, and, as the syntactical rules of French dictate, the object pronoun ("*nous*") precedes the verb ("*entendent*"), directing the emphasis to the latter word instead of the former. These first two lines read, "*Ne dis pas qu'ils ne nous entendent pas / ils nous entendent*" (Delbo, *Auschwitz et Après* 3: 68). Since both the source text and the translated version employ end rhymes and internal rhymes that are identical, these slight deviations are negligible.

Furthermore, by marking a "sensitive border" between the exterior and interior of the listening subject, the speaker of "Do not say they cannot hear us" intimates the process of empathy. Sensitivity − with its evocations of receptiveness, permeability, and openness − along with the oscillation between outside and inside are crucial constituents of empathy. Yet the second part of Delbo's poem details the empathetic gap between survivors and the inner world of their listeners:

> but their deepest self
>
> their inner truth
>
> remains remote
>
> flees as we think we're catching it
>
> retracts contracts escapes[.] (*Auschwitz and After* 269)

Signalled by the pivotal word "but" in the English translation, the volta of this text turns away from the outsiders' surface eagerness to understand toward their internal, unspoken revulsion at the dreadful experiences into which Holocaust survivors invite them. Formally imitating this estrangement, the rhyme in the English line "retracts contracts escapes," or in the French counterpart "*qui se rétracte et se contracte et échappe*," also retreats in both languages (*Auschwitz et Après* 3: 68). While "retracts" and "contracts" signal a semantic withdrawal, these words remain near in sound. Yet as the reader moves toward the end of the line, the word "escape" shatters (or escapes) the rhyme of the preceding two words. This linguistic distance corresponds to the emotional distance that the listeners' "deepest self" demands. Delbo's use of the term "deepest" echoes her division between common memory and deep memory. Delineating this division, Langer explains, "Common memory urges us to regard the Auschwitz ordeal as part of a chronology, a dismal event in the past that the very fact of survival helps to redeem. It

frees us from the pain of remembering the unthinkable …. Deep memory, on the other hand, reminds us that the Auschwitz past is not really past and never will be" (xi). If common memory pronounces itself in history books, then deep memory penetrates the body of its carrier. The promise of freedom that Delbo assigns to the former type of memory is not permitted to the latter type of memory. Indeed, deep memory requires investment and a continuous empathy with the events of the past. Yet the "deepest self" of the listeners in "Do not say they cannot hear us" refuses or is unable to enter into the deep memory − a bodily, extra-linguistic space − of the poem's speaker.

Offering a reason for this affective departure (the retreat of the "deepest self" that Delbo describes), the question that ends the poem exposes the dangerous possibilities of empathy for both the empathizer and the object of empathy. The concluding three lines offer a second volta: "do they withdraw and fall back / because they hurt / where we no longer hurt …" (*Auschwitz and After* 269). The latter two lines here follow the model of identical end rhymes ("hurt" and "hurt" or the French "*mal*" and "*mal*") that the text's opening lines establish (*Auschwitz et Après* 3: 68). Similar to the poem's opening rhymes ("us" and "us"; "understand" and "understand"; "edge" and "edge"), the closing rhyme's repetition of the same word precludes empathy with an other (*Auschwitz and After* 269). In other words, while empathy is a process of joining self and other, the identical end rhymes function as a refusal of an other (rhyming word). This linguistic refusal synecdochally signals the poem's refusal of empathy between listeners and survivors of the Holocaust experience. Yet the penultimate "hurt" that belongs to the listeners is distinct from the ultimate "hurt" that belongs to the survivors. Although the speaker explains that numbness has replaced feeling for the text's survivors, she wonders if paying attention to trauma can cause listeners to feel pain. In other words, she proposes that empathetically opening up to someone

else's trauma can leave individuals vulnerable to secondary trauma. The listeners' or empathizers' withdrawal, thus, may be a product of an unsaid (the final question remains unanswered) compassion fatigue.

While this reading considers the dangers empathy holds for empathizers, the closing lines of Delbo's poem also examine the perils of empathy for the recipients of this affective relation. Specifically, assuming the "hurt" of others can result in exclusively focusing on one's own distress, thereby eradicating those individuals with whom one is empathizing. A self-interested focus may also result in emotional fallibility, Delbo's "they" assuming that they experience hurt in the same way (the linguistic likeness of "hurt" is pertinent here) that Delbo's "us" do. The original French "*mal*," translated as "hurt" here, holds weight for this empathetic imprecision. *Mal* may additionally denote error; as such, Delbo's "*mal*" gestures at the possible emotional mistakes of empathy (*OLDO*). The unspoken message of the final couplet, as well as of the attention that the poem lends to the listeners of trauma, is that the listeners' emotional responses (longing, revulsion, hurt) garner more focus than the survivors' emotional realities. Delbo's poem realizes this message through empathetic dissonance: the speaker voices both the others' desire for empathy and the consequences of that desire. Underlying the poem's empathetic dissonance is the silence of the ellipsis that closes the text. Replacing the grammatically-mandated question mark, the ellipsis intimates the deep memory of Holocaust experience that refuses language and, thus, the possibility of being heard by the text's listeners.

Shifting away from the experiential or familial connections that inform Charlotte Delbo's and Ursula Duba's texts, Dionne Brand's 2006 book-length, seven-part elegy, *Inventory*, is born from a meticulous cataloguing of socio-political chaos at the turn of this century. Written from a

personal and geographical distance to the events that the text documents, including the terrorist attacks of 9/11, the war on Iraq, and Hurricane Katrina, Brand's poem underlines crises that interrogate notions of emotional and physical distance. Outlining the impetus for her text in a conversation with Eleanor Wachtel, Brand explains, "I found myself thinking, what could I do as a poet? What does a poet do at times like these? And… and the least I could do is make an inventory, an inventory of the kind of antenna of the time, what we might be feeling or thinking and what might be passing us completely, what… what we are consuming and absorbing, without comment" ("Dionne Brand on The Arts Tonight"). As literary antenna, *Inventory* becomes a sensory appendage, an empathetic examination of the early years of the twenty-first century. Although *Inventory* responds to numerous moments of devastation, including, briefly, Hurricane Katrina, this chapter situates Brand's text in response to 9/11 because of the work's focus on a post-9/11 world.

In the post-9/11 world of *Inventory*, empathy occupies an ambivalent space: while feeling is extended to fictional characters, it is withheld from actual people who experience suffering. Considering the former, the poem's opening affirms, "the black-and-white american movies / buried themselves in our chests" (Brand, *Inventory* 3). The act of entering the chest, with its unspoken reference to the heart, invokes the process of empathy. This empathy, however, carries a sense of coercion: the object of empathy (the movies) is also the subject of Brand's poetic phrase, the entity performing the action of demanding empathy. Heightening the discomfort of a coerced empathy is the term "buried," which intimates the deaths that this text will shortly begin to record. The pairing of the fictional with the mortal highlights the typical immortality of the former in contrast to the mortality of those whom the text mourns. The remainder of the poem's first section continues the juxtaposition between empathy with the fictional and concern with the

mortal. A few pages into this section, Brand declares, "Their love stories never contained us, / their war epics left us bloody" (5). Much like in Delbo's poems, the pronouns "their" and "us" foster an unsaid division between the movie characters and the spectators (the speaker included). Supporting this division is the first line's assertion that the on-screen "love stories" exclude those who watch them. The following line, however, undercuts this lack of connection by creating an empathetic relation between the viewed and the viewers; if fictional "war epics" injure ("le[ave] us bloody") the non-fictional audience, then that audience partakes in a process of empathy toward the fictional scenes. Yet akin to the previous intimations of "buried," the word "bloody" is an unspoken intimation of the actual suffering that *Inventory* catalogues. As such, these lines suggest that empathy would be better directed toward wars that play out in the off-screen world. In addition to the empathy extended to on-screen characters, the third part of the poem considers the empathy extended to the characters' living counterparts: "the lives of movie stars were more lamentable, / and the wreckage of streets was unimportant" (22). The ironic grieving for the lives of fictional characters and the actors who play them, at the expense of daily devastation, echoes Judith Butler's notion of "a grievable life" (38). Fiction and celebrity, Brand's text argues, become measures of a grievable life. *Inventory* mourns the shortcomings of empathy as a relation that operates through biases that favour imagined characters and actors over those outside of the spotlight.

Moreover, while movie stars are identifiable in the sense of both recognition and personality, "the wreckage of streets" is indistinct (Brand, *Inventory* 22). Committed to the "identifiable victim effect," empathy necessitates details (name, story, etc.) in order to be effective (Bloom). Deliberately denying specificity, however, Brand imagines an unnamed "she" who catalogues civilian deaths in the impersonal manner of a news report. Watching a recount of

these deaths on the same television that airs the empathy-inducing movies − the irony here is striking − the third-person speaker relates,

> five by mortars in Talafar, Sufi follower
> near Baghdad, twelve by suicide bomb in
> restaurant, bystander in Dora, in Mishada,
> in Hillah, twenty-seven again, twenty-seven −
>
> she's heard clearly now, twenty-three,
> by restaurant bomb near green zone, Ibn Zanbour[.] (Brand, *Inventory* 23-24)

The sparse details (who, how, where, how many) that the speaker notes about these fatalities leave the personal (the details about the victims' lives) unsaid; reduced to numbers, the catalogued dead remain faceless, their share of empathy negligible. Explaining this depersonalization, Brand observes, "there was nothing personal to say anymore … there is no personal happiness, no personal sort of way out, no grief that was personal" ("Dionne Brand on The Arts Tonight"). The impersonal inventory that Brand's elegy documents laments the desensitization and lack of empathy that mark many of the Western world's responses to events of crisis, particularly to the Iraq war. Formally, Brand de-emphasizes each event through its paratactic placement. Disconnected but for their televised documentation and geographic location, the unsaid implication of the paratactic inventory of deaths is that there is no time for connection, no time for empathy. Instead, readers are left with the poignant mathematical simplicity, "things, things add up" (Brand, *Inventory* 52). Moreover, not valuable enough to warrant their own lines, multiple deaths often appear in the same line. Indeed, the lack of full end stops both in this list and throughout the text suggests a runny faucet of information that impedes

the time necessary for reflection and the extension of empathy. Although the repetition of "twenty-seven" and its accompanying dash and stanza break constitute a pause, this pause is, emphatically, for accuracy rather than for feeling. "This was going to be a stocktaking," Brand says of *Inventory*, "but also a stocktaking which was challenging to the kind of stocktaking that takes place on the internet and on the television, something that saw behind the screen" ("Dionne Brand on The Arts Tonight"). Reproducing the influx of nameless and often disregarded deaths that comprise the news, Brand's poem evades empathy and simultaneously critiques − "challeng[es]," in Brand's words − this evasion.

Inventory is an empathetically dissonant poetic document, because it not only dissuades empathy by leaving the personal unsaid, but also provokes empathy by recognizing the centrality of the personal. Specifically, the dedication poem to Marlene Green at the heart of a catalogue of nameless victims forefronts an intimate relation; Brand's elegy enters the personal world of an identifiable individual (Brand, *Inventory* 61-62). Green, who died in 2002, was a black activist, as well as a friend and mentor to Brand ("Marlene Green"). The two-page dedication to Green, therefore, is personal both in its particularities (name, personality, etc.) and in its extra-textual relationship. The poem begins with a lament for Green's absence:

> The day you left the air broke
> into splinters,
> all night before the tree outside
> held its breath,
> the windows ached,
> the newspapers whimpered unread,
> old lovers, unknowing, staggered

in doorways,

We should gather rivers for you[.] (*Inventory* 61)

Through pathetic fallacy, this opening harnesses the outside world to empathetically respond to the grief that the poem's speaker feels for Green's death. By ascribing human feelings to non-human entities, pathetic fallacy forges empathy between the human and non-human worlds. In this passage, the personification of nature (the breath-holding tree) gives way to the personification of inanimate objects (the aching windows and whimpering newspapers), which gives way to the faltering lovers (are they unsteady in physical poise or in emotional connection?), which finally gives way to the collective "we." Although the poem has offered previous glimpses of a feeling world (for example, "a highway sighing"), the en masse presence of empathy here is unprecedented in the text (49). This ubiquitous empathy for a personal loss, against the backdrop of a work that exchanges empathy for inventory, once again underlines the problematic identifiable victim effect through which empathy operates. While Green, like the movie stars that Brand cites earlier, is identifiable, even personally identifiable, the victims whose deaths the "she" of the text records are unknown, their lives publicly unspoken. In the world of the text, thus, the deaths of these unknown victims are not accompanied by aching windows or staggering lovers. Recognizing empathy's biases, *Inventory* responds dissonantly: although empathy marks Green's dedication poem, apathy trails the text's death tolls.

Furthermore, the collective "we" that figures in the dedication poem also contributes to the empathetic dissonance of this work. The first-person plural pronoun promises a shared subjectivity: "we should call storms, / our grief will dry lakes," a later line in the dedication poem reads (61). The sharing of emotional responses casts "we" and "our" as emblems of empathy for the sorrow that Green's death initiates. Yet this united front collapses when

juxtaposed against the rest of *Inventory*. The first line of the long poem reads, "We believed in nothing" (3). This nothingness soon swells to include the work's collective pronoun. Amid the inventory of deaths, Brand's speaker announces,

> we,
> there is no "we"
> let us separate ourselves now,
> though perhaps we can't, still and again
> too late for that,
> nothing but to continue[.] (42)

Here the speaker both posits a collective and negates this collective. The parceling out of "we" works to refuse a shared subjectivity and, thus, to refuse empathy between the individuals belonging to the collective pronoun. Indeed, the unsaid conviction in the speaker's instruction to separate is that empathy is insufficient and perhaps harmful: "let's at least admit we mean each other / harm, / we intend to do damage," a verse paragraph earlier on the page declares. Furthermore, the resigned lines that follow the separation of "we" recall the "nothing" of the work's opening. If there is "nothing" to be done "but to continue" as one, then this continuation is merely a submission or, less optimistically, an oppression. The active process of feeling into another that characterizes empathy is missing here. Instead, the harm-intending "we" compels its participants into an inescapable ("perhaps we can't [separate], still and again / too late for that") empathy. In the face of events, like 9/11, that both annihilate and restructure notions of a shared humanity, "we" becomes a marker of empathetic dissonance that admits empathy's inadequacy alongside its inescapability.[30]

[30] A brief note on the annihilation and restructuring of notions of a shared humanity: the 9/11 terrorist attacks worked to annihilate notions of a shared humanity through the murdering of thousands of people; the aftermath of

The ending of Brand's long poem responds to the text's conflicting relationship with empathy. Specifically, the couplet on the last page acts as a synecdoche for this relationship: "there are atomic openings in my chest / to hold the wounded" (100). Alluding to the text's first mention of the word "chest" ("the black-and-white american movies / buried themselves in our chests"), the closing lines reposition the recipient of empathy from the fictional to the real injured people that *Inventory* documents (3). The coercive empathy of the poem's earlier lines, where grammatical subject and empathy's object are identical, is also exchanged for the welcoming gesture of the latter lines. In addition to signifying the heart, "chest" denotes a receptacle for storage, particularly for the storage of valuables. If the speaker's "chest" is a treasure chest, then the "wounded" that inhabit it contain a value that the poem leaves unsaid; these individuals are more than a number in an inventory. Inversely echoing the process of empathy − the affective entry of self into other − the "wounded" others enter the chest (heart and treasure chest) of the speaker. While the term "openings" invites empathy, the modifying adjective, "atomic," is less hospitable. Although "atomic" can designate the miniscule size of the openings, this word is simultaneously alert to its historical resonances. Indeed, the unspoken connotation of atomic bombs is inevitable in a poem steeped in violence. "Atomic" invokes the traumatic experiences of the twentieth century and simultaneously signals the multiple traumas already taking root in the twenty-first century. As such, "atomic" points to the traumatic possibilities of affective openness or empathy both for the empathizer and for the recipients of empathy. First, empathy alters the empathizer (the speaker, in this case) at the atomic level. "Who and what you identify with," contends Rebecca Solnit, "builds your own identity" (107). Unfortunately for Brand's speaker, this identity is rooted in suffering. Feeling for the others that

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9/11, on the other hand, largely restructured notions of a shared humanity through the physical, emotional, and financial support that poured in from many parts of the world. For more on this see the Introduction to my project.

the text references through statistic or name results in physical secondary trauma at the site of the speaker's empathy ("atomic openings"). Moreover, empathy is also traumatic for its recipients; the "atomic openings" in which the "wounded" reside further injure these individuals. Their injury is especially discernible in the multiple meanings of the infinitive "to hold." On the one hand, the positive denotations of this verb suggest support and embrace, actions that often accompany empathy in its positive iterations. As the second half of the matrimonial "to have and to hold," this verb pulsates with the promise of union between bodies. On the other hand, the negative denotations of "to hold" suggest possession and control, actions that often accompany empathy in its negative iterations. When empathy results in possession and control of another's experiences, the empathizer not only enters into a position of power vis-à-vis the object of empathy, but also risks obliterating the experiences of that object. Additionally, "to hold" evokes a holding pattern, which situates the wounded in a perpetual state of injury. As such, empathy for the wounded becomes ineffectual, as it cannot alter (heal, diminish) their fixed emotional state. The simultaneous kindness, union, symbolic violence, and stasis that the verb "to hold" communicates − but also leaves implied or unsaid − ensure that Brand's long poem is empathetically dissonant, as it linguistically recognizes both empathy's possibilities and its shortcomings.

The empathetic dissonance in *Inventory*'s couplet parallels Jean Valentine's short poem "In the Burning Air." By appearing in the collection *Poetry after 9/11: an Anthology of New York Poets*, this poem announces itself as a post-9/11 text and, moreover, a post-9/11 text penned by someone close to the main site of devastation. Valentine's geographic proximity (she lives in Manhattan) is relevant to the oscillation between near and far that characterizes the empathetic

process (Johnson and Merians, "Contributors' Notes" 110). Yet the poem itself maintains a distance from explicitly referencing the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. Instead, "In the Burning Air" allegorically responds to grief and empathy:

> In the burning air
> nothing.
>
> But on the ground
> *Let the sadness be*
> a woman and her spoon,
> a wooden spoon,
> and her chest, the broken
> bowl. (29)[31]

The eponymous first line, "In the burning air," with its nod to the smoke that filled the sky on 9/11, and the second verse's location "on the ground," with its echo of ground zero, come closest to directly identifying the event to which this poem responds. With the exception of these early phrases, however, 9/11 occupies an unsaid space in the text. Valentine's poem works, instead, through images. Although the first image that the speaker offers is a kind of pseudo-image − an obscure visual description of "burning air" − this image metonymically suggests the familiar, internationally-televised image of the burning World Trade Centers. Imitating the recurrence of this image through the repetition of the title and the first line, the poem's speaker casts readers into the continuous haze − physical and metaphorical − of September 11, 2001. The first word's pressure on inwardness echoes the feeling *in*to of empathy. Yet before readers reach the text's earliest instance of feeling ("*sadness*"), which is withheld − unsaid − until halfway through the

[31] This is the poem in its entirety.

poem, they stumble against semantic and formal nothingness. The lone word "nothing" on the second line, followed by a stanza break, suggests a nihilistic space where empathy is nonexistent, because there are no survivors in the air (either towers or people) to offer it. Here we can recall Kelly Cherry's conviction that art can access the capitalized Nothing that exceeds language (74) and *Inventory*'s opening line, "We believed in nothing" (3). Responding to the latter, Dionne Brand imagines nothingness as a space "where all of us … [are] emptied" and "open to new selves" that foster further possibilities of believing ("Dionne Brand on The Arts Tonight"). The "nothing" of "In the Burning Air" can also be conceived as an accessible space, one that is empathetically inviting even as it avows absence. Indeed, "nothing" or *no thing* suggests an absent presence, a tension that echoes the tension of empathetic dissonance.

The second verse of Valentine's poem continues the empathetic dissonance that the initial lines establish. As the second verse moves from "air" to "ground," the text empathetically performs the mortal and structural collapse (the falling bodies and towers) to which this work responds. The line that follows, "*Let the sadness be*," highlights the physical and metaphorical weight of feeling in the poem: physically, the location of sadness on the ground ("But on the ground / *Let the sadness be*") suggests sadness may be too weighty to lift; metaphorically, the poem gives sadness weight through the formal techniques of italicization, indentation, and centralization ("*sadness*" is at the approximate centre of the poem) (Valentine 29). Feeling, that vital component of empathy, carries weight in the text. Furthermore, through the implied "you" − "[you] let the sadness be" − Valentine's italicized, imperative sentence invites an unspoken reader into the poem's affective scene. Yet this sentence also requests readers to refrain from disturbing the sadness (let it be). Readers enter into "the burning air," follow the possibilities of "nothing," and fall to the "ground," but they must take these steps unobtrusively. When they

stumble upon the sadness that prepares them for the poem's protagonist, their empathy, the speaker underscores, should not be appropriative. "*Let the sadness be*" shuns the negative manifestations of empathy, such as emotional presumption and symbolic violence, opting instead for openness and acceptance.

While the movement from air to ground functions as an empathetic imitation and the sadness that takes place on the ground invites an unobtrusive empathy, the second half of the poem presents an allegory − a narrative with an unspoken underlying meaning − of empathetic dissonance. Echoing the chest punctured with "atomic openings" in *Inventory* (Brand 100), Valentine's poem employs the image of a nameless woman whose chest is a "broken / bowl" (29). As in Brand's work, the chest that Valentine's poem foregrounds is the site of both openness and breakage; although the concave shape of a bowl invites entry, the adjective that modifies "bowl" promises defectiveness. The formal separation of "broken" and "bowl" further underlines the breakage to which this poem alludes. Moreover, the starkness of the speaker's descriptions (a nameless woman, a wooden spoon, a broken bowl) parallels the destruction and bareness ("in the burning air / nothing") of September 11, 2001. The poem's closing image, thus, allegorically encourages empathy (the bowl is vacant) and simultaneously acknowledges the difficulty of this empathy (the bowl is broken; the images are stark) with the tumultuous events of 9/11.

Since the allegory in the latter half of "In the Burning Air" leaves much unsaid, the poem may also open to a reading of the woman as consumer of her own empathy. The lack of punctuation between the successive lines "*Let the sadness be*" and "a woman and her spoon" suggests the latter line (and the lines that follow) may function as an illustration of sadness. This sadness, to which the text lends physical and metaphorical weight, may so overwhelm the

poem's protagonist that she finds it necessary to remove her own heart. In other words, the image of a spoon-wielding woman, whose chest functions as the bowl from which she feeds, carries the possibility of the woman scooping out and presumably consuming her heart, a physical symbol of empathy. This self-consumption shields the woman from the unspoken harm of empathy: namely, the hurt one may experience when shouldering another's pain. Simultaneously, however, the cannibalistic gesture of eating one's own heart shifts the consequences of the symbolic violence of empathy (the eradication of the other in favour of the centralization of the self) from the object of empathy to the empathizer; empathy may be so repulsive or undesirable that one self harms in order to avoid it (Boyarin 90; S. Hartman 19). Moreover, self-consumption implies, among other concerns, a lack of nourishment. The empathy that feeds connection and growth is missing here. Indeed, the egocentric scene that Valentine's poem depicts prevents empathy through the absence of an other.

Allegory and metaphor, the latter to which *Inventory* also inclines, occupy an empathetically precarious position, particularly in literature responding to crises. Often straddling the line between testimony and imaginative re-interpretation, this literature must be wary of the tropes that sustain it. On the one hand, metaphors constitute an invitation to intimacy. For the receiver, metaphors require both a recognition as such and an unpacking of the metaphor's elements and the speaker's assumptions ("what the speaker believes, what the speaker believes about what the hearer believes") (T. Cohen 8). This process, what Ted Cohen terms "the cooperative act of comprehension," cultivates a "sense of close community" between the receiver and the speaker of the metaphor (9). On the other hand, however, metaphors constitute an "aesthetic estrangement" (Yaeger 410). Discussing tropes in Holocaust testimonies, Patricia Yaeger argues that literary figures of speech "change our reference point from the

rhythm of the story to another plane …. Any attempt to walk in proximity, to approach testimony with compassion, with nearness, is displaced by an enforced distance, by the introduction of another conceptual domain that does not permit the easy return to narrative" (413).[32] According to Yaeger, therefore, the added layer of distance that figures of speech impose, particularly in narratives of trauma which are often already difficult "to approach," is "empathy-unfriendly" (402). Moreover, because the various meanings of literary tropes are typically left unsaid or unexplained, the layers of distance between narrative and reader grow. Although Valentine's and Brand's texts do not fall into the category of testimony, their responses to historical events through allegory and metaphor resonate with the distancing that Yaeger describes. The tropes in these poems participate in an oscillation between nearness and distance; the hollowed chests that both poets steep in metaphor at the end of their respective works simultaneously invite and forbid entry. These opposing gestures ensure that each of the chests serves as a cavity for empathetic dissonance.

In the adjacent poems "Knowing Friend" and "Now This," from the collection *City without People: The Katrina Poems,* Niyi Osundare employs friendship as the chest or heart of empathetic dissonance after Hurricane Katrina. Nigerian-born Osundare was employed as a professor at the University of New Orleans when Katrina hit. He and his wife were in their house when the flood waters entered and pushed them first into the attic for upwards of a day and then out of the city for a handful of months (Osundare, "New Orleans is People" 121-31). The first-hand fear (125) and "dispossess[ion]" (132) that Osundare suffers during this time lends his writing, as it does the writing of authors like Charlotte Delbo, a sense of legitimacy. The focus on the inhabitants of New Orleans both in the title of Osundare's collection (*City without People*)

[32] Yaeger is specifically referencing Delbo's *Auschwitz and After* here.

and in the title of an interview in which Osundare shares his experience of the hurricane ("New Orleans is People") underscores the importance of the human for Osundare. "It's not just the French Quarter that is New Orleans," maintains Osundare in the latter text. "No. Not just the tourist areas. New Orleans is people" (133). Unsurprisingly, then, many of the poems in *City without People* spotlight the individuals that Osundare encounters during and after his city's plight. Championing the humanity of these people, Osundare comments, "it's amazing, the kind of friendship that we discovered, and the kind of hospitality, and the kind of good will that we enjoyed all over the place" (131). This praise of friendship that hinges on commiseration becomes the basis of the poem "Knowing Friend." In contrast, the poem "Now This" examines friendship that hinges on insensitivity and lack of empathy. Osundare's juxtaposition of these two texts, the former brimming with empathy and the latter empathetically parched, becomes the unsaid site of empathetic dissonance.

"Knowing Friend" spotlights a friend that affords the speaker empathy. Dedicating his poem, "*for Don Burness / for Mary-Lou*," Osundare includes a footnote that details the identity of these individuals: "Great friends through whom we got to know Franklin Pierce University, and whose genuine love and care cushioned our Katrina semester in New Hampshire" ("Knowing Friend" 87, 88). Similar to Dionne Brand's dedication poem to Marlene Green in *Inventory*, thus, Osundare's poem emerges from a personal relationship. Offering further comment on Don Burness, presumably the "he" of "Knowing Friend," in an interview with Rebeca Antoine, Osundare explains that Burness is "a poet and an academic" who helped Osundare secure the position of Poet in Residence and Visiting Professor at Franklin Pierce University following Katrina. This kindness ensured that Osundare and his wife had an income and a place of residence removed from the devastation of New Orleans ("New Orleans is

People" 130). The similar literary occupations of Burness and Osundare, as well as the benevolent gesture of the former to the latter become the roots of empathy that "Knowing Friend" cultivates between the two men.

While knowledge in Delbo's "O you who know" requires experience (the poem's outsider addressees cannot "know" the camps), knowledge in Osundare's "Knowing Friend" requires attention and appreciation. As such, Osundare's poem grants knowledge of the speaker's experiences to the text's understanding, albeit experientially-removed, friend. Instead of irony and disdain, thus, "Knowing Friend" adopts a tone of sincerity and deference. Moreover, shirking Delbo's repetition of the verb "know," Osundare's speaker enlarges the empathy of the poem with the phrases, "he has noticed"; "he understands"; "he knows"; "he can feel"; "he can read":

> Since Katrina's calamitous coming
> He has noticed those vacant lots
> In the country of my face
> My long, lingering gaze
>
> My absent moments
> And those sighs which erupt
> From some anguished corner
> In the chambers of my heart.
>
> A soft peripatetic polyglot,
> He understands the language

Of loss, brutal bereavements
Violent uprootings, and sudden dis-

Locations. He knows when
Blind storms have shifted the sky,
When houses roam the streets
In search of their missing roofs

He can feel the tremor of the terror
When I struggle to re-call
Favourite lines from a missing book,
The tantalizing phantom of vanished

Manuscripts. He can read
The deep-etched scars of the storm and
Katrina's savage scarification on the
Face of a once serene colleague[.] ("Knowing Friend" 87-88)

Positioned three stanzas before a claim to knowledge ("He knows when / Blind storms have shifted the sky"), the words "he has noticed" underline the attention necessary to the process of empathy. As Leslie Jamison conceives, empathy emerges from our decision "to pay attention, to extend ourselves" (23). Significantly, the friend in this poem pays attention to or extends himself into the speaker's empty spaces (we can recall here Brand's and Jean Valentine's metaphoric chests): the "vacant lots," "absent moments," and "chambers of [the] heart" (Osundare,

"Knowing Friend" 87). These aspects invite the empathetic entrance of another. Moreover, the movement from the eyes ("vacant lots") to the heart of the speaker constitutes an unspoken movement inwards. Aiding this movement is each of the following stanza's respective assertions that the friend understands, knows, feels, and reads the speaker's emotional state. In contrast to the lone knowledge that the "you" in Delbo's "O you who know" purportedly possesses, the "knowing friend" in Osundare's text can proffer empathy through the understanding and feeling that append his knowledge.

In addition to the verbs that beckon empathy, the two friends in "Knowing Friend" share a common language that facilitates the affective relation between them. The loss that marks the speaker's eyes as "vacant lots" and his moments with "absen[ce]" is not foreign to the "knowing friend"; this friend, the speaker asserts, "understands the language / Of loss" (87). As such, the linguistic and emotional space between the characters of the poem diminishes. Osundare's text becomes a nod to the connection and understanding that empathy can foster. Also of importance here is the unsaid aural empathy between the two friends. The alliterative "language / Of loss" in the fourth stanza reaches back to the speaker's "long, lingering gaze" in the second stanza, underlying the emotional convergence of the speaker and the friend. Indeed, alliteration is pervasive in this poem: "Katrina's calamitous coming"; "peripatetic polyglot"; "brutal bereavements"; "tremor of the terror"; and "savage scarification," among others (87, 88). Alliteration becomes a part of the common language that the speaker and his "peripatetic polyglot" friend share, buttressing the empathy of the text.

Furthermore, the final verb of the poem, "read," serves as a fraught bridge of connection or empathy between the two men. The speaker's assertion that his friend "can read" the effects of Katrina on the former's face alludes to both the understanding between them and the act of

reading that marks each of their occupations (88). Reading also gestures back to the opening stanza of "Knowing Friend":

> He measures his day
>
> By the volume of my laughter
>
> Studies my looks
>
> Like his book of vital signs[.] (87)

The terms "volume," "studies," and "book" set up a literary milieu through which the remainder of the poem may be read. Particularly, the simile in the fourth line decrees both a physiological and literary kinship. As part of their common language, literature becomes the catalyst for intimacy between the friends. Indeed, the unsaid (at least until the final stanza's "read") premise of the poem is the friend's ability to read the speaker as a text. Particularly, the alliteration and figurative language that drive "Knowing Friend" suggest that the text that the friend is reading is a literary text. Like the tropes that inform Brand's *Inventory* and Valentine's "In the Burning Air," the figurative language in Osundare's poem constitutes both an invitation to intimacy and an estrangement. As such, although the friend approaches the experiences of the Katrina-affected speaker, the friend also remains outside of these experiences. Moreover, the distance between the actual speaker and the speaker as literary text − a distance marked by the unspeakable or the extra-linguistic − further enforces the friend's separation from the speaker, as the friend can only read the speaker as text. If the friend functions as a kind of reader, then the text aligns him with the reader outside of the text proper. While both readers participate in an empathy with the speaker (or speaker as text), these readers also find themselves outside of the experiences that the speaker either figuratively describes or cannot verbalize.

Through literature, "Knowing Friend" also fosters an empathetic relation between the poem's speaker and Osundare. Literature functions as a site of loss in the speaker's post-Katrina world. As the penultimate stanza articulates, the "I" of the text "struggle[s] to recall / Favourite lines from a missing book" and is haunted by "the tantalizing phantom of vanished / Manuscripts" (87-88). Echoing the concern for lost literature that the poem's speaker voices, Osundare, faced with the prospect of this loss during the hurricane, extra-textually experiences anxiety: "I was so consumed by the anxiety to rescue as many of my books and documents as possible; of course I couldn't really rescue them" ("New Orleans is People" 123). Although it is impossible and futile to wholly attribute the speaker's anxiety to that of Osundare himself, the historically accurate aspects of "Knowing Friend" (the dedication, the explicating footnote) suggest a nearness linking speaker and poet here. The precarious partition between literary persona and authorial subjectivity characterizes many of the crisis poems that I examine. Indeed, the empathy between the fictional and the historical becomes a part of the empathy of the text.

While "Knowing Friend" invites empathy through the empathetic friendship that it depicts (however much distance this relationship necessitates) and the empathetic relation between speaker and poet, "Now This" considers the misguided or missing empathy that can exist between friends. Shorter and partitioned into two numbered parts, the latter poem sets up a formal distance (much remains unsaid and the separate sections intimate division more than they do connection) that the content of the text upholds. Unlike the identified and physically present friend of the previous poem, "Now This" contemplates two unnamed friends who interact with the speaker from a distance. The first of these friends, who communicates via telephone (a removed interaction), responds to the devastation of the hurricane with an unexpected hurrah:

i.

For the friend

Who called with the following message:

Hey man, I heard Katrina

Washed you out completely.

Congratulations! That'll be good stuff

For another book of poems…[.] (89)

The congratulations that stands in place of commiseration here points to a lack of sensitivity and an empathy as much misguided in this poem as it is well-guided in the preceding text. The "language / Of loss" that the pair in "Knowing Friend" share contrasts with the monologue of trite, cold words that the friend in "Now This" dispenses (87). Indeed, the latter friend's brusque "Hey man" − particularly when read in the context of the remainder of the message − trivializes the relationship between the two speakers; this greeting becomes less sign of comradeship and more sign of callousness (89). The double gesture of the next line's "washed you out" (with idiomatic inferences of loss and allusion to the flood waters of Katrina) signals the epigrammatic turn of the friend's third line. Imbued with a lack of understanding, the congratulatory message harbours the type of misguided empathy that assumes the feelings of another: perverse joy at the possibility of profit from wreckage.

Yet the friend's insensitivity metapoetically hits upon the very act in which "Now This" partakes; the "*book of poems*" that the friend suggests should derive from Katrina's havoc is precisely the book in which this poem is situated. The friend's message, thus, touches the question with which many crisis poems and the theoretical underpinnings of crisis literature

struggle: the ethics of making art from pain. Yet "Now This" deliberately leaves this question and its possible answer unsaid in the content of the text. Instead, Osundare offers both the question and the answer through the existence of this poem and the existence of *City without People*. By writing a "*book of poems*" in response to Katrina − notably, a crisis that affects him personally − Osundare not only announces the ethical value of poetry derived from tragedy, but also argues for the necessity of this poetry. Osundare's personal connection to the Hurricane demarcates the parameters of this ethical necessity. As the poet outlines in the preface to *City without People*, "These are the words of someone [Osundare] right in the eye of the storm, *written by himself*, not 'gathered' by an unappointed spokesperson or ventriloquised from 'reliable sources' by a privileged and distant secondary source" (10). The italicized emphasis on the writer's locale at the heart of the crisis, as well as the ironic nod at "'gather[ing]'" another's story from so-called "'reliable sources,'" cements Osundare's allegiance to the personally-derived response poem. As such, according to Osundare, the "*good stuff*" that the friend in "Now This" crassly references is only "*good*" − appropriate and accurate (in lieu of the friend's expansive and evocative) − if it stems from first-hand experience (89).[33]

Similar to the first half of "Now This," the second half of the poem features a friend who is physically removed from the speaker. Although this friend offers assistance, he refrains from offering empathy:

ii.

And another

Who shouted this across the distance:

[33] For more on Osundare's emphasis on the personal voice in response to crisis, particularly regarding the politics of exclusion, see the introduction to this chapter.

Hello there

We heard you lost everything

Just let me know

If there is anything you need

And if there is anything that I can do…[.] (89)

Like the friend who offers his congratulations via telephone, the friend here "shout[s]" his offering "across the distance." Unwilling to traverse the space between himself and the hurricane victim, the second friend also refuses to cross the bridge of empathy. The distance between the two companions ensures that this friend will not hear, as the "he" in the preceding poem does, "those sighs which erupt / From some anguished corner / In the chambers of my [the speaker's] heart" (87). In place of the intimacy of "Knowing Friend," the companion in the latter part of "Now This" confers a message marked by propriety and generalization. The sweeping terms "*everything*" and "*anything*" arouse mistrust in the aid that they promise, as they signal civility more than sincerity (89). Their indefinite nature both opens and shuts the door of support: on the one hand, offering "*anything*" functions as a token of generosity; on the other hand, the vague or unspoken nature of "*anything*" shifts the onus of specifying assistance to the person requiring it, inducing this already burdened individual to ask, more-often-than-not, for nothing. Furthermore, the irony at play between the total loss suffered by the hurricane victim and the uncertainty of the friend's repeated "*if*" ("*If there is anything you need* / *And if there is anything that I can do*…") underscores the disingenuousness of the friend's message. Like the ironic knowledge assigned to the addressees in Delbo's "O you who know," the irony between "*everything*" and "*anything*" in Osundare's poem renders it unconducive to empathy.

Indeed, whether the friend's message in the second part of "Now This" is sincere or insincere, empathy remains misguided or absent in each of the friends' monologues. In contrast to the ever-present voice of the hurricane survivor in "Knowing Friend," the survivor in "Now This" is relegated to introducing the voices of two friends. Silenced by the torrent of their speech (each of the friends speaks two times more lines than the survivor) or by the distance that they retain (a message left over the phone, a shout over the distance), the survivor in the latter poem cannot attain empathy, because he cannot attain a voice through which to express his feelings. Notably, while the opening words of both sections of "Now This" belong to the survivor, this survivor, like the speaker in Delbo's "O you who know," does not employ the first-person personal pronoun *I*. Instead, part one of the text constitutes empathetic ventriloquism − the friend assumes that the survivor will derive pleasure from calamity − and part two constitutes removed sympathy − the friend offers vague aid but does not emotionally join the survivor in his misfortune. The attention (visual and aural) that is ubiquitous in "Knowing Friend" and is requisite for empathy has little place in "Now This." Each ending with an ellipsis, the two halves of the latter poem engage with the unsaid: the voice of the hurricane victim that the friends' messages eclipse. The absence to which the ellipses point is also an empathetic absence that disregards the emotional and cognitive world of this victim.

By juxtaposing the empathetic abundance of "Knowing Friend" with the empathetic scarcity of "Now This," Osundare achieves an unspoken, empathetically dissonant relationship between the two texts. In addition to their adjacent positions in *City without People* and their parallel focus on friendship, these poems include a number of other elements that highlight their complementary characters. First, the second poem's title, "Now This," reads as a response to something that has preceded it − precisely, the previous poem. "Now This" functions as an

instrument in an intratextual conversation. Second, both works begin with the prepositional and dedicational "for." In the case of "Knowing Friend," "for" is a component of the paratextual makeup of the poem, set off in parentheses and italics and specified by two names: "*(for Don Burness / for Mary-Lou)*" (87). In "Now This," on the other hand, "for" is a part of the text proper, specified by the remainder of the poem (which, interestingly, also features two friends): "For the friend / Who" (89). Although "for" works differently in the two texts, this preposition frames each poem and linguistically connects one to the other. Among additional points of commonality between "Knowing Friend" and "Now This" are both of the poems' thematic considerations of literature (the former reverentially and the latter disparagingly), as well as their references to a post-Katrina emptiness (the former recognizing an emotional emptiness and the latter a physical emptiness). These complementary elements combine to suggest an unspoken, empathetically dissonant conversation between the two texts, one side enacting empathy and the other enacting its lack.

"You'd like to know / ask questions," a poem in Charlotte Delbo's *The Measure of Our Days* begins, echoing the earlier "O you who know." Halfway through this late text, however, the collective speaker admits, "we don't know how to answer / not with the words you use" (Delbo 275). In attempting to articulate the unspeakable, language comes up against its limitations; dragged through and employed as instruments of genocide, terrorism, or human disregard, words undergo a process of de-familiarization and re-signification. The poems that this chapter considers engage with the unsaid − linguistic inadequacies, silences − and the said − diction, rhetoric − through which these works offer comment on empathy. The fragmentations ("In the Burning Air"; "Now This"), ambiguities ("O you who know"; *Inventory*), unanswered

questions (“O you who know”; “Who Knew the Murderers”; “Do not say they cannot hear us”), and ellipses (“Do not say they cannot hear us”; “Now This”) that characterize the texts function as figures of empathy with the language-defying disasters to which they respond. Simultaneously, these figures elude empathy through the inhibiting effects of terseness and uncertainty; fragmentations, ambiguities, unanswered questions, and ellipses render the extension of empathy or imaginative entry difficult. The result of these opposing forces − the receptiveness to and evasion of empathy − is empathetic dissonance.

Significantly, the site of empathetic dissonance for many of the poems in this chapter is a close, namely familial or friendly, relationship. Ursula Duba’s “Who Knew the Murderers” focuses on the anxiety of empathizing with one’s own possibly guilty relatives. Dionne Brand’s dedication poem in *Inventory* foregrounds a friendship teeming with empathy, but one which underscores the lack of empathy extended to those characterized more by statistic than companionship. Niyi Osundare’s “Knowing Friend” and “Now This” figure two distinct friendships, the former marked by empathy and the latter by its absence. The close relationships that these texts depict become sites of vulnerability − the stage on which empathy is enacted. Of relevance here is the identifiable victim effect, which embraces (however ambivalently) the familiar sufferer over the unfamiliar sufferer. Yet the dissonance with which the poems confer this empathetic embrace reveals a mistrust of empathy. Just as the boy posing between the barbed wire fences at Auschwitz, the empathy with which the texts in this chapter engage is tinged with notions of exploitation and appropriation. The unsaid of the poems here is partially the suspicion that empathy not only undergoes transformation in the face of events at the limits of empathy, but also that empathy may play a hand in the devastations that this project considers. The next chapter moves from linguistic inadequacies to the problematics of witnessing.

Eschewing the personal relationships that mark many of the poems in this chapter, the texts in the second chapter prod empathy largely from a position of distance.

Chapter Two: The Unhere

"Flashbulb memories," as Roger Brown and James Kulik have theorized, are memories of the conditions in which one finds oneself at the moment of unexpected and significant events (73-75). On September 11, 2001, when the first plane crashed into the North Tower of the World Trade Center, I was sitting in an orthodontist's office, mouth wide open to the scrutiny and violence that promised to alter the foundation of my teeth. I recall the secretary walking in to deliver the news of devastation and to click on the television so that the orthodontist (and, by extension, I) could partake in the witnessing of disaster. For the remainder of the pulling and tightening that typically characterized my appointments, I watched the replayed image, then still shrouded in uncertainty, of the burning Towers. Later that day when I returned from school, nearly every channel on the television was ablaze with the images of the terrorist attacks, now numbering four plane crashes and stretching across three cities. Commenting on this televised experience, poet X.J. Kennedy writes, "Television − which, like most Americans, my wife and I watched continuously through the day of devastation − kept limning the nightmare. Over and over again, we watched that tower collapse, domino fashion" (221). The coverage of the burning and falling Towers was no less prevalent outside of North America: "The entire nation and indeed the entire world knew about September 11 because of the repeated play it was given in the US corporate-owned global media" (Parenti x). The media-saturated events of 9/11 ensured that even those who were absent from the site of catastrophe became witnesses to it. Although this experience of witnessing shifted 9/11 into the realm of the autobiographical − those who watched (on television, for example) had their own experiences, including flashbulb memories, of the event − these watchers also became witnesses to the experiences of those closer to the heart of the catastrophe (those in the planes and in the Towers, for example). To witness − to

choose to pay attention to another's story − is to begin the work of empathy. Unsurprisingly, empathetic witnessing is not immune to the dangers of appropriation (of the object of empathy's experiences) and secondary trauma (for the subject extending empathy). Watching the replayed images of 9/11, especially for the impressionable thirteen-year-old that I was, made it easy to become emotionally absorbed in an experience from whose site and immediate consequences I was removed. Marked by distance and witnessing, my memories − a word packed with its own issues of distance − of September 11, 2001 hold relevance for the current chapter because they illustrate the complexities of a mediated experience of crisis.

"The Unhere" considers poems that represent empathetic dissonance from various removed positions of witnessing. The deictic *unhere*, a term that only makes meaning in context, is particularly salient as the organizing principle of this chapter, because, as Julia Creet argues, there is an intimate relationship between witnessing and the deictic: "inherent in the call of the deictic" is "the test of our capacity to bear witness" ("Calling on Witnesses"). Moreover, I have chosen the deictic root *here* instead of its counterpart *there* because of the former term's pressure on the presence of the event. "The Unhere" takes into account the removed witness's desire to be present at the site of a particular crisis, the site of the privileged "here." Simultaneously, "The Unhere" considers the witness's anxiety that this desire places one in a here that is painful or uncomfortable and dislocates one from one's immediate surroundings. Yet the removed witness is neither quite at the traumatic event nor quite at the particular here in which she/he is situated; this witness is both absent and present vis-à-vis these sites.

The experiential, physical, emotional, personal, temporal, geographical, and/or cultural distances implicit in "the unhere" invoke disasters as spaces of ownership and those who experience disasters first-hand as governors of these spaces. As easy (and exclusive) as such an

allocation may appear, however, it is complicated by notions of secondary trauma and postmemory. According to Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, "the listener to trauma comes to be a participant and a co-owner of the traumatic event: through his very listening, he comes to partially experience trauma in himself" (57). In other words, the secondary trauma that listeners may experience renders them "co-owner[s]," however problematic the idea of co-ownership may be, of the disasters to which their aural faculties are attuned. While the role of the listeners falls in the sphere of the unhere (they are experientially removed from the initial traumatic event), their empathetic listening permits them entry into and governance of that event; following the path paved by the homonym, to *hear* allows entry into the *here*. Exploring that entry and governance, "The Unhere" considers texts like Charles Reznikoff's *Holocaust*, Cynthia Hogue's Hurricane Katrina interview poems, and Claudia Rankine's *Citizen: An American Lyric*, all of which chisel poetry from survivors' testimonies. Through their works, Reznikoff, Hogue, and Rankine become secondary witnesses to the events that they document.[34]

Similarly, albeit directed by familial relation, Marianne Hirsch's concept of postmemory spotlights indirect witnesses of trauma. Defining the term at the heart of her work on intergenerational memory and the Holocaust, Hirsch writes,

> postmemory is distinguished from memory by generational distance and from history by deep personal connection. Postmemory is a powerful and very particular form of memory precisely because its connection to its object or source is mediated not through recollection but through an imaginative investment and creation …. Postmemory characterizes the experience of those who grow up

[34] This chapter, especially, considers the position poets (in addition, of course, to their chosen speakers) occupy in relation to the events to which the texts respond. The intent here is not to tumble down the hole of authorial fallacy but instead to read these texts, in the ways that they ask to be read, as historical documents (testimonies, Google searches, photographs, interviews, news broadcasts).

> dominated by narratives that preceded their birth, whose own belated stories are evacuated by the stories of the previous generation shaped by traumatic events that can be neither understood nor recreated. I have developed this notion in relation to children of Holocaust survivors, but I believe it may usefully describe other second-generation memories of cultural or collective traumatic events and experiences. (22)

Although the children of survivors are experientially, physically, and temporally unhere at the event through which their parents survived, postmemory grants these children mediated access to the event. The unhere becomes the groundwork for the imaginative entry − the empathy − that the second generation experiences. While not enough time has elapsed for the coming of age of a second generation born from 9/11 and Hurricane Katrina survivors, this chapter gives attention to the work of a child of Holocaust survivors. Specifically, Lily Brett's poem "Leaving You" traces the struggles of living with the burden of postmemory, an experience of being unhere in both the event of the Holocaust and the present post-Holocaust world. Whether trauma is gleaned through listening or inheritance, these secondary harbingers of memory enter the restrictive spaces of disasters through the process of empathy.

In addition to witnesses who are unhere at the site of devastation, this chapter considers what remains unhere, and in turn what is here, in poems after devastation. The shaping of a work of poetry in response to another's testimony, in particular, calls into question the necessarily ideological choices of the poet and the poem. Source text occupies both an absent and a present space in such a poetic rendering. The poem's omissions and additions, as well as its literary and formal elements (for example, metaphor, parataxis, pronoun choice, line breaks, spacing, stanzaic structure), reveal the poem's relationship to the testimony. If this relationship is invested

in the process of empathy − through cognitive and emotional insertion into another's narrative − then the choices that characterize the poem also characterize its relationship to empathy. What is unhere and here in poems after crisis, therefore, can have a direct impact on the place empathy occupies in the texts.

Furthermore, who is here in a disaster is intimately tied up with who is granted empathy.[35] Yet physical presence is far from always a guarantee of emotional presence. Specifically, through the politics of power and visibility, certain victims may be rendered unhere in their own stories; these individuals suffer dislocation from their own crises. As such, while the unhere may offer closeness, through empathy, to those who are removed from an event, the unhere may also deny this closeness to those who are initially close to the event. For example, the African-American and economically-disadvantaged population of New Orleans was not in the eye of urban planners and policy makers when (as well as before and arguably after) Hurricane Katrina hit. "Our intent," write Hogue and Rebecca Ross in relation to their Katrina interview-poems and photographs, "is to share the personal experiences of a handful of Katrina evacuees …. We seek through our art to create a space for voices to be heard and people to be seen who might otherwise be invisible or forgotten" (126). In a similar vein, this chapter (and the larger project) pays attention to texts that pay attention and offer empathy to those who have been, at one time or another, "invisible or forgotten" and, thus, those who have been part of the affectively unhere.

The artistic attention that Hogue and Ross extend to emotionally unhere individuals necessitates responsible witnessing on the part of the experientially unhere witness. Outlining the obligations of a "poetry of witness" in an article about poetic appropriation, Abe Louise Young,

[35] Judith Butler's notion of "a grievable life" is pertinent here. For more on this see the Introduction to my dissertation.

founder of *Alive in Truth: The New Orleans Disaster Oral History and Memory Project*, comments,

> poetry of witness requires ethical rigor, careful editing, and ongoing stewardship of the personal stories of living people because it's quite easy to 'do something' destructive, too. The stories aren't just stories; they are evolving life-or-death truth. People's memories move, their stance shifts, and the stories they tell are intricately bound up with personal survival. For that reason, the primary storytellers must be involved in shaping the public presentation of the work.

The process of overseeing another's story, Young argues, involves, ideally, a collaboration between the poet and the sufferer of disaster. If this collaboration admits but does not appropriate the sufferer's story, then the collaboration may allow for an emotionally unhere sufferer to reclaim the here of his/her story; in other words, if the witness-poet applies "ethical rigor, careful editing, and ongoing stewardship" to recounting the sufferer's story, then the sufferer's voice can be re-centred in the narrative. The sufferer can move from the unhere to the here.[36] Yet when circumstances, the most obvious of which are the sufferer's death, forbid a partnership between the poet and the sufferer, the work of the poet grows even more precarious. Whether the collaboration is upheld or abandoned, however, one of the challenges of writing from an experientially unhere position is the potential for violence.[37] Specifically, the removed

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[36] The victim's movement from the unhere to the here points to the hierarchical relationship between the here and the unhere: while the here is a privileged, authentic site of witnessing, the unhere implies a less authentic site of witnessing. Similar to the problematics of ownership in relation to a crisis, the hierarchical relationship between the here and the unhere is problematic because of the legitimacy it lends to one narrative of suffering over another.

[37] Abe Louise Young identifies an instance of collaborative failure in her discussion of Raymond McDaniel's poem "Convention Centers of the New World" from his book *Saltwater Empire*. Without the knowledge and consent of the Hurricane Katrina survivors whose stories he finds in the online archives of Young's *Alive in Truth: The New Orleans Disaster Oral History and Memory Project*, McDaniel uses the words of the survivors for his poem. Young particularly notes that McDaniel de-individualizes the survivors by divesting them of their names and merging their narratives together. Incensed by McDaniel's poetic carelessness and liberty, Young comments, "Hurricane Katrina did not happen in a vacuum, in America's imagination, to everyone, or in general. It happened in a particular

witnessing that guides the texts in this chapter may cause further devastation through assumption and appropriation of another's story or through traumatisation of the empathetic witness. In the case of assumption and appropriation, the process of witnessing another's suffering contains the risk of usurping − altering, re-envisioning − that suffering. In the case of traumatisation, witnessing another's suffering (and desiring to be at the site of that suffering) can disturb the witness into his/her own trauma. The texts that "The Unhere" spotlights, therefore, work through the various possibilities of an experientially unhere witness.

The poems in this chapter recognize both the potential benefits of the experientially unhere witness, as a responsible collaborator who can help shift emotionally unhere victims into the here of their own stories, and the potential liabilities of the experientially unhere witness, as a source of violence through appropriation of another's suffering and traumatisation of the self. The oscillation between the various possibilities of the unhere witness ushers in a dissonance that echoes the empathetic dissonance that marks the poems that I consider here. On the one hand, these poems invite empathy through their choice to witness or to attend to (this is the case with most of the texts in this chapter) words or images that belong to another. On the other hand, as I will explain in detail later in this chapter, these poems discard empathy through the often enforced distance between poet and speaker, as well as their lack of direct interest in or voiced discomfort with the empathetic process. Specifically, this chapter looks at Reznikoff's *Holocaust*, Brett's "Leaving You," Robert Fitterman's "This Window Makes Me Feel," Wisława Szymborska's "Photograph from September 11," Hogue and Ross's *When the Water Came:*

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geography, a history, an economy, and a field of race and power built to render certain people powerless. When a white person [McDaniel] takes the voices of people of color for his own uses, without permission, in the aftermath of a racially charged national disaster, it is vulture work − worse than ventriloquism." Although my project does not consider McDaniel's poem outside of this footnote, Young's metaphorical equation of McDaniel as vulture has implications for the empathetic dissonance in the poems that I do study.

Evacuees of Hurricane Katrina, and Rankine's Hurricane Katrina section in *Citizen: An American Lyric*.

Although the American-born, Jewish poet Charles Reznikoff does not witness the events of the Holocaust first-hand − he is experientially, physically, and temporally unhere at the site of a Holocaust experience − he positions witnessing at the centre of his 1975 eponymous long poem *Holocaust* (Szirtes 8). Rooted in courtroom proceedings from the *Trials of War Criminals Before the Nuernberg Military Tribunals* and the *Trial and Appeal of Adolf Eichmann* in Jerusalem, *Holocaust* relies on primary sources ("statements made by witnesses and, to a lesser extent, affidavits and certain official war documents presented by trial lawyers"), particularly those relating to Jews (Sutherland 87). Structuring the poem as mouthpiece for firsthand witnesses of the Holocaust, Reznikoff performs an empathetic act, "a kind of Jewish negative capability in which the author witnesses the suffering of others as unobtrusively as possible" (Jenkins 66). The limits of the unobtrusive, however, prove tenuous. While most of the words in *Holocaust* do not belong to Reznikoff, his selections underlie the poem − from his choice of source texts to his arrangement of lines: "[Reznikoff] never appropriates a source as found; he always edits it severely. He deletes material, especially repetitions and irrelevancies; he sharpens diction, improves rhythm, and rids the source of figurative language and other rhetorical embellishments; he reduces the story to its dramatic essentials" (Sutherland 89). Inevitably, Reznikoff imbues *Holocaust* with his own ideological choices. As such, the text's empathy − its choice to witness others' experiences − is imbued with symbolic violence; *Holocaust* at once gives voice to and appropriates the words and stories of the witnesses. Commenting on this paradoxical gesture, Todd Carmody argues that "*Holocaust* appropriates language in order to demonstrate the limits

of appropriating emotion or experience fundamental to the Eichmann Trial" (89). In other words, although Reznikoff's act of linguistic appropriation is problematic, it is also instructive in the secondary witness's limited ability to emotionally appropriate or empathize with survivors of the Holocaust.

While most of Reznikoff's long poem gives voice to victim-witnesses, there are a few sections that also give voice to perpetrators. As such, by considering the often absent or unhere (and perhaps undesired) Nazi testimonies, *Holocaust* allows the possibility of empathy with these testimonies.[38] Considering this inclusive gesture, G. Matthew Jenkins maintains that *Holocaust* "witnesses and welcomes the Other. Ultimately, Objectivist poetics assumes responsibility for the suffering of the Other *and* one's complicity in that suffering" (67).[39] Reznikoff, Jenkins further specifies, "uses the logic of identification not only for sympathy with the victims but to collapse any distance we would like to keep from the perpetrators, a distance that is key to the process of judgment" (83-84). In other words, *Holocaust* "bear[s]" both the pain of the victims and the responsibility for that pain (73). This responsibility diminishes the space between non-perpetrator and perpetrator, and, thus, withholds moral judgment. Empathy becomes the structural tenet of the text's witnessing.

Empathy is particularly salient in the poem's choice of pronouns. Reflecting his own position as an experientially unhere witness, Reznikoff alters most of the testimonies with which

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[38] In this instance, the text, which offers attention to both victim and perpetrator accounts, takes up the role of potential empathizer. The text as empathizer allows for the further possibility of the reader as empathizer. Although I do not believe that Reznikoff intends for the reader to empathize with Nazis, the voice that this text lends to perpetrator accounts may open an avenue, despite Reznikoff's intentions, toward the reader's empathy with these accounts.

[39] Objectivist poetics, a Modernist movement theorized by Louis Zukofsky, involves conceiving of the poem as an object (Szirtes 7). According to Reznikoff, the objectivist writer is one "who does not write directly about his feelings but about what he sees and hears; who is restricted almost to the testimony of a witness in a court of law; and who expresses his feelings indirectly by the selection of his subject matter and, if he writes in verse, by its music" (8). For more on Objectivist poetry, particularly in relation to Reznikoff, see George Szirtes's introduction to *Holocaust* and Charles Bernstein's article "Reznikoff's Nearness."

he works from first to third-person narrations. Although this choice distances the speakers, it also highlights and brings nearer a particular perpetrator account early in the text. Instead of the third-person voice, this account adopts the first-person plural pronoun "we." Situated under the generic title, "Research," this poem details some of the heinous experiments that the Nazis conducted on Jews under the guise of scientific investigation. Speaking in a collective voice, the perpetrator in this section proclaims,

> We are the civilized −
> Aryans;
> and do not always kill those condemned to death
> merely because they are Jews
> as the less civilized might:
> we use them to benefit science
> like rats or mice. (Reznikoff 15)

The pretext of civilization here falls apart as the speaker compares Jews to rats and mice. While the poem's methodology of seeing through the eyes of survivors and perpetrators allows the possibility of empathy, the analogy to rats and mice underscores the speaker's denial of empathy; imagining the Jewish people as rodents − as vermin, even − further distances the "civilized" perpetrators and their victims. Moreover, the grammatically passive construction in the phrase "those condemned to death" conceals the group responsible for this condemnation.

Yet while the passive voice in this perpetrator poem allows Nazis to shirk responsibility for murder, the opening and repeated pronoun "we" does not permit the same concession. Although the poem identifies "we" as Aryans, the dash (a caesura or pause) at the end of the first line, coupled with the inclusivity of the deictic "we," suggests that this pronoun may have an

open antecedent. As Julia Creet argues in relation to H.G. Adler's *The Journey*, another text after the Holocaust that employs the deictic, "We, as readers, are swept up … through the deictic of *we* and *you*, which confuses the now and then, present and past, presence and absence. We know the memory is not ours, but [the deictic] calls to us and asks us at every enunciation of memory's voice to resolve whether we belong in the 'referential slither' of *you*, *we*, or sometimes *they*" ("A Dialectic of the Deictic" 209). Through a sweeping field of reference, therefore, the "we" in Reznikoff's *Holocaust* invites readers "to resolve" their level of belonging in the text's deictic. Indeed, I would argue that "we" implicates everyone (readers and Reznikoff included) in the horrific "research" that this poem describes; readers and Reznikoff alike are no longer able to hide behind the safety offered by the unhere, whose distances would preclude responsibility for the horrors of this scene. As Jenkins argues, "Reznikoff's poem takes responsibility for th[e] murders" (73). Uncomfortable as the collective "we" is, this deictic pronoun "enforc[es] empath[y]" (Creet, "A Dialectic of the Deictic" 209): "Reznikoff desires to make his audience 'feel actually what happened' by inviting them to put themselves in the place of the Other [all of the individuals, whether victims or perpetrators, whose voices the text foregrounds]" (Jenkins 79). Adhering, therefore, to Dominick LaCapra's controversial suggestion that empathy with perpetrators is necessary, *Holocaust* empathetically feels into the role of a perpetrator (LaCapra 104).[40] "The enemy," explains Jenkins, "is We − you and I − and we are forced to face how we make ethical judgments at all" (77). Facing the often latent processes through which we form ethical judgments is also an exercise in Judith Butler's conception of "a grievable life"; in other words, the conditions under which we grieve or condemn are rooted in ideologies that dictate the extension of empathy (Butler 38). Although it is problematic to assume the perspective of both victims and perpetrators − recall the symbolic violence to which this assumption is vulnerable −

[40] For more on LaCapra see the Introduction to my dissertation.

especially in a text that interchanges these perspectives, the structuring of the text as such opens to empathy.

While *Holocaust* invites empathy by witnessing both victims and perpetrators, a concern with facts at the expense of emotional engagement ensures that the long poem is empathetically dissonant. Explaining Reznikoff's process, Janet Sutherland notes,

> Reznikoff edits his source material so skillfully [*sic*] that the reader of Holocaust [*sic*] never is aware that the words on the page are drawn from courtroom transcripts. The names of the war criminals are withheld, their sentences are not given, their lawyers and judges are silent. The names of the survivors − that is, the witnesses for the prosecution − are also withheld. What matters to Reznikoff is not who does the telling, but the telling itself: the personal testimony, the concrete details of what happened. (87)

Stripping the narrative of identifying information, the poet's focus becomes the narrative itself. Reinforcing this focus, Reznikoff refrains from allowing his speakers to offer opinions regarding what they witness. Instead of reflection, therefore, the text invests in the immediate present, the here of the anonymous speakers. Significantly, Reznikoff is concerned with the facts of the Holocaust. Explaining what she characterizes as "a bare skeleton of fact without any rhetorical wraps," Sidra DeKoven Ezrahi argues that "Reznikoff, and other documentary writers would force their audience to confront reality by closing off, as far as possible, the option of viewing it as fantasy. As master of the imagination the artist again becomes the historian *par excellence*" (*By Words Alone* 45). A focus on facts, DeKoven Ezrahi contends, maintains the reality of the events that *Holocaust* depicts. Underlining Reznikoff's focus on facts are the historical and roughly chronological sections into which Reznikoff divides his text ("Deportation," "Research,"

"Ghettos," "Gas Chambers and Gas Trucks," "Work Camps," etc.). While choosing to witness with minimal intrusion can, in some circumstances, function as an empathetic act, the focus on facts comes at the expense of the emotional engagement necessary for empathy. Delineating the deliberately unhere emotions in *Holocaust* in the introduction to the text, George Szirtes comments, "He [Reznikoff] offers us no screaming, no weeping, no close description of pain, no rhetoric" (9). While the callous and incomprehensible acts that *Holocaust* considers implore an emotional response − particularly one rooted in empathy − from the poet or speakers, this emotional response has no outlet except in the reader. The focus on facts, therefore, leaves emotions unhere in the text: while emotions are absent from the text proper, they remain present in the response that the text demands from the reader.

The lack of emotional engagement is particularly evident through the poem's detached tone and emotionally understated narrations. In the early section titled "Ghettos," a witness recounts the brutal murder of a mother and her baby:

> One of the S.S. men caught a woman with a baby in her arms.
> She began asking for mercy: if she were shot
> the baby should live.
> She was near a fence between the ghetto and where Poles lived
> and behind the fence were Poles ready to catch the baby
> and she was about to hand it over when caught.
> The S.S. man took the baby from her arms
> and shot her twice,
> and then held the baby in his hands.
> The mother, bleeding but still alive, crawled up to his feet.

The S.S. man laughed

and tore the baby apart as one would tear a rag. (Reznikoff 20)

The witness's matter-of-fact and distant tone leaves little room for empathy. The focus here is not the doling out of sentiment but the delineating of the sequence of events that render the S.S. man guilty. Substantiating this focus through his analysis of the courtroom, Szirtes explains, "After the event comes the evidence. Evidence is presented before a court. It does not confront the court with pain, with screams, with tears: that is not the court's business. The court's business is with bare events and with points of law" (9). Like the courtroom testimonies, *Holocaust* is concerned with the "bare events" of the situation: the woman, the baby, the fence with the Poles behind it, the S.S. man taking the baby, the S.S. man shooting the mother twice, the S.S. man tearing the baby apart. For judge and jury, these are the facts that will allow the conferring of an appropriate punishment. For poetry readers, however, these facts draw attention to what they omit, what remains unhere in the text; among the omissions are the mother's and the baby's emotional states. As such, the aloof tone and narration deter textual empathy while demanding the reader's empathy; the deliberate emotional disengagement of the poem creates room for readers (the other unhere witnesses, who are absent from the experiences that the text describes but whom the text draws in with its aloofness) to enter bearing their own empathy.

The emotionally understated description of the mother and the baby is a product of *Holocaust*'s investment both in its courtroom source texts and in its poetic vision of detachment. Reading the poem alongside its courtroom source, Sutherland points to the resemblances and the variations between the two works. Significantly, while the source for the passage at hand mentions, "The baby wept and cried," Reznikoff's poem chooses to exclude this detail (Sutherland 89). If *Holocaust* is concerned with witnessing through the eyes of the court, then, as

Szirtes explains, tears are "not the court's business" (9). Yet Reznikoff's omission of this detail, of rendering the baby's tears unhere (absent through omission but present through the poem's close relationship with the source text), is an empathetically appropriative act; the secondary, unhere witness (Reznikoff) plugs his own vision into the text. On the more frequent occasions when Reznikoff refrains from altering the words of the testimonies, this choice nonetheless works in service of the poetic ideology of emotional detachment and impartiality. When the witness comments, for example, "The S.S. man took the baby from her [the mother's] arms," the verb "took" fails to encompass the struggle − the prying, seizing, thieving − that characterizes the act of separating mother and child, particularly in a historical context that promised danger and possible death (Reznikoff 20). The onus to realize the horror of this verb falls on the unhere reader, whom the text calls upon to imaginatively enter the scene. As such, the poem's aloof descriptions serve as the site of empathetic dissonance: while the courtroom and poetic ideologies of detachment that inform these descriptions ensure that empathy is kept at a distance, the emotions that remain unhere in these descriptions open to emotions and empathy in the reader.

Reznikoff also employs juxtaposition to highlight the empathetic dissonance of his text. In the incident with the mother and the baby, the mother's desire for her baby to live ("She began asking for mercy: if she were shot / the baby should live") is juxtaposed with the S.S. man's apathy for both of the lives in his hands ("The S.S. man took the baby from her arms / and shot her twice"), as well as his amusement with death ("The S.S. man laughed / and tore the baby apart as one would tear a rag") (Reznikoff 20). The paired actions of the mother and the S.S. man are empathetically dissonant: while the former empathetically offers to relinquish her own life to save the life of her child, the latter laughs at the prospect of showing empathy. Furthermore, the

horrific simile that juxtaposes the tearing of the baby with the tearing of a rag is empathetically deficient; equating a human being with a rag echoes the lack of empathy and the dehumanization that took place during the Holocaust. Although Reznikoff lifts the simile directly from the court transcripts – the transcript reads, "and tore him [the baby] as one would tear a rag" (Sutherland 89) – this literary device is particularly striking at the end of a straightforward recount of two murders. Moreover, according to Sutherland, Reznikoff generally "rids the source of figurative language and other rhetorical embellishments; he reduces the story to its dramatic essentials" (89). Particularly significant then is Reznikoff's choice to retain the simile in this instance, to privilege this literary device in the here of the poem and the here of the witness's testimony. This choice reminds the reader that, however much *Holocaust* is a document rooted in court transcripts, it is also and foremost a piece of poetry. As such, this text forces the reader to pay attention, to approach *Holocaust* as a poetic, not just a quasi legal, text. While Patricia Yaeger maintains that literary tropes in testimonies distance the possibility of empathy through their "introduction of another conceptual domain," the unexpected simile in Reznikoff's work draws the reader's attention and, thus, possible empathy to the callousness that the poem recounts (Yaeger 413). By non-empathetically juxtaposing a baby and a rag, as well as inviting the attention necessary to empathy, the simile's locomotive "as" becomes the linguistic marker of empathetic dissonance.

Moreover, the incident that directly succeeds the S.S. man's mercilessness toward the mother and her child once again expresses the empathetic dissonance of the poem. Paratactically juxtaposed with the two murders, the lines that follow depict a moment of empathy:

> Just then a stray dog passed
>
> and the S.S. man stooped to pat it

and took a lump of sugar out of his pocket

and gave it to the dog. (Reznikoff 21)

The S.S. man's caressing and sweet − made sweeter by the gift of sugar − gesture toward the stray dog is jarring against the backdrop of the preceding murders. Moreover, the witness's observation that the dog is a stray makes the S.S. man's benevolence even more jarring. While the kindness that the S.S. man extends to the dog signifies a moment of empathy, the cruelty that the S.S. man extends to the mother and her baby signifies a moment of apathy − even worse, pleasure. By positioning these two events next to one another, *Holocaust* formally articulates their empathetic dissonance. Moreover, the placement of the events, which is deliberately paratactic, functions as a crucial moment of the unhere: while the connection between the two events may be pieced together by the reader, this connection remains unacknowledged by the text. Parataxis in this instance works to underline the poem's lack of interest in empathy, in fostering the connections and engaging the emotions − which may include shock, confusion, and outrage − that the juxtaposed incidents demand. Not until some thirty pages later does *Holocaust* assist the reader in making sense − to the extent that this can be made − of the empathetic dissonance that the S.S. man displays. In the section titled "Entertainment," a witness recounts one S.S. guard's pastime: "The S.S. man would call the dog '*Mensch*,' that is, 'man': / and whenever he set the dog on a Jew would say, 'Man, get that dog!'" (53). The S.S. man's reversal of the fundamental nature of these beings (dog is man and man is dog) intratextually recalls the earlier S.S. man's disregard for the life of a mother and her baby and this man's subsequent kindness to a dog. Spelling out the paratactic connection between the earlier incidents, the S.S. man in the second passage articulates his empathetic allegiances. Kindness and empathy become products of invisible but indoctrinated beliefs: dog is more kin than Jew. Through juxtaposition

of humans and animals, the text reveals the empathetic dissonance that delineates the treatment of each.

Although moments of empathy toward Jews are largely unhere in *Holocaust,* when these moments or their possibility become present, they are swiftly eliminated. In the section concerned with work camps, one witness recounts the Nazi solution for the overcrowding of the gas chambers:

> If the gas chambers were crowded
> and no room for the youngest children − or even the adults −
> they were thrown on piles of wood
> that had been sprinkled with gasoline
> and just burnt alive.
> But that their screams might not be too disturbing
> to those who worked
> an orchestra of Jews from the camp
> was set to playing loudly
> well-known German songs. (Reznikoff 46)

While Szirtes asserts that *Holocaust* "offers us no screaming," the witness in this account documents the screams of the burning victims (9). Yet, consistent with Szirtes's assertion, Reznikoff conceals these screams in a line that draws attention away from the screams even as it mentions them. Buried in the line, "But that their screams might not be too disturbing", the screams assume an unhere place in the text: recording the screams, the poem also suppresses them. This suppression works both through Reznikoff's stylistic choice at the level of the line and through the S.S.'s attempt to drown out the screams, to render the victims unhere − an

eradication that epitomizes the Nazi agenda − in their own dying. Significantly, the German songs that work to erase the people's cries function symbolically as yet another means through which Nazi Germany overpowers the individuals it deems inferior. Moreover, along with the screams that the music endeavours to render unhere are the emotions of the screaming people and the possibility of empathy from the other prisoners that these emotions may trigger. Particularly salient for the unhere empathy in this passage is the word "disturbing." This term suggests not only the horrendous atrocities being perpetrated in the camp, but also the process of movement or change. The latter suggestion carries the possibility of empathy: a disturbing of self to enter another. Yet while the word "disturbing," teetering on the edge of its poetic line and followed by the caesura of blank space, opens to these various connotations, the line that follows cements this word in the particular ideological context of the Nazi camp: "Disturbing / to those who worked" reduces "disturbing[']s]" circle of influence to the workers. As the sign over the entrance of the Auschwitz camp − "*Arbeit Macht Frei*" ("Work Sets You Free") − confirms (however ironically), labour is an essential part of camp life. As such, the word "disturbing" in the witness's account is, in the context of this passage and the Holocaust, a concern that the screams of the dying may disrupt the work of the camp. This concern for the continuation of labour in the face of human burnings highlights the lack of concern for both the burning individuals and the emotional consequences for the other prisoners in the camp. Empathy for the people being burned alive in this passage is suppressed or pushed into the unhere by both the orchestra's music and the Nazis' prioritization of work.

In addition to pushing empathy into the unhere, *Holocaust* demonstrates that extensions of empathy (and its related processes) are punished. When a group of Jews in a work camp is

instructed to carry the dead bodies of other Jews to the wagons that will eventually transport the bodies to the gas chambers, one of the workers suffers for his kindness:

> One Jew left the body he was dragging to rest for a moment
>
> and the man he thought dead
>
> sat up,
>
> sighed and said in a weak voice,
>
> 'Is it far?'
>
> The Jew dragging him
>
> stooped and put his hand gently around the man's shoulder
>
> and just then felt a whip on his back:
>
> an S.S. man was beating him.
>
> He let go of the body −
>
> and went on dragging the man to the wagons. (Reznikoff 43)

The kindness, with its conceptually intertwined history with empathy, that the working Jew extends to the dying man is empathetically charged (Solnit 195).[41] Specifically, the Jew's act of "stoop[ing]" situates him at a similar level to the dying man; the former performs a physical empathy by assuming a position analogous to the latter. Indeed, this empathy gestures at the similarity between the two men in their particular historical context: the dying man is less other than he is indicator of the living man's probable future. Yet the working Jew's empathy, which entails the empathizer's hand "gently" wrapped around the other, is promptly repaid with the S.S. guard's whip. Touch becomes the marker of both empathy and punishment. Through the causal relationship between these responses, the S.S. guard conditions empathy to be unhere –

[41] Rebecca Solnit explains that the term *kindness* (along with terms like *sympathy*, *pity*, *compassion*, and *fellow-feeling*) "covered the same general ground before Edward Titchener coined it [empathy]" (195). For more on this see the Introduction to my project.

present but absented – in the camp. Furthermore, the use of "just then" to introduce the turn from empathy to punishment recalls the poem's earlier use of this phrase to introduce the juxtaposed murders of a mother and her baby with the kindness granted to a stray dog. Similar to this earlier incident, the later incident's juxtaposition of the working Jew's benevolence with the S.S. man's violence forefronts the empathetic dissonance of the text: the presence and condemnation of empathy. Moreover, in both accounts the empathizer "stoop[s]" and offers gentleness − a pat and a lump of sugar in the earlier account, an enveloping hand in the later account (Reznikoff 21). In each instance, however, the body's bending is temporary; empathy is an interlude that is rarely here and readily punished in the daily callousness of camp life.

Another means through which *Holocaust* consigns empathy to the unhere is the removal of the empathizer. When a new S.S. man extends empathy to the Jewish inmates, he, like empathy, becomes a temporary presence in the camp:

> One of the Jews had loaded sections of rail on his back
> and the new S.S. man said: 'Why do you take so many?'
> So the Jew took off one
> but the S.S. man had him take off a few and said:
> 'There's time. Walk slowly.'
> The Jews saw him when the transports came −
> walking about and looking ashamed.
> Sometimes he would say a kind word to them.
> But he only stayed a month;
> one evening he came into their barracks and said:
> 'I didn't know where I was being sent to.

I didn't know about this,

and when I found out I asked at once for a transfer.

I am leaving you now,'

and he shook hands with some of the Jews

and wished them to survive. (Reznikoff 48)

Like the Jew who offers gentleness to the dying man in the previous incident, the S.S. man here offers kindness to the Jewish workers. As such, the S.S. man disrupts the camp's empathetically deficient relation between victim and perpetrator. The physical weight that the S.S. man asks the worker to unload also metaphorically signals the unloading of the emotional weight or distance between them. Yet this empathetic movement toward each other is cut short by the S.S. man's decision to leave the camp. The anaphoric repetition of "I didn't know" (with its reversal of Charlotte Delbo's "O you who know" and its response to Ursula Duba's "Who Knew the Murderers," as discussed in the previous chapter), coupled with the insight that leads to immediate action, suggests that the events of the camp overwhelm the new guard. In particular, these events overwhelm his empathy: the parting wish for the Jews' survival is also an admission of empathy's inability to survive in the context of a concentration camp, or, more specifically, the empathizer's inability to survive the witnessing of and participation in brutality. Empathetically dissonant, this encounter both produces empathy (through the S.S. guard's kindness to the Jewish workers) and eliminates empathy (through the removal of the empathizer and the implicit acknowledgment that empathy is ineffective in the camp). Once again, both the events of the Holocaust and *Holocaust* the text (by choosing to portray this encounter) work to relegate empathy to the realm of the unhere.

Situated roughly at the centre of the text, this incident serves as a microcosm for the empathetic dissonance that plays out throughout the poem. On the one hand, the S.S. guard's inversion of the customarily non-empathetic relation between victim and perpetrator speaks to the poem's openness to the possibility for empathy with and between both of these groups. On the other hand, the removal of the empathetic S.S. guard speaks to the poem's tone and ideology of detachment − its lack of interest, at least directly, in empathy. At the root of this poem's empathetic dissonance is Reznikoff the witness. Although Reznikoff occupies an experientially, physically, and temporally unhere role in relation to the events that his text documents, his inclusion (and subsequent expulsion) of an empathetic Nazi, a contentious choice, highlights his emphatically here role in the poem: his presence is marked by his selections. As such, Reznikoff occupies both an absent and a present role in the text. Significantly, through the unhere – Reznikoff's removed witnessing and the understated emotions in the text – *Holocaust* is empathetically dissonant: the text lends attention to others' testimonies, but it simultaneously shapes these testimonies according to its lack of interest in empathy.

Substituting testimony with postmemory, Lily Brett's poem "Leaving You" struggles with the burden of empathy for the Holocaust experiences that belong to Brett's parents and in relation to which Brett occupies an experientially, physically, and temporally unhere position. Charles Reznikoff's impersonal *Holocaust* finds its contrary in Brett's hyper-personal "Leaving You." Born directly after the Second World War to Holocaust survivors, Brett lives and writes through the influence of her parents' history. "I once said to my mother," recounts Brett in an interview, "'When I close my eyes I can hear crying,' and she said, 'That's because when you were born everyone was crying, either out of joy at your birth or terrible anguish at loved ones

who had died" (Elliott). Although an unhere witness to her parents', in particular her mother's, trauma, Brett viscerally experiences the tears into which she is born. Postmemory, Marianne Hirsch's conception of second-generation traumatic inheritance, informs Brett's experiences and the poem which this section of the chapter will consider. Significantly, both "Leaving You" and postmemory in general occupy an interesting space vis-à-vis empathy. Indeed, postmemory ensures that the speaker of this poem *more* than empathizes with her mother: the latter's experiences are so ingrained in the former that the active process of feeling into another that is a part of empathy becomes nearly superfluous; postmemory stands at one limit of empathy wherein familial connection obliterates otherness between subject and object.[42]

"Leaving You" explores the tension between feeling into and feeling out of experiences that the subject does not personally witness or undergo. As the speaker explains, her life has been rooted in her mother's Holocaust experiences, to which the speaker has gained cognitive and affective access:

> It has taken me
> a long time to know
> that it was your war
> not mine
>
> that I wasn't
> in Auschwitz
> myself

[42] As I mentioned in the previous chapter's discussion of Niyi Osundare's "Knowing Friend," the poems that my project considers often eschew the distance between speaker and poet. Rooted in personal or historical crises, many of these poems fall into the category of poetic non-fiction or documentary poetry. As such, the author informs and enriches the speaker, as is the case with Lily Brett in "Leaving You."

that I have never

seen

the Lodz Ghetto

……..

I thought

I knew

Nazis

I thought

I had lived

with fear

……

I thought I knew

what bodies gnawed by rats

looked like

and how

the mattresses

smelt

and what
it felt like
to fill your lungs

with
smoke
from flesh

to
live
with death

I have had
trouble
Mother
leaving you. (Brett 140-41)

Empathy, a process of both cognition and affect, is prominent in the speaker's description of experiences that she recollects but at whose site she remains unhere. The repeated "I thought (/) I knew" at the centre of the poem implicates knowledge in the speaker's entry into her mother's experiences. Yet the opening's present tense and infinitive "to know" checks the past tense of the speaker's empathetic knowledge; in its present and unconjugated (untainted) state, "to know"

suggests the current awareness of separation between daughter and mother. Challenging this distinction, however, is the "Leaving You" that bookends the piece as both title and closing line: the present participle here implies an ongoing departure, which undermines the speaker's cognitive certainty "that it was your war / not mine." Cognition, thus, functions as a marker of empathetic dissonance. Yet unlike Charlotte Delbo's "O you who know," which restricts its addressees to the field of knowledge (ironic as this knowledge may be), and Reznikoff's *Holocaust*, which leaves emotional engagement unhere in the text in order to invite emotional engagement from the reader, Brett's poem hinges on affect to empathize with the experiences of a camp survivor. Indeed, "Leaving You" moves from cognitive, external descriptions (seeing cattle wagons and living with work permits) to affective, internal descriptions (filling lungs with smoke from flesh and living with death). The sensory sketches − sight, smell, feeling − that adhere to this inward movement ensure that the poem depicts the speaker's emotional entry into her mother's Holocaust experiences. These sketches, nevertheless, also ensure that the speaker's entry is limited. The formally abrupt, often single-word lines point to the foreignness of the experience that the speaker is attempting to describe: removed from this experience, the speaker is unable to verbally populate it. The feeling but fleeting lines, thus, indicate the tension between empathy for and distance from the experiences of another.

This empathetically dissonant struggle also works through the poem's pronoun usage. Although the opening verse paragraph clearly distinguishes between 'you' and 'I' or "your[s]" and "mine" ("it was your war / not mine"), the remainder of the poem questions this distinction. Ironically, "I" becomes the dominant pronoun in the speaker's attempt to separate herself from her mother's camp life: "I wasn't / in Auschwitz / myself"; "I have never / seen"; "I thought / I knew"; "I thought / I had lived" (140). The repetitive force of "I," coupled with the verb "seen"

set off on its own line in the third verse paragraph, gestures at the aurally identical "eye." In Brett's poem, however, "I" is an un-eye, an individual whose postmemory lures her into secondary trauma of events at whose site she is experientially unhere. The speaker's insistence on the personal pronoun, which obliterates the presence of the second person − pronoun and mother − throughout the majority of the poem, ensures that "Leaving You" is as much about empathetic fusion ('I' becomes 'you') as it is about separation. When "you" does reappear at the end of the tenth verse paragraph, it is almost imperceptible:

> I thought I knew
>
> ……
>
> what
>
> it felt like
>
> to fill your lungs
>
> with
>
> smoke
>
> from flesh[.] (140-41)

Positioned after a string of "I" statements and before the disturbing image of breathing in dead flesh, the possessive adjective "your" can easily be disregarded as a grammatically incorrect turn of phrase. Indeed, if the phrase were grammatically accurate, "your lungs" would read "one's lungs." Brett's choice to return to the second person deictic here not only encourages the reader (another 'you') to adopt an empathetic stance, but also resituates the object of empathy (the mother) in her own body. This latter gesture arrests the empathy that the daughter extends to her mother: the speaker forfeits the camp experience by restoring the lungs filled "with / smoke /

from flesh" to their original owner. "Your," a seeming blunder here, exemplifies the empathetically dissonant struggle between feeling into and feeling out of another.

Weighing in on this struggle, the poem's closing verse paragraph figures both "I" and "you." Here the speaker confesses the difficulty of "leaving you":

> I have had
>
> trouble
>
> Mother
>
> leaving you. (141)

Formally, the two pronouns in this verse paragraph are spread apart as far as possible, "I" initiating the verse paragraph and "you" concluding it. The separation that the speaker claims in the title (with the caveat of the present participle) and in the opening verse paragraph becomes a formal reality in the final quatrain. Significantly, Brett withholds the antecedent for the poem's second-person pronouns until the penultimate line of the text. Preceding the mention of "Mother," these second-person deictic pronouns read as an address to an unknown singular victim or collective victims of the Holocaust. Although her experiences make up the poem, "Mother" remains unhere in these experiences until the poem's ending. Similar to the separation of "I" and "you" in the final verse paragraph, the mother's near-separation from the poem underscores the emotional divide that the speaker seeks to establish between herself and her mother. Yet the penultimate line's inclusion of "Mother" as antecedent signals that this familial figure has been there all along, an unhere presence situated behind the experiences that her daughter describes.

Further highlighting the empathetic dissonance of the final verse paragraph is the word "trouble." Positioned equidistantly from the "I" and the "you" that frame this verse paragraph,

"trouble" calls into question the ease of the separation that this poem aims to achieve. The source of trouble is the postmemory or secondary trauma which the speaker inherits from her mother. Indeed, postmemory here constitutes a kind of empathetic violence that not only usurps the mother's suffering, but also coerces the daughter into adopting experiences that she subsequently struggles to abandon. As Hirsch explains in her theorization of postmemory, these adopted Holocaust experiences "evacuate" the child's "own belated stories" (22). The empathetic violence of postmemory, thus, ensures that Brett's speaker is unhere in both her mother's Holocaust story and in her own present, temporally post-Holocaust story. Unhere as her mother's Holocaust experiences are for the daughter, postmemory − a process that is more than empathy − allows the daughter to simultaneously feel into and feel trapped in these experiences. The stuggle between feeling her mother's experiences and attempting to separate herself from these experiences is the process of empathetic dissonance in Brett's poem.

More aligned with Charles Reznikoff's *Holocaust* than with Lily Brett's "Leaving You," American poet Robert Fitterman's conceptual 2002 poem "This Window Makes Me Feel" approaches the 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon through impersonal, empathetically dissonant, and unhere witnessing. A Google search poem, Fitterman's text works against the more conventional response of personal and emotional engagement with a crisis. In his note on the poem, the author elucidates the thinking and research that inform his writing process:

> "This Window Makes Me Feel" … was propelled by my interest in subjectivity through appropriation. I.e., what would a text read like if it were entirely subjective, but not my personal subjectivity. I started by googling the phrase "this

> feels" or "this makes me feel." The further I wrote into this text, the more it resonated as a response to 9-11, even though none of the borrowed language speaks directly to that event. (Fitterman 107)

While Fitterman eschews his own subjectivity − he is personally unhere in "This Window Makes Me Feel" − he empathetically opens his text to witnessing the subjectivities of others. Yet this empathetic witnessing is informed, as Fitterman divulges, by "appropriation," particularly the appropriation of "feel[ing]" on the internet. The title and subtitle of the collection in which "This Window Makes Me Feel" is situated read *Rob the Plagiarist: Others Writing By Robert Fitterman 2000-2008*. Appropriating the words of others (as the term "*Plagiarist*" and the unusual phrase "*Others Writing By Robert Fitterman*" insinuate) and repositioning them as part of one's own experience (the perpetual "me" and "I" that drive the text) replicates the process of empathy; "This Window Makes Me Feel" enters and assumes others' internal landscapes. Moreover, Fitterman's framing of this poem "as a response to 9-11," in spite of the text's lack of references to that day, is another kind of plagiarism: the theft of a cultural and personal trauma to act as a palimpsest for a Google search poem.[43] Simultaneously, by timing and dating his work at "8:35 A.M., September 11, 2001" − eleven minutes prior to the first plane crash into the North Tower of the World Trade Center − Fitterman sets up his text to avoid direct reference to the events of 9/11 (The 9/11 Memorial Museum). Yet the deliberate temporal proximity to the terrorist attacks ensures that the poem functions in relation to these attacks. As such, even though the author presents "This Window Makes Me Feel" as preceding 9/11, it is, like the other texts I examine, a poem of aftering, one that works through the events that its date invokes. Fitterman's

[43] Fitterman's "This Window Makes Me Feel" is not alone in this plagiarism or appropriation. I would venture to say that all of the poems I examine and all responses to events of crisis function on a continuum that runs from personal involvement in a crisis (with its own continuum of levels of involvement) to plagiarism of another's experience, with varying degrees of appropriation in between.

text offers an empathetically dissonant response to the crisis that is both here and unhere in the poem.

Although "This Window Makes Me Feel" refuses to focus its content on the termination of life, this text empathetically performs the meaninglessness and arbitrariness of life that inform the events of 9/11. The deictic pronoun "this," which initiates every sentence of the poem and lacks meaning outside of context, gestures at the meaninglessness into which Fitterman plunges his readers. The text employs "this" as part of its anaphoric repetition at the beginning of each sentence: "This window makes me feel," most often with the addendum "like." Fitterman, thus, selects an arbitrary pronoun and object ("this window"), along with an arbitrary Google search entry ("makes me feel") as the basis of his conceptual piece. Moreover, the Google search results that follow the eponymous statement are a collection of arbitrary and paratactic − the connections between them are unhere in the text − thoughts:

> This window makes me feel unsafe and vulnerable being dressed in a top which is not tucked into my track-suit bottoms. This window makes me feel like I have the key to exploring myself. This window makes me feel like a mondo dork − I've mostly recovered my dignity from this self-demoralizing view, but, wow, I'm a huge loser …. This window makes me feel like something weird is going on because there are a lot of birds swirling around or circling in on something. (Fitterman 103)

Although the reader may feel an impulse to interpret a number of the statements in this work as concealed commentary on 9/11 (for example, "This window makes me feel unsafe and vulnerable" as a reference to the helplessness victims of 9/11 may have experienced), the contextualization of these statements refuses such interpretation (feeling unsafe and vulnerable,

the reader learns, is a product of a fashion choice). Even when the cause of the featured situation remains unexplained (for example, the swirling, circling birds and the weird feeling that they produce), its paratactic placement in the text ensures that explanation and meaning are not the point. Indeed, Fitterman does not value one statement over another; he spends about equally little time developing each of them, deserting them as devoid of contextual meaning and arbitrary as they begin. Moreover, the sentences often contradict one another: "me" initially feels like he "count[s]" (90) and later feels "unwanted and ugly" (92); "me" feels "cocky and powerful" and later "unhip, out-of-touch, old" (100). Adjoining sentences also contribute to the inconsistencies: "This window makes me feel good and lets me know that I'm a pretty good player. This window makes me feel like my disappointment is a rock in my chest − it makes me feel hard inside" (91). The oscillation of both feeling and subjectivity in the poem refuses a single consciousness and a simple meaning. Instead, Fitterman assembles many voices through which − as much as through the window − he witnesses the meaninglessness and arbitrariness of life. This approach empathetically imitates the senselessness surrounding the crisis to which this poem responds. In other words, by forefronting arbitrary sentences and subjectivities whose connections remain unhere in the context of the poem, "This Window Makes Me Feel" empathetically responds to the chaotic events of and arbitrary individuals affected by 9/11.

Moreover, the central image of the window in "This Window Makes Me Feel" at once offers empathy and relegates it to the unhere. The window functions both as the foundation of the conceptual and the framework of the visual. Specifically, this poem formally resembles a window, each page featuring a rectangular block of justified text. On the one hand, the words or signifiers that make up each block of text offer entry, and thus the possibility of empathy, through their signifieds; the words can act as transparent indicators. On the other hand, the

rectangular block of text, formed through the signifiers and complete in itself, visually works to thwart entry; there is no actual place through which the reader can enter here. Indeed, the window functions as a barrier between the text and the reader. Although a window typically gives sight, much remains unseen through Fitterman's window, namely the attacks on the economic and military centres of the United States. Even the sights that the text offers − the emotionally-rooted and paratactic Google search results − are fleeting glimpses that undercut the transparency of the poem's signifiers. Opaque in lieu of transparent, Fitterman's window obstructs the process of empathy, which requires less a casual glance and more an engagement with the objects of empathy. Furthermore, a window signifies not only the transparent opening that allows one to see outside, but also the computer display of a particular program, a signification that is especially relevant to the text's roots in a Google search poem. This doubling (the rectangular blocks of text also resemble the computer window) works to further empathetically distance the reader through ambiguity and mediation. First, the ambiguity regarding which window "makes me feel" leaves the possibility of empathy in a similarly ambiguous space. Second, the mediation that both kinds of windows dictate − the glass and the screen − frustrates the meeting that empathy necessitates. Whether a wall opening or an electronic display, the window is central to the text's production of feeling. The repeated phrase, "This window makes me feel," suggests that the window both causes and forces feeling. In the first instance, if feeling is a result of the inanimate (a window), then the active process of empathy, which oscillates between empathizer and object of empathy, stalls in the object − the literal object of a window. In the second instance, if the window is the personified tyrant who coerces feeling from the multiple subjectivities in the poem, then the process of empathy is rooted in violence. Both instances confront a problematic empathy. As such, the visually and

linguistically resonant window, while initially provoking the possibility of empathy through the transparency of the signifiers that comprise it, works to push affective correspondence to the unhere.

Also working to render empathy unhere is feeling itself. While the word "feel" is a focal point of the text's anaphoric phrase, Fitterman's poem, like Reznikoff's *Holocaust*, is not really concerned with feeling. Instead, "This Window Makes Me Feel" employs feeling in the service of its conceptual ideology; the poem reduces feeling to a Google search term. The numerous feelings that the text does offer are fleeting (barely here) and mediated. Ensuring this mediation is the comparative "like," which more often than not follows Fitterman's conceptual phrase. Declaring that "this window makes me feel like I'm coming home to a warm cottage in the middle of a cornfield, gentle guitars" is different from declaring that sentiment without the insertion of a simile (Fitterman 101). In this instance, the feeling of a pastoral homecoming is experientially unhere, replaced instead with a vestige of that feeling. "Like" necessarily separates the speaker from the direct experience, asserting what the feeling is similar to but also, fundamentally, what it is not. Although Patricia Yaeger's argument about figurative language as estrangement is directly linked to testimonial writing, her work is also relevant for Fitterman's use of simile. Yaeger contends that even as simile attempts to draw the reader closer (by invoking a corresponding experience), simile drives the reader away (by introducing a removed experience) (402). This oscillating gesture is also the movement of empathetic dissonance. Fitterman's "like" functions in an empathetically dissonant way, as it both pulls the reader toward the experience − of a warm cottage surrounded by nature and music, for example − and pushes the reader away from the experience. While feeling is a critical part of the process of empathy and the process of Fitterman's conceptual poem, feeling is also short-lived (through the

paratactic sentences) and experientially unhere (through the similes) in the text. The witnessing of other subjectivities, therefore, particularly their emotional situations, functions as a turning away from these subjectivities, an empathetically dissonant response that comments on empathy's precarious role in responding to the crisis underpinning "This Window Makes Me Feel."

Also negotiating empathy's precariousness after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, particularly through the unhere, is Polish poet Wisława Szymborska's 2002 poem "Photograph from September 11."[44] Geographically and culturally unhere in New York City on September 11, 2001, Szymborska chooses to witness the events of this day through a photograph. Nestled in Szymborska's collection *Monologue of a Dog: New Poems* between a poem concerned with abandonment and a poem concerned with death, "Photograph from September 11" engages with both issues. Instead of Robert Fitterman's window, Szymborska filters her response through a photograph of bodies jumping from (abandoning) the World Trade Center Towers. One of the most famous photographs emerging from 9/11 and likely informing Szymborska's poem is Richard Drew's *The Falling Man*.[45] "In the picture," writes Tom Junod in an examination of this image, "he [the falling man] is frozen; in his life outside the frame, he drops and keeps dropping until he disappears." The photograph, thus, both invites viewers to witness one of the final moments of the falling man's life and misrepresents this moment, prolonging it in a refusal of the promised "disappear[ance]" or death. Explaining this paradoxical relation in her investigation of photography, Susan Sontag argues, "A way of certifying experience, taking photographs is also a way of refusing it" (9). Similarly, Szymborska's ekphrastic "Photograph from September 11"

[44] The English translation with which I am working appears in 2006.
[45] This photograph also informs and provides the title for Don DeLillo's 2007 novel *Falling Man*, as well as Henry Singer's 2006 documentary *The Falling Man*.

both confirms and denies the experience of bodies "jump[ing] from the burning floors" (Szymborska 69). While this poem occupies an artistically removed or unhere position vis-à-vis the subjects of the photograph, this poem prolongs the moment of witnessing − of possible empathy with − the here of the falling subjects. "The photograph halted them in life," the second verse paragraph declares (69). This halting works in an empathetically dissonant way to distance the victims and, simultaneously, to bring their penultimate moment into focus.

Distance marks "Photograph from September 11," from its allusion to a photograph to its commitment to a withdrawn diction and tone. First, Szymborska's text is a simulacrum: a poem depicting a photograph depicting a reproduction of actual events in New York City on September 11. This doubling ensures that both the photograph and, particularly for the purposes of this chapter, the poem are, as Jean Baudrillard argues, "already purged of their death" (11). This removal from both the original event and the event of death − a pertinent removal for the circumstances that the photograph represents − distances "Photograph from September 11" from September 11, 2001. As such, the original event is unhere in the simulacrum of the poem. While the original event's unhere nature in the poem is a commonality across all of the poems that I consider, Szymborska's titular "Photograph" draws attention to the distance that informs this text, as "Photograph" refers to an unhere representation of events. Furthermore, Szymborska does not identify the photograph, withholding the names of its creator and subjects. Although this lack of specificity may broaden the poem's possible objects of empathy, without identifiable victims, empathy remains at arm's length. Unspecified in the course of Szymborska's poem, the photograph is here but also unhere (in the sense of unidentifiable). Moreover, a photograph, according to Sontag, is a visual marker of detachment: "Photographing is essentially an act of non-intervention …. The person who intervenes cannot record; the person who is recording

cannot intervene" (11-12). The photographer, thus, occupies an aloof and unhere space in the photograph and, by extension, in the poem. Additionally, Sontag argues that photographs "distance the emotions" (110) and involve "a disavowal of empathy" (77). If photographs remain distinct from the emotional terrain of their subjects, then Szymborska's poem, which both depicts a photograph and marks itself as a photograph in the title, also participates in this affective separation.

Furthermore, "Photograph from September 11" is an experience in linguistic and tonal detachment. Indeed, the speaker refuses to empathetically enter into the emotional stance of the photograph's subjects:

> They jumped from the burning floors −
> one, two, a few more,
> higher, lower.
>
> The photograph halted them in life,
> and now keeps them
> above the earth toward the earth.
>
> Each is still complete,
> with a particular face
> and blood well hidden.
>
> There's enough time
> for hair to come loose,

for keys and coins

to fall from pockets.

They're still within the air's reach,

within the compass of places

that have just now opened. (Szymborska 69)[46]

Focusing on the image of jumping bodies, the speaker offers no insight into the internal worlds of these bodies. Instead, in the fourth and longest verse paragraph, the text turns to a contemplation of the possible physical consequences of this jump: loose hair and lost objects. "Her touch in these matters [poetic responses to "the dark side of history"]," writes Billy Collins in the forward to the collection in which "Photograph from September 11" appears, "is always lightened by irony and distance. She is no Wilfred Owen bringing the gore of war to our faces; nor is she a Siegfried Sassoon quick to draw a moral from the swirl of events. Instead, Szymborska floats above scenes of destruction and injustice, drawing our attention to them" (x). The aloofness that Szymborska's poem offers − the focus on situating the bodies in the photograph, the meditation on the potentially falling objects − leaves the emotional worlds (the feelings and thoughts) of those in the photograph unhere in the text. Indeed, emotional and empathetic engagement, which requires a more proximal attention and involvement than, in Collins's astute observation, Szymborska's "float[ing] above scenes of destruction and injustice," is lacking in the text. Formally reiterating this disengagement are the closed verse paragraphs, each concluding with an end-stopped line that seals that particular meditation; as the poem self-reflexively declares, "each is still complete" (Szymborska 69).

The pronouns in "Photograph from September 11" also work in service of the poem's

[46] This is the poem in its entirety, with the exception of the last verse paragraph, which I will discuss shortly.

unhere empathetic engagement. Opening the poem with the removed "They," Szymborska underscores the separation between the speaker and the jumpers. Although the speaker's eye dictates the direction of the piece, the speaker's "I" remains unhere until the final verse paragraph: "I can do only two things for them − / describe this flight / and not add a last line" (69). Relegating the personal pronoun "I" to the end of the poem emulates the speaker's refusal to empathetically adopt the personal stance of the photograph's subjects; the speaker (at least explicitly) remains on the outskirts of, physically unhere in, the poem. Moreover, the two possible alternatives that the speaker offers to the jumpers (depiction and silence) highlight the disparity between the speaker, who is at liberty to choose among various actions, and the poem's subjects, who have been stilled (the word "still" recurs twice in the poem) by the photograph. This disparity increases the distance and, thus, decreases the empathy between the "I" and "they" of the text.

Alongside the distance that informs "Photograph from September 11," Szymborska's text also encourages empathy between the speaker and the photograph's subjects. Firstly, this poem is an act of witnessing − of recording, spotlighting, and extending a moment just before death as portrayed in a photograph. Like Charles Reznikoff's and Fitterman's texts, therefore, Szymborska's poem centres around the choice of an unhere speaker to lend empathy through attention, however remote this attention remains, to the here of others. Furthermore, although the final verse paragraph underscores the disparity between the active speaker and the static jumpers, this ending also invokes and empathizes with the final action of the photograph's subjects at the beginning of the poem: "They jumped" (69). In a poem rooted in stillness (the description of a stationary image; the proliferation of terms like "halted," "keeps," and "still"; the contemplation of possible action: "There's enough time / for"), these bookended actions (the individuals

jumping and the speaker doing) protrude and produce an empathy with one another. The final action of the speaker, which the speaker's desire for inaction ("and not add a last line") problematizes, reaches back to the final jumping action of the poem's subjects, which the choicelessness of the jump in the context of the burning towers also problematizes. The correspondence between these actions across the distance of the poem brings the actions nearer to one another, thus fostering the empathy between them. Moreover, the speaker's ironically placed final line, which declares its intention "not [to] add a last line," extricates the individuals in the text from art, both photograph and poem. Although claiming not to add a last line is nevertheless a last line, by assigning no end to the poem, the speaker refuses to seal the photograph's subjects in the frame of either a photograph or a poem. Indeed, instead of stillness or closure, the speaker offers the individuals an infinite continuation of their jump. As such, the poem empathizes with the final action that these individuals choose by maintaining this action (the jump) in the world of the text. In this way, the poem extends itself, ad infinitum, into the moment of the jump.

The concluding line of "Photograph from September 11" also imparts empathy to the jumping subjects by acknowledging that the speaker cannot physically inhabit their here. Although this rejection of entry into the jumpers' "flight" − at least a linguistic rejection of language's entry into the flight − seems to contradict the empathetic process, appreciating that empathy is not always possible is a way to empathize, to feel into the impossibility of affective correspondence. The refusal to include a last line is also a refusal to append a eulogy and, thus, a refusal to enter into the unknowable of death. Although Adam Smith argues that the sympathetic imagination has the power to "lodg[e]" itself into the dead body (12), Szymborska's distanced poem explores the limits of empathizing with the dead. Recognizing that one of the things she

cannot do for the photograph's subjects is stop their downward flight outside of the photograph and the poem ("I can do only two things for them"), the speaker stands aside, assuming a position of deferential and physically unhere witnessing instead of a position of falling (Szymborska 69). This empathetically dissonant stance − the speaker is at once removed from (through her unhere position) and invested in (through her position as witness) the jumpers − interrogates the appropriateness of empathy in the context of responding to the individuals affected by 9/11.

Another kind of unhere witnessing and one which echoes Charles Reznikoff's *Holocaust* occurs in poet Cynthia Hogue and photographer Rebecca Ross's collaborative text of witnessing after Hurricane Katrina. The 2010 collection of "interview-poems" and accompanying photographs, *When the Water Came: Evacuees of Hurricane Katrina*, brings together poems and images wrought from interviews with Katrina evacuees: "We act as witnesses," explain Hogue and Ross at the end of their work, "communicating what we have seen and heard, filtered through our own perceptions and aesthetics. The poems are drawn from the actual words of the evacuees …. All poems have been shaped and edited out of the original interviews, some of which were fifty-pages long once transcribed. Nothing has been added" (126). On the one hand, like Reznikoff, Hogue and Ross situate themselves as empathizers: their minimally intrusive witnessing (the maintenance of "the actual words of the evacuees" and the assertion that "nothing has been added") gives voice and visibility to others while maintaining the poet's and photographer's own experientially unhere positions.[47] On the other hand, like Reznikoff again, Hogue and Ross encroach on their subjects' 'here' experience of crisis; as the two collaborators

[47] My subsequent examination of Victoria Green's interview-poem further considers Hogue's and Ross's unhere positions.

acknowledge, this text is the product of "shap[ing] and edit[ing]" that is necessarily "filtered through" the interpretations and creative choices of poet and photographer. On the photographs, specifically, Hogue and Ross comment, "The photographer and evacuees created the portraits together, primarily in their [the evacuees'] Arizona homes" (126). Adhering to Abe Louise Young's notion of the importance of collaboration between primary and secondary storytellers, this text claims to be born from the combined efforts of both parties. Although optimistic and commendable, the joint creation here is dubious. Just as the process of empathy sets up a hierarchical relationship between empathizer and object of empathy (wherein the former wields more power than the latter), the empathetic collaboration between photographer and evacuee also tends to incline toward hierarchy. For example, when the photographs are portraits, as they often are in this collection, the individual behind the camera generally exercises more agency (deciding the angle, zoom, lighting, and/or exact moment of the photograph) than the individual in front of the camera. Moreover, while the setting of the photographs in the evacuees' homes may lend more authority to the homeowners, the photographer's entry into the physical space of the evacuees for the purpose of telling their story may function as an act of encroachment for individuals who have already suffered the encroachment of Katrina. The empathy underpinning *When the Water Came*, therefore, is both conceding − a yielding of space to others' words and collaborated images − and appropriating − a harnessing of these words and images in line with the particular creative and ideological frameworks of poet and photographer.

Significantly, at the heart of Hogue and Ross's empathetic project is the desire to resituate those "who might otherwise be invisible or forgotten" – those who might be on the receiving end of a politically motivated push into the margins of the here or even into the unhere – in their own stories (126). Unlike Reznikoff's *Holocaust*, which removes the names of

survivors in order to shift focus to the narrative itself, *When the Water Came* foregrounds the names of the Katrina evacuees. These names comprise not only the dedicatees of the text, but also feature as the titles of their respective poems. As a glance at the table of contents confirms, individuals function as the organizing principles of the text. Furthermore, the "Authors' Note" at the end of the collection emphasizes that this work is a product of "the evacuees' permission" (126). Supporting this assertion is the Acknowledgments page, which first and foremost recognizes the evacuees: "To the Hurricane Katrina evacuees who shared their travails and triumphs, their life-journeys with us: this book is a tribute to you" (125). The process of sharing through face-to-face interaction (interviews and photographs) ensures that this work makes meaning through connection, through a space of empathy that opens up between poet, photographer, and evacuee. In contrast to the depersonalized works of Reznikoff, Robert Fitterman, and Wisława Szymborska, the personal is the focal point of Hogue and Ross's text. At the same time, the personal stories of the eleven evacuees that *When the Water Came* portrays function as synecdoches for the larger community of Katrina-affected individuals. In other words, while the text places emphasis on individuals, these individuals double as representative examples of the Katrina victims outside of the text. This synecdochic gesture works to deflect empathy away from the evacuees in the text, who function not only as individuals but also as symbols of a larger collective. Similarly, the use of the eleven evacuees' names as the titles of their respective poems, while drawing attention to the evacuees, shifts the evacuees away from actual, here individuals toward eponymous, unhere literary characters or topics. As such, the evacuees in this text become the sites of empathetic dissonance: *When the Water Came* both affords them empathy by underscoring their significance in the here of their stories and refuses them empathy by employing them as unhere synecdochic markers of other Katrina victims, as

well as unhere literary personae. My consideration of *When the Water Came* will forefront the words and photographs of one of the collection's evacuees, Victoria Green, whose section is particularly resonant of the empathetically dissonant struggle of both the text (as welcoming and invasive) and of the approach to affective correspondence after a crisis.

Appearing as the fourth interview-poem, Green's story expresses empathetic dissonance after Katrina by pitting the familiar − the personal and extended family − against the unfamiliar − the geographically unhere non-citizens of New Orleans. Paralleling the other poems in the collection, the title of this poem ("Victoria Green") is followed by a simultaneously identifying and limiting parenthetical characterization of its speaker: "(mother of four)" (36). Motherhood and family, Hogue informs the reader, are at the heart of this woman's identity.[48] In line with this designation, the speaker begins with the collective and empathetically-inviting pronoun, "We": "We always talked of The Big One, / but I had not heard of Katrina" (36). Although "we" could embrace speaker, interviewer, and reader (see my discussion of "we" in the early perpetrator poem in Reznikoff's *Holocaust*), the first two lines delimit the reach of this deictic pronoun. The people perpetually conversing about the colloquially charged "The Big One" − the referent here is idiosyncratic − are situated in a particular community at a particular time; they are geographically and temporally in Green's here, a here in relation to which the reader is experientially unhere. As the interview-poem progresses, readers recognize that "we" primarily includes Green's family members, the focal point of the narrative. Recalling the night before the evacuation in the first section of the poem, Green presents a catalogue of these family members:

> Honest to God, I did not have $1
>
> in my pocket or any plan.

[48] In my email exchange with Hogue, the author explains that she selects the parenthetical identifiers to align with "more or less the occupation of the evacuee." These identifiers are also "modeled after Studs Terkel's *Working*."

I did not have a car (I don't even drive).

I had my elderly mother,

my 4 kids, youngest was 8 months

and I had 2 diapers for her,

my husband home from jail

on some minor charge which by

a miracle he got out of two days

early because of an error or

something, my deaf uncle

Little Mervin who lived near us,

and his son who had a wife and 3 children,

and a baby my cousin was watching −

we called her Baby X because

my cousin didn't even know

her last name − and one car

wasn't going to do it for all of us.

My uncle said, "I can't go to Texas

with $5!" None of us had any money,

so we all went to sleep Saturday

without deciding what to do. (36)

Unlike the impersonal lists that derail empathy in Dionne Brand's *Inventory*, Green's list of the family members with whom she must evacuate opens to empathy.[49] Spotlighting these individuals is also a spotlighting of the socio-economic conditions that inform their lives and,

[49] Refer to Chapter One for more on Brand.

thus, their evacuation (insufficient finances, lack of a vehicle, an aging mother, limited diapers for the baby, the husband's incarceration). As Green invites the interviewer and, consequently, the reader into the circumstances of her personal here, she also invites their empathy.

Underpinning this empathetic invitation into the personal here is the full-page close-up photograph of Green's face opposite the family catalogue (see Figure 1 at the end of this chapter) (37). In this photograph, Green's hair is tucked into a kerchief and her ears dangle large hoop earrings − a circle symbol to which I will shortly return. Partly blurred, however, as is much of the lower half of Green's face, these details frame the focal point of the photograph: Green's eyes. The eyes here are sombre, serious, steady, confronting the viewer's gaze by staring directly into the camera's lens. If a photograph "transform[s] subject into object," as Roland Barthes argues in *Camera Lucida* (13), and if this individual-turned-object "can be symbolically possessed," as Susan Sontag argues in *On Photography* (14), then the photograph of Green seeks to defy transformation and possession; Green − perhaps it is more accurate to say, the way in which the photographer presents her − asks to be read as subject, not object; she demands to be here (to have presence and agency) in her own narrative. Pertinent to this reading and to Hogue and Ross's explicit aim to "see [those] who might otherwise be invisible or forgotten" is Green's visible blackness (126). The close-up of Green, therefore, both underlines and confronts the problematics of Katrina as a calamity that disproportionately affected the African-American population of New Orleans. Yet the act of photographing this woman, which defies the erasure of her body by the political and cultural tenets that delineate a grievable life, also necessarily objectifies her, transfigures her story and image into art. Green is thus both here (she is the subject of the photograph) and unhere (she is an objectified reproduction) in the photograph. "To photograph," explains Sontag, "is to appropriate the thing photographed" (4). Similarly, the

empathy that Ross's photographic witnessing performs is marked by appropriation and intrusion: the blurring of the photograph in a way that fits with the aesthetic and ideological position of the photographer and the larger text. Moreover, Green's portrait also functions as a formal intrusion or interruption, a caesura that prolongs the night and decision of evacuation in the content of the poem.[50] As such, the text further objectifies Green, employing her image as literary figure or pause. This visual objectification ensures that the empathy which this image invites (through the collaborative process that produces the photograph and the space that the photograph offers its subject) is exploitative, both in terms of its choice of focus and in terms of its placement in the text.

Less subtle in its empathetic dismissal is the poem's response to those who are geographically unhere in New Orleans. While Green's family constitutes the epicentre of both the poem and empathy, the unfamiliar becomes the site of the unempathetic. Following her decision to leave the Katrina-threatened city, Green ruminates on the differences between those inside and outside of New Orleans:

> People ask, *Why didn't you leave before?*
> They don't understand New Orleans'
> anatomy. New Orleans period.
> This was our *home*. We *always*
> stay. That's what we do. (Hogue and Ross 38)

Green's pronoun usage draws a sharp line between the questioning "they" and the resolute "we." Denying foreigners the ability to understand residents ("They don't understand"), Green also denies those who are geographically unhere the ability to empathize. As such, Green draws a

[50] Green's photograph appears on page 37 of *When the Water Came*, directly after the admission, "so we all went to sleep Saturday / without deciding what to do," on page 36 of the text. Page 38 resumes the interview-poem.

circle around her personal and extended New Orleans family. Symbolically reiterating this circle are the three photographs of the Circle Food Store (40-42), the grocery store near where Green was raised (38), at the centre of this interview-poem. As the first New Orleans grocery store owned by African Americans ("History"), as well as one of the city's longest-running grocery stores ("Hurricane Katrina Tour"), the Circle Food Store points to the value of the community and its local businesses for Green.[51] Additionally, the visual importance of Circle Food and its two references in the poem metaphorically intimate Green's familiar circle of New Orleans residents. Connected by place – New Orleans, Circle Food – these residents form the extended family that is situated in Green's here.

Considering this extended family in the second section of the poem, Green emphasizes their significance for the layout of the city. She articulates the necessity of their being here to the familiarity of the neighbourhood:

> You wonder where
>
> *everybody* was, the bum
>
> on the corner, the pickpocketers,
>
> the little man that's always on Bourbon Street
>
> painting the city. CNN was showing people on houses.
>
> This was not a strange neighborhood to me.
>
> This was *my* neighborhood. (Hogue and Ross 43)

Green's extension of familiarity to typically marginalized and excluded urban characters, like the homeless and the thief, underlines the division that she makes between her New Orleans and the "strange neighborhood" televised on CNN (the simulacrum). Although the news allows

[51] The Circle Food Store was a major site of flooding during Hurricane Katrina and, due to funding deficiencies, remained closed until January 2014 ("History").

physically unhere viewers to approach the here of a Katrina-affected city, television presents New Orleans as "strange" and distant. If empathy brings individuals closer − making them less strange − to one another, then the televised broadcast employs the screen as empathetic barricade. Verbalizing this barricade toward the end of the poem, Green asserts, "You'd have to be a citizen / of New Orleans to understand" (43). Like Charlotte Delbo's recurring contention in *Auschwitz and After* that those outside of the Holocaust experience are unable to empathize with it, Green's dismissal of foreigner understanding takes up a similar stance regarding those outside of the New Orleans community.[52] Working through empathy's familiarity bias, which posits that the likelihood of empathy increases in conjunction with the familiarity of empathy's receiver, Green contends that there is too much unfamiliarity between citizens (the here) and non-citizens (the unhere) of New Orleans to allow for empathy. This interview-poem is therefore empathetically dissonant, situating empathy in Green's immediate and extended New Orleans family, while refusing the possibility of empathy from those who are unfamiliar and unhere.

The intersection of empathy with Green's division between those here and those unhere in New Orleans is particularly salient to consider in relation to Hogue and Ross, the text's self-characterized "witnesses" (126). Although Hogue taught at the University of New Orleans for four years, she had already been living outside of New Orleans for a decade by the time Katrina struck. "She loves New Orleans and never forgot its human warmth and musical richness," comments Jarret Keene in an article examining the lasting impact of this city on Hogue's poetry. "It is in memory of that lost city that she often writes." Hogue's status as both insider and outsider of New Orleans – both affectively here and physically and temporally unhere – places her in a liminal position that, according to Green's poem, leaves Hogue's ability to approach New Orleans with empathy uncertain. Photographer Ross, on the other hand, resides in Arizona,

[52] Refer to Chapter One for more on Delbo.

the state to which the Katrina survivors in *When the Water Came* evacuate. Lacking residential ties to New Orleans, Ross falls into Green's categorization of a non-New Orleans resident, an unhere outsider, who cannot understand the community from which the evacuees come (Keene). The divide between Hogue and Ross as the partial creators of this text and their position as non-citizens of New Orleans undermines, according to Green's poem, their ability to empathize with the individuals that their text represents.

Formally, Green's interview-poem also enacts the empathetic divide between the familiar, or here, and the unfamiliar, or unhere. First, Hogue partitions the poem into two numbered parts, a division that suggests the 'us' versus 'them' paradigm underpinning Green's narrative. Each of these sections then consists of a parallel thematic structure: a discussion of either the personal or extended family ('us'), followed by a denial of empathy from outsiders ('them'). Furthermore, the poem's verse paragraphs visually suggest distress or conflict. Each verse paragraph consists of a block of text (beginning with eight and swelling to nine lines about halfway through the poem, as if in imitation of the city's rising water levels) and a subsequent three lines, each of whose margins move further to the right of the page, as if in preparation of evacuation.[53] This bi-part structure is significant for a number of reasons. First, the stanzaic structure visually imagines the order − however politically, economically, and structurally fraught − of the pre-Katrina every day (the block of text) in juxtaposition to the chaos of the Hurricane (the marginally restless tercet). Second, the stanzaic structure lends itself to the text's dichotomy between the familiar and the unfamiliar: while the first eight or nine lines are marginally normative and, thus, familiar, the final three lines are marginally unusual and, thus, unfamiliar. Moreover, while the former lines step into or identify with a single margin, the latter

[53] Although Hogue does not consistently include a space between these "verse paragraphs," I refer to them as such because they visually work as poetic units.

lines refuse a single margin or sole point of identification. Hogue's stanzaic formatting, thus, situates the familiar lines as symbolic markers of empathy and the unfamiliar lines as symbolic markers of a lack of empathy. This empathetically dissonant form reflects the empathetically conflicted content of Green's narrative: although Green invites empathy by spotlighting the personal, she also refuses empathy by limiting understanding to her circle of familiarity. On a larger scale, Hogue's formal shaping of the poem to address Green's dichotomous content constitutes an empathetic act, but this act simultaneously highlights Hogue's intervention into Green's story. Indeed, Hogue's interference undercuts the attention to the evacuee's story by shifting some of the attention to the poetic form; this shift in attention also undercuts Hogue's empathy with Green, as Hogue must split her concern between Green's story and the stylistic and formal elements of the text. Moreover, partaking in empathy's appropriative inclinations, the constructed sections and verse paragraphs of this poem, like the other poems that this chapter considers, harness a personal and communal crisis to make art. In other words, Hogue and Ross's witnessing of Green as a New Orleans evacuee is coloured by their individual visions and collaborative objectives.

Claudia Rankine's 2014 collection of poems and images, *Citizen: An American Lyric*, specifically the piece dated "August 29, 2005" and succinctly titled "Hurricane Katrina," similarly treads the territory of empathetically dissonant witness poetry.[54] *Citizen* is an amalgamation of racially-charged moments that reveal the systemic and covert racism underpinning contemporary American life. Employing the second person "you" in place of the lyric's conventional "I," Rankine compels readers to assume the place of a racialized body. This

[54] Unlike Fitterman's "This Window Makes Me Feel," which begins by dating itself prior to (and thus outside of) the 9/11 attacks, Rankine's "Hurricane Katrina" dates itself at the heart of the Hurricane.

body's experiences of "casual racism" (Kellaway) or "micro-aggressions" "suggest that racial harmony is superficial − skin-deep − and Americans revert readily and easily to their respective racial camps" (Laird). Such a division calls into question the possibility of interracial empathy. Situated at roughly the centre of Rankine's text, the Hurricane Katrina prose poem partakes in this empathetic uncertainty. Like Charles Reznikoff, Robert Fitterman, and Cynthia Hogue, Rankine constructs this poem from the words of others, namely "quotes collected from CNN," and therefore positions herself as a physically unhere (she watches on television) witness to crisis (Rankine, *Citizen* 82).[55] Significantly, by spotlighting the difficulty − a word that repeats throughout this piece − and pain of various Hurricane victims, Rankine ensures that her witnessing is empathetically charged. Yet while this piece offers visibility or room in the here of the Katrina experience to black and economically-underprivileged individuals, it also considers the invisibility or politically and affectively unhere space to which these individuals are consigned and, consequently, their negligible share of empathy. As Nick Laird observes in his book review of *Citizen*, "A recurring theme is the paradox of being seen but not seen, of being both overly visible and completely invisible." Empathetically dissonant, Rankine's "Hurricane Katrina" explores the ways in which racial politics − the tenets that dictate the visibility of a body and its position in the socially privileged here − intersect with empathy and how these intersections become particularly relevant in a moment of crisis.

Although the Katrina witness poem focuses on the bodies of those affected by the storm, thus encouraging empathy for these individuals, the ambiguity and anonymity of these bodies undercut the extension of empathy. The first semblance of a body in this poem appears shrouded in uncertainty: "standing there, maybe wading, maybe waving, standing where the deep waters of

[55] My above notes on simulacrum in relation to Wisława Szymborska's "Photograph from September 11" hold relevance for Rankine's engagement with quotes from CNN, a news broadcaster removed from the events of Hurricane Katrina.

everything backed up, one said, climbing over bodies, one said, stranded on a roof, one said, trapped in the building" (Rankine, *Citizen* 83). The ambiguous gesture of the standing body (is it wading or waving?) echoes Stevie Smith's "Not Waving but Drowning" (1440). Rankine's allusion to Smith's renowned poem, which depicts the misunderstood gestures of a dead man (is he waving or drowning?), suggests that the themes of invisibility, distance, and ambiguity run through both texts.[56] Indeed, the rhyme (proximity in sound) between "wading" and "waving" highlights the ambiguous body (proximity in action) in Rankine's poem. Ambiguous and anonymous, this body can neither occupy a space in the socially privileged here nor secure empathy from the speaker or the reader. Furthermore, the repetition in the opening of Rankine's poem functions as a kind of stutter, one that gestures not only at the linguistic inability to describe the scene of crisis ("one said" as a sticking in the throat), but also at the unlocatable individual at the heart of the crisis. Jumping from one setting ("the deep waters of everything," "bodies," "a roof," "the building") and character (does "one" change referents or remain the same?) to another thwarts the possibility of solid ground for the reader. Considering this lack of solid ground through the linguistic register, Laird explains that "Rankine's language is … uncanny and reverberant, continually wrongfooting the reader, swapping referents, mixing the physical and the metaphysical at will." The unsteadiness into which Rankine's writing casts her readers also destabilizes the empathy in the text. Adding to this unsteadiness are the bodies over which the "one" climbs. Through the parallelism that sets up these presumably dead bodies as one of the settings in this passage ("climbing over bodies"), individual deaths are stripped of empathetic opportunity. Moreover, the brief glimpse that the poem offers each scene ensures that the visibility of the already indistinct victims falters into invisibility; in other words, while the poem acknowledges the presence of "one[s]," it does not remain with these individuals long

[56] The image of drowning in Smith's poem is also salient for the "deep waters" of Rankine's "Hurricane Katrina."

enough to learn or impart details about them. By pushing these individuals into an unhere space in their own stories, the text enacts the negligence to which black lives are often subjugated under the American socio-political eye, a negligence that foregoes the possibility of empathy.

In an attempt to re-imagine the socio-political eye and its lack of empathy for those it deems politically and affectively unhere, Rankine conceptualizes "Hurricane Katrina" as a "script for Situation video" (82). As a visual project, this text seeks to counter the insufficient visibility and empathy that its glimpses engender. In Rankine's words,

> The decision to exist within the events of the 'Situation videos' came about because the use of video manipulation by John Lucas allowed me to slow down and enter the event, in moments, as if I were there in real time rather than as a spectator considering it in retrospect. As a writer working with someone with a different skill set, I was given access to a kind of seeing that is highly developed in the visual artist, and that I don't rely on as intuitively …. That kind of close looking, the ability to freeze the frame, challenges the language of the script to meet the moment … to know as the moment knows, and not from outside. The indwelling of those Situation pieces becomes a performance of switching your body out with the body in the frame and moving methodically through pathways of thought and positionings. (Interview)

Rankine's description of "indwelling" parallels the process of empathy: entering the body of another or "switching your body out with the body in the frame." The movement from outside to inside is also a zooming in, a focusing that beckons empathy as it shifts the unhere "spectator" into the here (or what Rankine terms "real time") of "the body in the frame." This action disrupts the poem's empathetically-lacking wide field of view, which allots brief glimpses to the

individuals in the text. Yet Rankine's nod at the "performance" that empathy requires opens to questions of empathy as deception. If empathy is a mask that one dons, then the empathy that the Situation video encourages also highlights the gulf in experience that empathy cannot overcome; in other words, the impersonation of the other always remains an impersonation (Ahmed 37). As such, even though the camera's focus seeks to enter "the body in the frame" – to move the unhere viewer into the here of another's body – the video's performance of empathy ensures that empathy – and thus the here of the other's body – remains at arm's length.

Further ensuring this empathetic dissonance is the disintegration of the body. Rankine's poem depicts bodies broken down into limbs, arms, and faces: "The missing limbs, he said, the bodies lodged in piles of rubble, dangling from rafters, lying facedown, arms outstretched on parlor floors" (*Citizen* 84). The disassembled ("missing limbs") and dehumanized ("lodged in piles of rubble"; "dangling from rafters") bodies here distance the reader's empathy − the bodies are unidentified and unidentifiable − even as they invite sympathy or pity − feelings that simultaneously convey commiseration and separation (Katz 8; Arendt 89; Blum 512).[57] As in the opening passage of the poem, individuals are unhere in this latter passage, their selfhood emptied out and replaced with corporeal remains. The verbal and likely physically intact "he," paralleling the earlier "one," speaks, but the text offers no indication of his personality or which words belong to him. "He," thus, is an empty signifier, his body (like the other bodies) here but his individuality unhere in the text. While the poem's content refuses empathy (there is a lack of a discernible individual with whom to empathize), the form (steeped in ambiguity regarding the speaking voice) empathetically performs the disorientation and catastrophe of Katrina. As such, the fragmented bodies − both the physical bodies in the poem and the body of the poem itself − serve as sites of empathetic dissonance.

[57] Refer to the Introduction of my dissertation for more on the disambiguation between *empathy*, *sympathy*, and *pity*.

Faces in particular become the mouthpieces of empathetic dissonance in "Hurricane Katrina." The repeated question, "Have you seen their faces?", simultaneously disconnects the Hurricane victims from the poem's addressee (paralleling the poem's disembodied limbs and arms), and connects the victims to the addressee (alluding to faces as the points of personal contact) (Rankine, *Citizen* 83, 85). The tension between disconnection and connection here is both a stepping away from and a stepping toward empathy. In other words, while the addressee cannot extend empathy to the disembodied faces, whose identities remain unhere in the text, the poem's invocation of the faces, symbols of the individual and carriers of the emotive, suggests the opportunity for empathy. Unanswered, the recurring question, "Have you seen their faces?", haunts the poem. The closing, which eschews prose for verse, offers a possible answer:

> Call out to them.
>
> I don't see them.
>
> Call out anyway.
>
>
> Did you see their faces? (86)

"I don't see them" offers a negative reply to the poem's recurring question. Yet the double charge to "call out" in spite of the "I's" lack of sight, along with the final echoing question − echoing back to "Have you seen their faces?" and forward to the silence of the poem's end − suggests that not seeing is an oversight on the part of the "I." Indeed, the omnipresent references to faces in the poem gesture at their physical presence. Invisibility becomes a product of the politics that dictate who occupies space in the socially privileged here or centre; who is here and who is unhere − and, by extension, who receives and who does not receive empathy − is intimately tied to race and economic advantage. Specifically, the largely African American and

economically underprivileged population that resided and continues to reside in the areas most affected by Hurricane Katrina (particularly the Lower Ninth Ward in New Orleans) suffered from invisibility and a lack of empathy on the part of city planners and government officials before, during, and after the storm.[58] The faces of the individuals in this population often remain affectively unhere and unacknowledged by the oppressive social and political forces that Rankine's poem critiques.

Underlining the constructed notions that direct one's share of empathy and position in the here is not only the turn to verse (a form of speech that is visibly constructed), but also the full-page ink drawing of what Laird describes as "a black man's face" at the closing of Rankine's "Hurricane Katrina" (see Figure 2 at the end of this chapter). Titled *Uncertain, yet Reserved*, this image by Toyin Odutola features a face aglow with colour, one whose identity is uncertain, aligning with the drawing's title and the poem's unspecified faces and bodies (Rankine 87, 164). The constructed brightness of this face "demands," as Laird writes of *Citizen*, "that we look"; specifically, this image demands that we do not *over*look this face as the poem's addressee does ("I don't see them"), that we do not remove this face from the here of his own story. As such, while the unrecognizable image undermines the extension of empathy, the attention that the image commands informs the empathetic process. Furthermore, although Odutola's illustration is not a photograph, Roland Barthes's comments on photography may be of value for the glowing face: "The Photograph is violent," deems Barthes, "not because it shows violent things, but because on each occasion *it fills the sight by force*, and because in it nothing can be refused or transformed" (91). Pairing sight with violence is particularly salient for the racism that *Citizen* exposes and the consequences of that racism for the victims of Katrina. Moreover, the forceful

[58] The confounding of race with class points to a systemic and historically-rooted problem that limits the educational, professional, and economic opportunities of African Americans in the United States, but also elsewhere.

way in which Barthes imagines the photograph commanding the viewer's attention − an attention that is necessary to the process of empathy − speaks to the violent possibilities of empathy; if empathy functions coercively, then it too is a process of impingement and violence. Echoing the violence that Barthes assigns the photograph are the words that appear in an earlier image in *Citizen*: "I FEEL MOST COLORED WHEN I AM THROWN AGAINST A SHARP WHITE BACKGROUND" (Rankine 53).[59] The aggressive verb "thrown" and the positioning of a coloured body against a white backdrop are also pertinent for Odutola's drawing in "Hurricane Katrina." The coloured − indeed multi-coloured − face in Odutola's image, contrasted with the white background, highlights the violence not only of the image, but also of the attitude of white citizens toward black citizens. The visual contrast between black and white also underscores the gulf in experience, and thus in empathy, between black and white lives.

Informing this empathetic gulf is Judith Butler's conception of a grievable life. As *Citizen* exposes, black lives are frequently devalued and relegated to the affectively unhere in the social and political fabric of America. This unhere or marginal position becomes particularly salient during a crisis: "There is a … shocking piece about hurricane Katrina," comments Kate Kellaway in a review of Rankine's collection, "in which the emergency services are less than urgent. She [Rankine] reports that the lives of black people in the disaster were less valued than those of the rescuers." Less grievable than white lives, the black lives that Rankine's poem considers are left physically and empathetically stranded. "Where were they? Where was anyone?" the polyphonic, often disembodied voices in "Hurricane Katrina" question (Rankine 83). In response, one voice admits, "Being honest with you, in my opinion, they forgot about us" (84). While the black lives that Rankine depicts in *Citizen*, specifically in the Hurricane Katrina poem, are denied empathy and rendered unhere in their own experiences, *Citizen*, as a text of

[59] This image belongs to Glenn Ligon, who borrows the words from Zora Neale Hurston (Rankine 164; Laird).

witnessing, offers both empathy to these individuals and an attention to their particular here. The empathetic dissonance of Rankine's work seeks to show the unequal distribution of empathy along racial lines, but also to probe the adequacy of empathy as a process through which white individuals can approach the experiences of black individuals: "Though the white liberal imagination likes to feel temporarily bad about black suffering," writes Rankine in an article about black suffering in America, "there really is no mode of empathy that can replicate the daily strain of knowing that as a black person you can be killed for simply being black" ("The Condition of Black Life"). Rankine's distrust and dismissal of empathy here speaks directly to the gulf of experience between empathizer and receiver of empathy, a gulf informed not only by the experience of a crisis, such as Hurricane Katrina, but also by the experience of racism.[60]

The texts in this chapter grapple with issues of witnessing, secondary trauma, and postmemory, negotiating positions of the unhere and the here in relation to empathetic dissonance. Experientially, physically, emotionally, personally, temporally, geographically, and/or culturally unhere at the site of crisis, the removed witness attempts to access this site through empathetic witnessing (entering into another's story). Yet this attempt to access another's here dislocates the witness from his/her own here. Moreover, empathetic witnessing can dislocate the receiver of empathy into an unhere position vis-à-vis his/her own story. Significantly, these works also scrutinize the political tenets that dictate who occupies affective territory in the privileged space of the here.

Unlike the previous chapter, where empathetic dissonance was frequently rooted in a

[60] Although Rankine dismisses empathy at the beginning of this article, she closes by asserting that "it's a lack of feeling for another that is our problem" and shared "grief" might "align" us with each other ("The Condition of Black Life"). This condemnation of and call for empathy is itself a dissonance that reiterates the struggle with the adequacy and possibility of empathy.

familial or friendly relationship, empathetic dissonance in this chapter most often stems from a relationship of distance. Charles Reznikoff's *Holocaust* confronts the fact-centred and aloof courtroom testimonies of victims and perpetrators of the Holocaust through the editorial voice of a geographically and temporally removed poet. Robert Fitterman's "This Window Makes Me Feel" replaces the personal with the conceptual, moulding itself as a Google search poem that refuses to foreground the events of 9/11. Wisława Szymborska's "Photograph from September 11" remains detached both in its conception as a simulacrum and in its language and tone. Cynthia Hogue and Rebecca Ross's *When the Water Came* situates two outsiders of the Katrina experience as the text's interpreters and gatekeepers. Claudia Rankine's *Citizen* employs a series of decontextualized quotes from CNN that maintain the anonymity and disembodiment of the African-American and economically-disadvantaged individuals affected by Katrina. Even Lily Brett's "Leaving You," which depicts a familial inheritance of postmemory, centres on a speaker who does not witness the events of the Holocaust first-hand and, indeed, argues for the necessity of distance between her and her mother's experiences.[61] Working through unhere witnessing, these texts negotiate the place empathy (itself a negotiation of distances) occupies in poetic responses to events of crisis. For the unhere witness, empathetic entry into these events can only be granted through secondary outlets, for example the television through which I first encountered the World Trade Center attacks. As such, empathy is necessarily removed, its dissonance a product of both the distance or gulf in experience between the empathizer and the receiver of empathy, as well as the poems' recognition and suspicion of empathy's bridging and appropriating abilities. If both proximity (see the first chapter) and distance are problematic

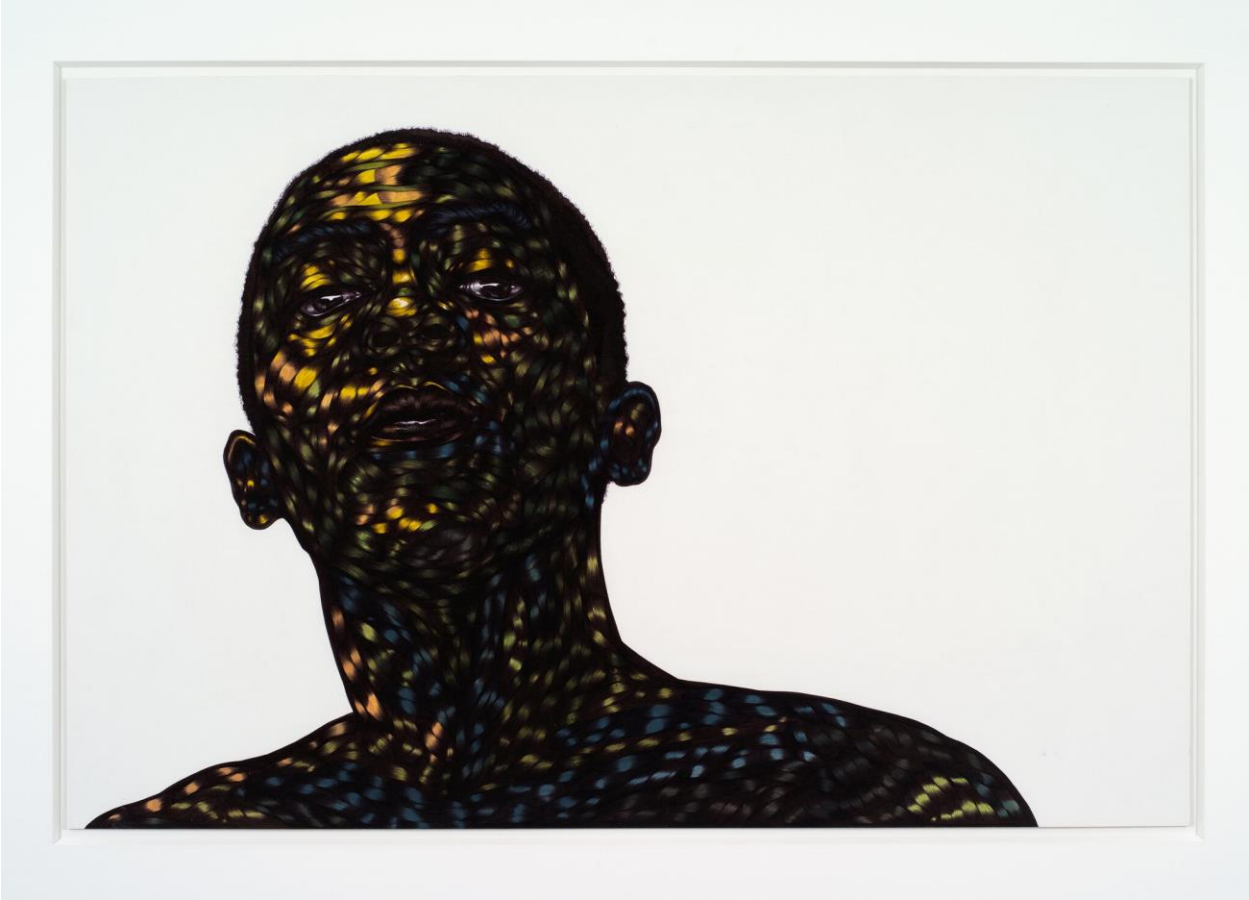
[61] Although distance marks all of the texts in this chapter, a number of the poems, namely *Holocaust* and *When the Water Came*, also respond to their respective crises through the personal voices of those affected. Again, however, these voices are edited by authors and photographers in positions of distance.

stances for the conferral of empathy, then the next chapter opens to the possibilities of theological empathy with that which is both near and far.

Figure 1:

Photo of Victoria Green by Rebecca Ross. Excerpt from *When the Water Came: Evacuees of Hurricane Katrina* by Cynthia Hogue and Rebecca Ross.

Figure 2: *Uncertain, yet Reserved (Adeola. Abuja Airport, Nigeria)* by Toyin Odutola, 2012.



Chapter Three: The Ungod

In May 2016, I visited New Orleans, a city ravaged by the effects of Hurricane Katrina more than ten years earlier. While there, I took a *Gray Line* "Hurricane Katrina Tour" − New Orleans's branch of the popular and not unproblematic disaster tourism trend − which involved a New Orleans reporter-turned-tour-guide leading a group of approximately twenty people to sites of Katrina's devastation and commemoration. "About 1500 people died in New Orleans as a result of Katrina," the guide explained, "but that number does not take everything into account." To perplexed looks, the guide continued, "For example, a family evacuates their aging mother and a week later she dies. Is that death a result of Hurricane Katrina, which forced the move, or a result of God's will? Many deaths after the Hurricane fell into this grey zone." The guide's question regarding the cause of death is a significant issue for this chapter. Indeed, natural disasters are themselves often referred to as "acts of God," occurrences willed by a deity as part of a divine plan and/or as part of moral punishment (Steinberg xxiii; Vaught 408). Critiquing this viewpoint in the aptly titled *Acts of God: the Unnatural History of Natural Disaster in America*, history scholar Ted Steinberg argues that economic and political motives inform the "act of God" justification:

> by recruiting an angry God or chaotic nature to their cause, those in power have been able to rationalize the economic choices that help to explain why the poor and people of color − who have largely borne the brunt of these disasters − tend to wind up in harm's way. The official response to natural disaster is profoundly dysfunctional in the sense that it has both contributed to a continuing cycle of death and destruction and also normalized the injustices of class and race. (xxii)

Steinberg contends that figures of political authority cast God and nature as scapegoats for their

own social ineptness. For Hurricane Katrina, in particular, the recurrence of "death and destruction" and the "normaliz[ation]" of "the injustices of class and race" that result from this scapegoating are highly relevant. Citing God as culprit for the Hurricane in lieu of the levee engineering errors that are steeped in biases of class and race allows those in power to shirk "their own culpability for calamity" (xxv). This chapter explores God's place in poetic responses to the three crises that my dissertation engages.

Unlike the previous two chapters, which examined empathetic dissonance in the context of human relations, this chapter locates empathetic dissonance in a relation between human and deity. Contemplating the human-God relation at various historical periods, Martin Buber asserts, "times of great utterance, when the mark of divine direction is recognizable in the conjunction of events, alternate with, as it were, mute times, when everything that occurs in the human world and pretends to historical significance appears to us as empty of God, with nowhere a beckoning of His finger, nowhere a sign that He is present and acts upon this our historical hour" ("The Dialogue" 65). Buber posits a correlation between the events of history and the providence of God, as humans perceive it. Specifically, contingent on their particular circumstances, both individuals and broader cultural communities either proclaim God's absence or His presence.[62]

The historical oscillation that Buber describes between an absent and a present God is relevant for poetry after crisis, wherein poets frequently question the nature and role of God in the face of devastation. Yet while Buber depicts a God who alternates between absence and presence, this chapter focuses on the ungod, a divine figure of absence even when he is present.[63] Significantly, the ungod can take two forms. First, ungod can indicate an individual's atheistic

[62] Certainly, within this reductive dichotomy of God's absence or presence, there are other alternatives, such as a view of God as fallible, impotent, unreasonable, etc.
[63] I choose not to capitalize *ungod* or the pronoun referent *he* (I maintain this male pronoun to parallel the Judeo-Christian God) in order to highlight the distinction between God and ungod.

belief that God does not exist (He is absent); within this belief is the dual possibility that God has never existed and that God no longer exists. Second, ungod can indicate an individual's theistic belief that God does exist (He is present), but the individual either refuses a divine relationship with God or believes that God refuses a divine relationship with the individual; both of these refusals work to absent God. Taking up the first possibility of ungod, Holocaust theologian Richard L. Rubenstein argues, with homage to Nietzsche, that "*we live in the time of the death of God*" (250). Indeed, the Holocaust generated religious doubt and confusion on an unprecedented scale, "pos[ing] the most radical counter-testimony to both Judaism and Christianity" (Greenberg 105). Arriving at the Holocaust in his historical study of the relationship between the Jewish people and God, Buber takes up the second possibility of ungod by questioning God's role in a post-Holocaust world:

> how is a life with God still possible in a time in which there is an Auschwitz? The estrangement has become too cruel, the hiddenness too deep. One can still "believe" in the God who allowed those things to happen, but can one still speak to Him? Can one sill hear His word? Can one still, as an individual and as a people, enter at all into a dialogic relationship with Him? Can one still call to Him? Dare we recommend to the survivors of Auschwitz, the Job of the gas chambers… ? ("The Dialogue" 66)

Although the Nazi genocide was far from the first or last event to dislocate or discredit God, this genocide does, argues Buber, cause an "estrangement" between Jews and God. While belief in God may still be possible, the relationship between Jews and God grows problematic after Auschwitz. By invoking the Biblical Job − paradigm of faith in the face of loss − as analogue for Holocaust survivors, Buber introduces the possibility of the Holocaust as a trial of faith (*The*

Bible. Authorized King James Version Job 1.11-22).[64] Yet the "Dare we" that frames this comparison suggests that the gas chambers of the concentration camps are incomparable to the losses that Job suffers. As such, Buber questions if expecting a sustained faith in God from camp survivors is not only unrealistic, but also insolent. Although Buber's argument relates specifically to the relationship between Jews and God after the Holocaust, this relationship is also instructive for the other crises that I examine. Indeed, any crisis can function as the crux from which an estrangement between individuals or communities and God can develop, particularly for "all those [people]," as Buber posits, "who have not got over what happened and will not get over it" ("The Dialogue" 67). Paul Celan's "Psalm," Katie Ford's "Flee," and Brad Bechler's "Water Mirror," all of which I consider later in this chapter, take up these questions of God's absence and estrangement.

Fuelling an individual's estrangement from God – an estrangement that pushes God into the absent role of an ungod – is the possible conviction that God is a malevolent, empathetically-lacking figure. While theistic religions often depict God as both stern and merciful, a God who an individual perceives as only or predominantly stern may precipitate that individual's turning away from a relationship with God. Jewish Studies scholar David R. Blumenthal argues that both the Bible and historical events like the Holocaust prove that God can be abusive (242). "When God acts abusively," Blumenthal contends, "we are the hurt party and we are not responsible for God's abuse. Our sins − and we are always sinful − are in no proportion whatsoever to the punishment meted out to us. Furthermore, the reasons for God's actions are irrelevant, God's motives are not the issue. Abuse is unjustified, in God as well as in human beings" (248). Holding humans and God to the same standards of responsibility, Blumenthal condemns God for

[64] Although Job maintains his faith in God, it is also relevant to consider Job's insistence on the injustice of his sufferings and, thus, Job's estrangement – paralleling the estrangement that Buber assigns to Jews in the face of the Holocaust – from God.

His violent behaviour. Although Blumenthal later stresses that this burden of blame on God does not absolve humans from their role in perpetrating the Holocaust, he also maintains that "God [is] co-responsible" (262). Celan's "Tenebrae," which I consider later in this chapter, examines the possibility of a violent God whom the speaker renders an ungod. Ascribing culpability to God is a response that surfaces not only after the Holocaust, but also after the events of September 11, 2001. For both the Holocaust and 9/11, religion was a focal factor in motivating hate. While the former event used religion and ethnicity (Judaism), among other social groupings, as justification for genocide, the latter event used religion, particularly Islamic extremism, as justification for terrorism. The consequences of this latter theological justification include a post-9/11 America that increasingly "demoni[zes]" the Islamic God (A. Brown). "So what is the religious legacy of 9/11?" asks Andrew Brown a decade after the terrorist attacks. "First and most obviously, widespread fear and mistrust of Muslims and Islam …. too many Americans have come to see the face of terror as a Muslim face. Efforts by scholars of Islam to distinguish between the hijacked Islam of extremists and the historical Islam of true believers have largely fallen on deaf ears." The association of religious convictions with terrorism casts the Islamic God as villain for "too many Americans." Furthermore, although there are certain fundamentalists who view 9/11 as a punishment for American sins (Gentile xii), this view is much more pervasive four years later with the advent of Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans and the Gulf Coast. In the wake of the Hurricane, explains historian Seneca Vaught, some political and religious leaders "implied that God's design was to punish New Orleans for its immorality" (414). Voicing this opinion, "Politicos, pastors, and pundits blamed everything from abortion to homosexuality, from Mardi Gras to the inefficiency of the federal government, for a disaster that kept getting worse." Consequently, God became source of retribution for certain "moral and

political agendas" (410). Although theistic religions often centre on a deity who is both violent and benevolent, the abusive God of the Holocaust, the demonized God of 9/11, and the vindictive God of Hurricane Katrina may, for some individuals, be Gods with whom an empathetic relationship is challenging.[65] As such, individuals may turn away from these violent Gods who, though present, may become figures of absence (ungods) through the individuals' refusal to worship them.

Although the focus of this chapter is the ungod, it would be amiss if this opening section did not consider God, a figure of presence that both informs and stands in opposition to the ungod. Specifically, the ungod draws on God through the ungod's theistic possibility that God exists. Although the relationship between the ungod and the individual is marked by absence, the possibility of God's existence also underlies the possibility of a relationship between the ungod and the individual (a possibility that would render ungod God). In his conception of the "I-Thou" − an association of inseparability between beings − Buber asserts that every interaction of "I" with "Thou" is also an interaction of "I" with the "eternal Thou" or God (*I and Thou* 6). The ubiquitous relationship between "I" and God that Buber posits at once acknowledges the possibility of a relationship between the individual and the ungod (a figure informed by the "eternal" God) and stands in opposition to the ungod's lack of a relationship with the individual. The primacy of God in Buber's theory is a primacy that also often surfaces after crisis. Indeed, the presence of crisis may reaffirm the presence of God for faithful followers or comfort seekers. Discussing the simultaneity of God and evil, David Birnbaum explains, "In arguments used by traditional theologians, what man calls evil sometimes turns out to be good in God's eyes; suffering, pain, and death are the consequences of man's erring belief or behavior …. Invariably

[65] By an "empathetic relationship" I mean one in which, in the eyes of the individual, God extends empathy to that individual. What this empathy looks like (for example, God's omnipresence or intervention) of course manifests in different ways for different individuals and, thus, for the different poems that this chapter considers.

and inevitably, the Divine image is sustained, and it is man who is diminished" (9). Although highly contested by social scientists, theodicy – the justification of God's existence despite the occurrence of evil – persists as a theological response to suffering (Braiterman 19-25). While belief in God may allow for the possibility of a deity who permits or even perpetrates evil, the ungod necessitates a turn away from this deity.

Although the poetic responses to the three crises that I consider express, in addition to their theological uncertainty, conviction in God's presence, this chapter examines this present God as an ungod, absent even when he is present. While this absent presence may be the role in which many theists cast God (consider the idea of God as both remote and immanent), what sets ungod apart from God is the pressure on absence: for the ungod, whether God is present or not present, the relationship between the individual and God is marked by absence. "God's absence, even at Auschwitz, is not absolute," argues Eliezer Berkovits. "Because of that it was possible for many to know God even along the path to the gas chambers. There were many who found him even in his hiding. Because of the knowledge of God's presence, the Jew can find God even in his absence" (101). Berkovits upholds that God can be found even in moments of extreme anguish when God appears to be absent ("the path to the gas chambers"). Similarly, God plays a central role – even if that role is of an ungod – in poetic responses to the three crises that my dissertation addresses.

The ungod is an empathetically dissonant figure. On the one hand, his absence, whether stemming from atheism or a refused relationship, negates the possibility of empathy with humans. On the other hand, informed by and laden with the possibilities of a present God, the ungod allows for the possibility of this empathy.[66] As such, I attempt to understand empathetic

[66] Although a present God is certainly not always an empathetic figure, His presence allows for the possibility of empathy by opening to the possibility of a relationship (again, one not always marked by empathy) between God

dissonance through theological dissonance in order to suggest the instability of empathy after the crises that I consider. Further complicating the theological dissonance in the poems with which I work are the poems' varied conceptions of God. Although Christianity and Judaism (whether as trope or belief) are the two religions, with their various sects, most discernible in these poems, each poem also has its own conceptions of God and of God's role and responsibility toward humanity in the face of the crisis at hand. As such, in addition to mapping the ungod in these poems, I attempt, as much as the poems allow, to consider the poems' conceptions and expectations of God; understanding these conceptions and expectations of God is necessary to understanding the ungod in each of the poems. The texts that this chapter reads include Celan's "Tenebrae" and "Psalm," Dan Pagis's "Autobiography" and "Written in Pencil in the Sealed Railway-Car," Susan Birkeland's "Jesus Poem," Lucille Clifton's "9/11/01 − 9/17/01," Ford's "Flee," and Bechler's "Water Mirror."

The events of the Holocaust prove inseparable from both Paul Celan's consciousness and his writing. Born in 1920 in Czernowitz, then part of Romania, the Jewish, German-writing poet came of age during the rise of the Nazi Party. In June of 1942, his parents were deported to a concentration camp, where both eventually perished. Shortly after his parents' deportation, Celan was taken to one of the several forced labour camps in which he would work until the arrival of the Red Army in 1944 (Felstiner, Preface xix-xx). These experiences of persecution, along with the conversion of his German mother tongue (both initial and maternal) into the tongue of the Nazi murderers, haunted Celan until his suicide in Paris in 1970 (Felstiner, Preface xxxv-xxxvi;

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and the individual. Furthermore, in the Judeo-Christian tradition – the context that helps to inform the poems in this chapter – the Biblical God is emotive: "He has emotions which are all too human: he [*sic*] is said to be jealous, and angry, and he sometimes changes his mind and feels regret" (de Lange 156). This emotive God, thus, further admits the possibility of an affective relation such as empathy.

DeKoven Ezrahi, *Booking Passage* 141). This section will consider, in English translation, two of Celan's poems after the Holocaust: "Tenebrae" and "Psalm". Although much of Celan's poetry brims with empathetic tension, these poems are particularly relevant to the theological questions that this chapter foregrounds.

"Tenebrae," from the 1959 collection *Sprachgitter* (*Speech-Grille*), engages with empathetic dissonance through a theological figure that the speaker renders an ungod. This poem sets up an empathetic relation between a collective "we" speaker and an addressed "Lord." Celan's text employs repetition to underline this empathetic relation. Specifically, the "Near are we" and inverted "We are near" that bookend the poem suggest a bond between the speaker and the Lord.[67] This bond grows closer as the second verse paragraph exchanges proximity for convergence:

> Grasped already, Lord,
> clawed into each other, as if
> each of our bodies were
> your body, Lord. (Celan, "Tenebrae" 103)

With the caveat of "as if" (which I will discuss shortly), the collective bodies of the speaker imagine themselves into the body of the Lord. This imaginative exchange of bodies becomes the site of empathy. Yet this empathy, or imaginative entry into the body of another, occurs against the backdrop of violence: the bodies in the poem are "clawed into each other." If clawing is a response to the reimagining of another's body as the body of Christ (in other words, if the speaking bodies claw into each other because they imagine each other to be Christ), then Christ emerges as an ambiguous figure: both possible source of aid that the clawing bodies (presumably Holocaust victims) desperately desire and possible source of abuse that the clawing bodies

[67] All of the translations of Celan's poetry that I examine are by John Felstiner, unless otherwise noted.

violently rebuke; in other words, the bodies are imaginatively clawing into Christ because they either require Christ's assistance or feel angry with Him over some unnamed abuse. If the second possibility holds true, then the abusive nature of the deity in this poem becomes a possible motive for the speaker turning away from the Lord as deity and, thus, rendering the Lord an ungod.

Echoing this theological ambiguity and abusiveness, the latter half of the poem also forefronts a violent deity that the speaker imagines as an ungod. Considering the blood that is evocative of Christian and Jewish symbolism, as well as, in the context of Celan's work, the violence of the Holocaust, the speaker asserts, "It was blood, it was / what you shed, Lord" (103). Significantly, the poem here is unclear on who has shed the blood: while the shed blood could belong to the sacrificing Lord, this blood could equally belong to the victims of the Holocaust's bloodshed. The latter possibility syntactically situates the Lord as responsible for the victims' shedding (you, Lord, shed our blood) and, thus, implicates the Lord in the violence that this poem stages. Lingering on the image of blood, the penultimate verse paragraph both alludes to Christian and Jewish covenants with God and reconfirms the image of a violent deity: "We have drunk, Lord. / The blood and the image that was in the blood, Lord" (103). In a Christian context, drinking what is possibly the Lord's blood and image is an allusion to Christ and the Eucharist, a symbol of the covenant with the Christian God. In a Jewish context, blood connotes circumcision and the blood sprinkled at Mount Sinai (both symbols of the covenant between God and the Jewish people), as well as the possibility of redemption (specifically, Ezekiel 16:6: "And when I passed by thee, and saw thee polluted in thine own blood, I said unto thee when thou wast in thy blood, Live; yea, I said unto thee when thou wast in thy blood, Live" (*The Bible. Authorized King James Version*)). In both Christian and Jewish contexts, the covenantal

relationship between God and His people establishes a bond – and, thus, the possibility of empathy – between God and the collective speaker of Celan's "Tenebrae." Yet blood in this poem is also necessarily reminiscent of the spilled blood of the Holocaust. If the bodies who drink the blood and image are the same bodies who empathetically exchange places with the Lord in the poem's second verse paragraph, then it is the Lord who drinks the blood of the victims. The violently represented theological empathy of "Tenebrae" echoes the violence of the Holocaust, an event never too distant from Celan's poems. Indeed, this violence becomes a possible stimulus that spurs the speaker to render the Lord an ungod.

Notably, the physical violence of "Tenebrae" parallels the symbolic violence of empathy.[68] Instead of obliterating the other (the Lord), however, as is a possible result of empathy, the clawing bodies of Celan's text invert the other's function: "Pray, Lord, / pray to us," the third verse paragraph commands (103). Although the speaker and the Lord maintain a relationship through prayer, this relationship inverts the typical divine relationship between individual as transmitter of prayer and God as recipient of prayer. Indeed, Celan's inversion of God's function in this poem suggests that God's role (pre-inversion) is as listener and, thus, presumably, answerer of prayer; as such, the poem's pre-inversion deity is a possibly omnipotent figure laden with the expectation of aiding those in need. Yet through the sacrilegious reversal that recasts the Lord as praying subject, the poem's speaker gains agency. The Lord, on the other hand, becomes an ungod, a non-deity whom the speaker, instead of worshipping, directs to worship humanity. The empathetic relation between the speaker and the Lord redefines both entities: the speaker becomes God and the Lord becomes ungod, a figure the speaker refuses as deity. Yet the "as if" that dangles at the end of the poem's fourth line suggests that this empathy − and, thus, the various subject positions that it produces − is precarious. "As if / each of our

[68] See Boyarin, Goldie, and S. Hartman for more on the symbolic violence of empathy.

bodies were / your body, Lord" implies uncertainty in the exchange of bodies that occurs in the poem (103). "As if" functions as the marker of empathetic dissonance: this phrase serves both as a bridge that connects the speaker and the Lord and as a barrier between the two (Celan formally emphasizes this barrier by positioning the speaker's and the Lord's "bodies" on separate lines). In his biographical and literary study of Celan, *Paul Celan: Poet, Survivor, Jew*, John Felstiner argues that because the "likening" of speaker and Lord takes place in the "subjunctive, the mood reserved for what is doubtful or contrary to fact .... The speakers are not suffering in Christ's name" (103). Although "Tenebrae" forges a connection between the suffering of Holocaust victims and the suffering of Christ, suffering is simultaneously the root of empathy between the Holocaust victims and Christ and the root of separation between them because of the disparate sufferings that their bodies undergo. The empathy in "Tenebrae" hinges uncertainly on "as if."

Similar to the subjunctive "as if," the title of Celan's poem also gestures at uncertainty. "Tenebrae," which Felstiner preserves in his English translation, is the Latin word for darkness, night, or shadows. Further, the Christian service that carries this name performs darkness through the extinguishing of candles (*OED*). In the context of Christian tradition, this gradual darkness signifies Christ's suffering and death ("Tenebrae: A Service of Shadows"). Celan's "Tenebrae," thus, is set in a tormented and eventually theologically empty landscape. Moreover, however precarious, the poem's empathetic exchange of bodies – in which the speaker becomes God and the Lord becomes ungod – suggests that the collective speaking voice (presumably belonging to the Holocaust's victims) shares the suffering and death of Christ. Indeed, the "claw[ing]" of the poem's bodies, who are presumably Jewish, is perhaps the bodies' struggle to displace Christ as

the central image of suffering in the Western imagination.[69] As such, the Tenebrae service to which the title of Celan's poem alludes also, and perhaps primarily, becomes a service in honour of the Holocaust's sufferers.

Significantly, in the Tenebrae or darkness that Celan's text sets up, empathy between the speaker and the Lord or ungod grows difficult to perceive. Adding to this uncertainty is the empathy-displacing journey that takes place at the centre of "Tenebrae":

> Wind-skewed we went there,
>
> went there to bend
>
> over pit and crater.
>
>
> Went to the water-trough, Lord. (Celan 103)

The unspecified location of the "water-trough" and the extraordinary scene "over pit and crater" situate Celan's poem in the unknown. Although the speaker repeatedly insists that "we are near," one of the underlying questions of the poem becomes, *where are we?* (103). Seeped in darkness, amid an ungod who presumably cannot offer aid, the text is unable or unwilling to give an answer. "Tenebrae," thus, cannot allow the very empathy or entry that it stages: it is difficult to enter when one does not know where it is that one is entering. In his analysis of Celan's poem, Felstiner argues that this undefined space "evokes the terrain where *Einsatzkommandos* did their job" (*Paul Celan: Poet, Survivor, Jew* 104). If Celan's "pit and crater" are constituents of an

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[69] We can recall here Charlotte Delbo's "You who have wept two thousand years," which I consider briefly in Chapter One and which also relates the suffering of Christ with the suffering of Holocaust victims. Delbo's poem argues that the suffering of Holocaust victims surpasses, at least in duration, the suffering of Christ:

> You who have wept two thousand years
> for one who agonized for three days and three nights
>
> what tears will you have left
> for those who agonized
> far more than three hundred nights and far more than three hundred days. (*Auschwitz and After* 10)

extermination site, then the nearness on which the poem's speaker insists is a nearness not just to Christ but also to death (105). This unnamed death, buried in the middle of a poem whose title denotes darkness and whose deity is an ungod, becomes the landscape for the empathy that the text both displays and conceals.

As the poem moves into its penultimate verse paragraph, the initial empathy between the speaker and the Lord recedes. The speaker divulges, "It cast your image into our eyes, Lord / Eyes and mouth stand so open and void, Lord" (Celan, "Tenebrae" 103). Eyes and mouth, which gesture at sight and speech, function as bridges for empathy: self and other meet in these spaces. Yet although the eyes and mouth of Celan's text "stand so open" to the other, they remain vacant. Empathy recedes as "Tenebrae" acknowledges that the image of the Lord (the Genesis contention that humans are created in God's image reverberates here) cannot fill the "void" of the speaker, as the Lord is an ungod or divine absence in this poem (*The Bible. Authorized King James Version* Genesis 1.27). The epistrophic repetition of the word "Lord," which appears at the end of half of the poem's twenty-two lines, becomes more urgent in this penultimate verse paragraph. Repetition acts as a call for a Lord who retreats from the speaker, a Lord who becomes an ungod as the speaker empties out the Lord's body to take His place. Additionally, the "open and void" depiction of the eyes and mouth parallels the earlier image of "pit and crater." This parallelism casts the speaker as analogue for an inert earth, thereby disappointing the desire for spiritual conflation. In other words, if the speaker embodies emptiness or death, then the speaker, who has imaginatively become a God in the poem, is cast into the role of an ungod. Just as the poem's bookended "Near are we" and "We are near," the possibility for connection between the speaker and the spiritual in the penultimate verse paragraph remains near but ultimately unfulfilled. Furthermore, the eyes and mouth in "Tenebrae" are the disembodied

parts of the empathizing body. "Through Celan's strong verb 'stand,'" argues Felstiner, "these [eyes and mouth] belong to mortally emaciated faces" (*Paul Celan: Poet, Survivor, Jew* 104). The emaciated body in "Tenebrae" deteriorates. If there is no body with which to empathize, however, empathy also breaks down in this text. The crumbling body of Celan's poem ensures that the move toward theological empathy, through the potential openness of eyes and mouth, is always also a move away from empathy. Informing this empathetic dissonance is the violent Lord with whom the speaker empathetically exchanges bodies but whose new role as ungod – the speaker absences the Lord from the role of deity – ensures that he cannot offer divine empathy or aid to the speaker.

The ungod of "Tenebrae" finds an echo in Celan's later poem "Psalm," which appears in *Die Niemandrose* (*The No-One's-Rose*), the 1963 collection that follows *Speech-Grille*. Like "Tenebrae," the title of this poem gestures at the sacred. Indeed, Celan's "Psalm" employs the subject matter (God, for instance) and the techniques (repetition, for instance) of the Biblical psalms. Yet as Felstiner points out, "'Psalm' can never, for this poet, purely and simply line up with the hymns of lament and praise that have comforted generation unto generation" (168). Replacing the repeated "Lord" of "Tenebrae" with "*Niemand*" (no one), "Psalm" opens with a scene of devastation:

> No one kneads us again out of earth and clay
>
> no one incants our dust.
>
> No one.
>
> Blessed art thou, No One. (Celan 157)

By capitalizing "*Niemand*" (156) − a capitalization that Felstiner maintains as "No One" in his English translation − Celan transforms pronoun into proper name, lending physical presence to the poem's addressee. Discussing *Niemand,* Felstiner insists that, for Celan, "God is the 'wholly Other.' What is more 'Other' than 'No One'?" (*Paul Celan: Poet, Survivor, Jew* 169). Part of Celan's "No One" also contains a common name for God in Jewish tradition, *One*, and invokes Judaism's belief in the unity or oneness of God (de Lange 157). According to this poem, God occupies the Biblical role of creator, the one who "incants our dust." Yet the poem's collective speaker ironically inverts the name of God from *One* to "No One" and re-casts God from creator to non-creator ("No one kneads us again out of earth and clay"). God or No One, the addressee of Celan's "Psalm," is an ungod: a figure of divine absence (because, as his name suggests, he cannot perform the role of creator) even as he is a figure of divine presence in the poem. As such, the ungod here functions as a site of empathetic dissonance: both absent and present to the possibility of empathy. Similar to the Lord in "Tenebrae," the ungod of "Psalm" serves as the other in the empathetic relation between "us" and "No One." By refusing the speaker rebirth, however, No One simultaneously embraces and denies empathy. On the one hand, the Genesis-reversing scene that casts the speaker as "dust" or nothingness (the third verse paragraph reads, "A Nothing / we were, are now, and ever / shall be") brings the speaker closer to the ungod of the poem; an empathy arises between the absence invoked by "Nothing" and "No One" (Celan, "Psalm" 157). On the other hand, by remaining "Nothing," the speaker cannot possess the self-consciousness necessary for an empathetic relation (Katz 9). No One retreats from the speaker, just as the Lord in "Tenebrae" cannot fill the speaker's eyes and mouth.

Imitating the empathetic dissonance of the opening verse paragraph, the collective speaker of "Psalm" moves both toward and away from the poem's ungod. The second verse paragraph examines this movement:

> In thy sight would
>
> we bloom.
>
> In thy
>
> spite. (Celan, "Psalm" 157)

Similar to the "as if" in "Tenebrae," the subjunctive "would" here is a marker of empathetic dissonance: while "would" promises the possibility of blooming for the speaker, of becoming more than nothingness or dust and thus allowing for the possibility of empathy with the ungod, "would" also continually thwarts this possibility by remaining in the subjunctive and thus refusing to materialize the blooming that it promises. Furthermore, commenting on Celan's "*entgegen*," which Felstiner liberally translates as "spite," Felstiner explains that the German word carries a "double sense − both 'toward' and 'against'" (*Paul Celan: Poet, Survivor, Jew* 168). While Joachim Neugroschel, in his translation of "Psalm," pinpoints the direction of blooming as "Towards / thee" (182), Felstiner maintains the ambiguity of "*entgegen*" in his translation. On the one hand, the speaker's possible blooming occurs in No One's sight, suggesting a nearness between the speaker and the ungod, a nearness necessary to the process of empathy. On the other hand, blooming to spite the ungod or blooming as a result of the ungod's spite suggests a hostility between the speaker and the ungod that denies the nearness that empathy produces. The rhyme bridging "sight" and "spite" in Felstiner's English translation highlights the empathetic dissonance of "*entgegen*."

Emerging in the second verse paragraph and continuing into the poem's closing, the blooming Rose − the collection's eponymous "No-One's-Rose" − renounces the possibility of empathy that the former verse paragraphs leave open. A metaphor for the poem's collective speaker, the Rose is also a common metaphor for the people of Israel (a rose among thorns, rose of Jacob). As such, Celan's Rose, set in a landscape of devastation, identifies the collective speaker as a Jewish Holocaust victim. Magnifying the Rose, the final verse paragraph depicts,

> With
> our pistil soul-bright,
> our stamen heaven-waste,
> our corona red
> from the purpleword we sang
> over, O over
> the thorn. (Celan, "Psalm" 157)

The botanical terminology ("pistil," "stamen," "corona") that pervades the final verse paragraph indicates fecundity, offering a scene far removed (both in the physical space of the poem and in its thematic considerations) from the "dust" of the poem's opening. Yet this fecundity moves away from the interpersonal necessity of empathy. No One or ungod, who has appeared in each of the previous verse paragraphs, is absent from the poem's conclusion, finally fulfilling the absence that this name invokes. While the penultimate verse paragraph marks the collective speaker as "No-One's-Rose" (the Rose belongs to a physical No One), the closing verse paragraph relinquishes possession (the Rose belongs to no one, as there is no one and No One to claim it).

Moreover, the compound nonce words (words Celan merges for single usage), which pervade the final verse paragraph of "Psalm" and which are characteristic of Celan's work, ensure an esoteric movement inward; words like "soul-bright," "heaven-waste," and "purpleword" require deciphering. Bridging the accusations of "impenetrability" or "'hermeticism'" that plague Celan's poetry with Celan himself, literary scholar Sidra DeKoven Ezrahi characterizes Celan "as the last Jewish poet in German literature … as foreigner or outlander − the one outside the community of selves, the one who in Germany most embodies an effaced, wandering otherness or non-identity" (*Booking Passage* 150). Celan's status as outsider or other, a status that his work reflects in its difficulty, further distances the possibility of empathy. The neologism "Heaven-waste," for instance, pairs sacred paradise with profane barrenness, leaving "Psalm" and its readers, much like "Tenebrae" does, in an unfamiliar and un-enterable landscape. Conversely, the "purpleword" and terminal "thorn" that follow allude to the crucifixion of Christ − wherein Christ wears a "crown of thorns, and the purple robe" (*The Bible. Authorized King James Version* John 19.5) − and, thus, foster empathy (echoing "Tenebrae") between the speaker's experiences and Christ's. The latter part of "purpleword" also invokes the Godhead – "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1.1) – and further opens to the possibility of empathy between the speaker and the divine. Yet the speaker's singing "over, O over / the thorn" suggests an experience that goes over or surpasses the Biblical references. Moreover, in English, while "over" can connote breakthrough (being over an experience, for instance), "over" can also connote termination (the experience is over, for instance). The doubleness of "over" in the English translation suggests both separation from the sacred and the incomparable death and nothingness at the centre of this poem. Additionally, the gaping "O," which Felstiner capitalizes in his translation, is, like the "O"

of Charlotte Delbo's "O you who know," beyond speech, beyond comparison.[70] Whether "O" is the singing or the lamenting voice, there is no one (barring the bodies gathered in the speaker's "we") left to hear it. As such, empathy between the ungod and the Holocaust victims or Rose cannot take place in the final verse paragraph. Although the No One or ungod in "Psalm" is an absent presence, a figure of empathetic dissonance who both denies and allows the possibility of empathy with the speaker, the poem's abandonment of this ungod and turn inward in the final verse paragraph ensures that empathy between the ungod and the speaker remains unfulfilled. Indeed, the speaker's final action of singing "over / the thorn" relinquishes the ungod who, as his name (No One) suggests, has relinquished the speaker all along.

Like Paul Celan, Dan Pagis's Holocaust experiences deeply influenced his consciousness and poetry. Also born in Romania, though in 1930 (a decade after Celan), Pagis spent three years imprisoned in a concentration camp in Ukraine. In 1946 Pagis immigrated to Palestine, where he taught medieval Hebrew literature and emerged as a distinguished Israeli poet (Jelen 94; DeKoven Ezrahi, *Booking Passage* 158). "His greatest strength as a poet of the Holocaust," writes Sheila E. Jelen in a study of Hebrew Holocaust literature, "lies in his absolute rejection of the possibility of resolution. The Holocaust, to him, is an open wound that resists closure or redemption" (94). Along with a resistance to resolution, Pagis's poetry also often resists empathy. This section will consider, in English translation, "Autobiography" and "Written in Pencil in the Sealed Railway-Car."[71] These two poems engage with empathetic dissonance

[70] See Chapter One for more on Delbo's "O you who know."
[71] Although, like Celan, German was Pagis's mother tongue, Pagis chose to write in his new adopted tongue, Hebrew, which is the language from which the poems that I examine are translated (DeKoven Ezrahi, "Conversation in the Cemetery" 132).

through the ungod, whom the poems portray through theological, particularly Biblical, paradigms.

While Pagis structures "Autobiography" as a Biblical allegory that implicitly affirms God's presence, this Biblical allegory is only a proxy for God, who remains absent from the poem. Although God's absence limits what readers know about God in this text, the Biblical allegory suggests that the God of "Autobiography" is the Biblical God of the Hebrew Bible, the God who has created the characters in the poem. These characters – in particular Abel, whose voice is most prominent as the poem's speaker – are proxies for God because they are figures who have directly interacted with God and whose stories are thus embedded in the previous accessibility of God. In other words, Abel functions as God's proxy because he is a testament to God's former presence. As God's proxy, Abel represents the ungod in this poem: Abel is both a vestige of God because of his previous interactions with God and, emphatically, not God. Abel, the ungod, offers an empathetically dissonant response to the events of the Holocaust.

Specifically, the theological allegory that structures "Autobiography" both performs and dispels empathy. By adopting the identity of Abel and situating himself as part of a Biblical family, the speaker of the poem metaphorically steps into or empathizes with an other, specifically an ungod. The speaker uses the story of the first murder to relate to the murders of the Holocaust:

> My brother invented murder,
> my parents invented grief,
> I invented silence.
>
> Afterwards the well-known events took place.

> Our inventions were perfected. One thing led to another,
> orders were given. There were those who murdered in their own way,
> grieved in their own way. (Pagis, "Autobiography" 3)

Titled "Autobiography," this poem purports to tell the story of Pagis's life. Instead, however, the text recounts the story of Abel. "The autobiographical gesture of the survivor," explains Sidra DeKoven Ezrahi in response to another work by Pagis, "generally precedes the emergence of a fictive self and establishes a baseline of reference and authenticity .... [But for Pagis] autobiography appears at the end of a life of the most elaborate poetic evasions" ("Conversation in the Cemetery" 128).[72] By privileging the fictional over the factual (to the extent that this term can describe autobiography), the speaker of Pagis's text defines himself through an empathetic relation to a Biblical family. Significantly, this relation to the other both reveals and conceals the self. Pagis "cultivate[s] a variety of distanced, ventriloquistic voices," maintains Robert Alter, "that become authentic surrogates for his own voice. When he writes a poem called 'Autobiography,' it is the autobiography of an archetype, Abel, the first victim; Abel is also, among many other avatars, Dan Pagis, 1939-45" (xii). By empathizing with "the first victim," Pagis offers an indirect autobiography that charts his own identity. Through the Biblical, therefore, the ungod is a figure of both presence and absence in "Autobiography," because on the one hand he offers a paradigm through which Pagis's speaker − and Pagis himself − can understand and communicate his identity and on the other hand this paradigm functions only as a proxy for the absent God.

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[72] In an interview (circa 1970), Pagis explains his lack of direct writing about the Holocaust: "because the reality exceeded human bounds, reality overcame the letters." At another time, he is quoted saying, "I tried to ignore the years of concentration camps, the Second World War .... Not only did I not write about the Shoah, but I tried to ignore the subject" (Tamar Yacobi translates these reflections from the Hebrew) (qtd. in Yacobi 221). Yacobi comments that it is not until Pagis's late poems that he begins to deal with the events of the Shoah, though sparsely and often still indirectly (221, 222).

Yet the Abel allegory also works to conceal identity and to distance empathy. As a Biblical figure, Abel is removed from a Holocaust survivor situated in the "afterwards" of the poem (Pagis, "Autobiography" 3). Commenting on "Autobiography," DeKoven Ezrahi argues that Pagis's "'I' becomes so generalized, dehumanized or unbounded as to preclude any lyric possibility" ("Conversation in the Cemetery" 127). "Autobiography," much like Pagis's other poetry, undermines the lyric's predisposition for the personal voice. Instead of a lyric, Pagis offers readers a dramatic monologue: a poem that adopts the voice of another character.[73] As such, "Autobiography" is marked by what DeKoven Ezrahi calls "self-lessness," a text drained of the author's self and, thus, of the possibility of approaching that self through empathy (129). Moreover, Patricia Yaeger's argument about the "aesthetic estrangement" of literary figures of speech in testimonies holds relevance for Pagis's allegory in this poem (410). Literary figures of speech, contends Yaeger, "change our reference point from the rhythm of the story to another plane .... Any attempt to walk in proximity, to approach testimony with compassion, with nearness, is displaced by an enforced distance" (410).[74] The distance that the Biblical allegory introduces in Pagis's poem ensures that empathy, a process that fosters nearness, remains removed from "Autobiography." Empathetically dissonant, thus, the Biblical allegory, a proxy for the absent God, both allows for empathy through the speaker's imaginative adoption of

[73] We can consider here the prevalence of the lyric in poetry after crisis. Most of the texts that my dissertation considers fall into the genre of the lyric, a poem that commonly involves one voice speaking in the first person and expressing a personal sentiment. This genre seems appropriate to the consideration of crisis and the possible trauma that ensues, topics that are often deeply rooted in personal experiences and reflections. Poems like Pagis's "Autobiography" or "Written in Pencil in the Sealed Railway-Car" (which I will consider shortly), as well as Charles Reznikoff's *Holocaust*, Robert Fitterman's "This Window Makes Me Feel," or sections of Claudia Rankine's *Citizen* (all of which I consider in Chapter Two), are exceptional in their lack of a lyrical voice. This lack is relevant to my work with empathy, as the distanced voice and, in the case of Reznikoff and Fitterman, the often striking absence of feeling either reject or pose a challenge for empathy.

[74] For more on Yaeger's argument regarding testimony and literary figures of speech see my discussion of Dionne Brand's *Inventory* and Jean Valentine's "In the Burning Air" in Chapter One.

another character's story to articulate the speaker's own self and limits the possibility of empathy through the emptying out and distancing of the speaker's self in favour of another's story.

The latter half of "Autobiography" highlights the poem's lack of interest in empathy. Here the speaker or ungod distances himself from the reader, particularly from an empathetic relation with the reader:[75]

> I won't mention names
> out of consideration for the reader,
> since at first the details horrify
> though finally they're a bore. (Pagis, "Autobiography" 3)

The speaker's purported "consideration for the reader" refuses this reader the ability to empathize. Like Celan's refusal to identify a location in "Tenebrae," Pagis's refusal to share "details" bars empathy or entry. Moreover, the verse paragraph that follows creates another barrier between "I" and "you":

> you can die once, twice, even seven times,
> but you can't die a thousand times.
> I can.
> My underground cells reach everywhere. (3)

The "I"-"you" separation here is both semantic and spatial. Although the speaker comments that "you can die once, twice, even seven times," the experiences of the "you" or reader remain distinct from those of the speaker or ungod, who can "die a thousand times." Emphasizing the differences between the speaker and the reader – between the ungod and the human – works to deny the possibility of empathy between them. The final line of this passage descends into the

[75] Sidra DeKoven Ezrahi explains the importance of the reader in Pagis's poetry: "It was the absence not only of a subject in the present but also of any specifically addressed and definable *other* that had made the community of his readers the primary audience in Pagis's poetry" ("Conversation in the Cemetery" 132).

ground as it announces, “My underground cells reach everywhere.” This line also reaches back to the beginning of the poem (“I died with the first blow and was buried / among the rocks of the field”) and forward to the end of the poem (“I began to multiply in the belly of the earth”) (3). “Autobiography” becomes a sort of eulogy spoken from the grave by a partly mortal (he can die), partly immortal (he subsists even after dying a thousand times) ungod whose inconceivable experiences are far removed from the reader and the reader’s ability to empathize. Moreover, similar to Celan’s formal separation of speaker and Lord in “Tenebrae,” Pagis spatially constructs the disconnect between “I” (the ungod) and “you” (the reader) by positioning them on separate lines. “Autobiography,” thus, both invokes empathy, through its empathetic relation to the Biblical Abel, the poem’s ungod, and dismisses empathy, through the distance it maintains between Abel and Pagis, as well as Abel and the reader.

Pagis’s renowned short poem “Written in Pencil in the Sealed Railway-Car” also works through a Biblical allegory that at once confirms God’s presence and, by functioning as a proxy for God, underlines His absence. Paralleling “Autobiography,” the absent God in “Written in Pencil in the Sealed Railway-Car” is the Biblical God of the Hebrew Bible, the God of creation. Positioning Abel as son instead of speaker, the latter poem assumes the voice of Eve as God’s proxy; Eve’s Biblical interactions with God confirm God’s previous presence. As such, Eve functions as an ungod: like Abel in “Autobiography,” Eve is both a trace of God and distinctly not God. Banished from Paradise, Eve is imprisoned in a “sealed railway-car,” harbinger of the Holocaust in this poem. From this railway-car, Eve asks the addressed “you” or reader to deliver a message (albeit one that remains unfinished and presumably unfinishable):

> here in this carload
>
> i am eve

with abel my son

if you see my other son

cain son of man

tell him that i[.] (Pagis, "Written in Pencil" 23)[76]

Like "Autobiography," this short dramatic monologue is empathetically dissonant: while the action of the poem is an appropriation of an other (Eve), the ground on which this empathy occurs is unwelcoming and unfinished. Indeed, the poem's interruption of Eve's message thwarts any attempt to foster a connection between Eve (the ungod) and the reader. "Death is not *represented* in this truncated poem but *enacted*," comments DeKoven Ezrahi. "'Here in this carload' there is, simply and suddenly, no time left" (*Booking Passage* 161-62). Death, the implied ending of this poem, separates the reader from both Eve (already separated by her distance from the Holocaust) and Eve's message. Invoking Cain in this message, the poem offers another empathetically-fraught moment. While Cain, the first murderer and the murderer of his brother Abel, is an empathetically-repulsive figure, particularly in the context of genocide, Cain is also a son: "cain son of man" (Pagis, "Written in Pencil" 23). Seeing Cain through the eyes of his mother Eve, separated from her son and desperately trying to relay a message to him, allows for the possibility of empathy toward him. At the same time, Eve's depiction of Cain as "my other son" and her simultaneous claim and renunciation of him as "cain son of man" distance Cain from Eve, and thereby from the reader, by underscoring Cain's otherness and assigning him to maleness.

Ending mid-sentence on the message to her son, Eve employs the "i" that is so various and precarious for Pagis. Commenting on this "i," Alter argues,

[76] This is the poem in its entirety.

> In the poems that deal directly with genocide, this use of distanced and multiple voices is linked with an impulse to pull apart the basic categories of existence and reassemble them in strange configurations that expose the full depth of the outrage perpetrated. It is as though time and space ... man and God, self and other, body and soul, had been spun through a terrific centrifuge to be weirdly separated out, their positions disconcertingly reversed. (xii-xiii)

If Pagis's "multiple" personae are indeed responses to the horrors of genocide, then they also render the empathy in the poetic context of this genocide multiple and varied. Although Eve's voice, like Abel's in "Autobiography, is "distanced," making empathy difficult, her voice also speaks from a place of empathy for the experiences of the Holocaust. As such, Eve as the ungod and speaker in "Written in Pencil in the Sealed Railway-Car" offers an empathetically dissonant response to the events of the Holocaust. On the one hand, Eve's character extends empathy through the allegory that situates a Biblical character in a railway-car of the Holocaust, a "reassembl[ing]" of positions that works to, in Alter's words, "expose the full depth of the outrage perpetrated." On the other hand, Eve's "distanced" character complicates the extension of empathy because Eve's experiences are far removed from the realities of the Holocaust. In both "Autobiography" and "Written in Pencil in the Sealed Railway-Car," therefore, the Biblical characters, who function as proxies for God because of their stories' stakes in God, concurrently perform empathy and highlight empathy's inadequacy in approaching the horrors of this genocide.

Although Susan Birkeland did not experience the events of September 11, 2001 in the personal and familial ways that Paul Celan and Dan Pagis experienced the Holocaust, her "Jesus

Poem" approaches the events of 9/11 through a religious framework. Born in Minnesota and residing in Texas before moving to the San Francisco Bay Area, Birkeland, though an American citizen, is physically removed from the 9/11 sites of devastation (Cohen and Matson 288). Her "Jesus Poem," however, eschews this removal in favour of a first-person speaker who imagines what she would have done and felt if she had been in one of the World Trade Center Towers on 9/11. Situated in Allen Cohen and Clive Matson's 2002 anthology, *An Eye For An Eye Makes The Whole World Blind: Poets On 9/11*, Birkeland's "Jesus Poem" participates in the kind of empathy that Cohen's introductory remarks for the anthology delineate:

> Many of the poets [in the anthology] had projected themselves into the minds and the bodies of the victims of 9/11, and the firemen and policemen who were searching the wreckage of the buildings and even the suicide hijackers ….
>
> These poets had thrown their consciousness into lovers talking on the phone for the last time, a fireman wondering how he would say grace at Thanksgiving dinner after digging up limbs from Ground Zero, and especially the people who threw themselves from the high floors of the World Trade Center rather than be smothered or burned in the advancing smoke and fire. (Introduction ii-iii)

The "project[ion]" that Cohen ascribes to Birkeland and numerous other poets in this anthology is part of the work of empathy. Significantly, the synonym that Cohen chooses for projection, "thrown their consciousness into," depicts projection as a kind of careless (throwing consciousness around seems haphazard) and even violent act. Empathy's inclination toward violence is especially relevant for Birkeland's contribution to the collection. Considering this violence in relation to "Jesus Poem," this section examines empathetic dissonance through the ungod that guides Birkeland's poem.

Empathetically projecting herself into a victim inside the World Trade Center Towers, the speaker of Birkeland's poem filters her reaction through her faith in Jesus. The work's title, "Jesus Poem," announces that at the forefront of this text is Christ and the speaker's Christian faith; the events and victims of 9/11 are of secondary concern. God in this poem is the Christian God who sacrifices his Son for the sins of humanity. Yet while Jesus is present in the poem's title, he and God are absent from the poem proper; neither directly intervenes in the action of the poem. Paralleling Pagis's Biblical allegory poems, "Jesus Poem" draws on proxies for God, particularly Christian values and divine allusions, which become markers of the ungod (the God who is an absent presence). In other words, because the Christian values and divine allusions that the poem forefronts originate from the Christian God, these values and allusions are vestiges of that God and, in this poem, symbols of the ungod: while God is symbolically present through these proxies, the proxies also draw attention to God's physical absence in the poem. Through the ungod Birkeland's text voices its empathetic dissonance. Beginning the poem with the subjunctive "If," the speaker imagines,

> If I'd been trapped in one of those towers,
> and had a cell phone,
> I'd have called my sister and brother
> and told them I'd loved my life,
> loved them, always would, and to
> thank everybody for being so good to me and
> to take no avenging actions,
> nor support the avenging actions of others,
> but to let me die with the dignity of my faith. (Birkeland 187)

This first half of Birkeland's poem sets up the empathetic projection of the speaker's "I" into "one of those towers." This half of the poem also delineates the Christian values, proxies for God and thus markers of the ungod, that guide the speaker's projection: love, gratitude, forgiveness, non-violence, and faith. Indeed, the final request in the list of things that the speaker would ask of her siblings is the request to die with her faith intact. Imaginatively inserting herself into the World Trade Center on 9/11, the speaker also inserts her worship of God into this scene. Furthermore, the instruction "to take no avenging actions, / nor support the avenging actions of others" acts as a political nod at the War on Terror − the United States's invasion of Afghanistan already underway and the invasion of Iraq ensuing when this collection is published in 2002. Indeed, the speaker's turn away from vengeance aligns with the anthology's title and cover illustration. The collection's title, *An Eye For An Eye Makes The Whole World Blind*, alludes to the pacifism of Mahatma Gandhi, while the collection's front image depicts the American national emblem of the bald eagle, its wings and body festooned with American flags, gripping a peace sign in its talons against the backdrop of a burning city (likely New York City). As such, both the paratextual space of the anthology and the textual space of Birkeland's "Jesus Poem" call for a peaceful response to the violence of 9/11. Birkeland's speaker employs the process of empathizing with a victim saying her final goodbyes to promote a religious and political agenda; empathy in this poem becomes the avenue through which Birkeland voices what seem to be her personal ideologies (Christian faith and pacifism).

Further empathizing with the role of a victim through an assertion of feeling in the second half of the poem, Birkeland's speaker usurps the feelings of the actual victims in the Towers through her devotion to a Christian God. Following the imaginary phone call, the speaker projects,

Then I'd step out into the air,
something opening beneath me,
the last fall of my life.
It's hard to say what I'd be feeling,
surprise, mystification, terror, glory,
but I'm sure I wouldn't be angry.
In the last moments,
there's nothing to fix,
no protest against the speed of the fall.
I imagine I'd be filled with
something beyond terror,
a feeling which is
(from where we stand)
intolerably bright. (Birkeland 187)

The phone call and instructions in the first part of the poem give way to the jump and appropriation of feeling in this second and final part of the poem. Indeed, the speaker's "step[ping] out into the air" metaphorically foreshadows the emotional overstepping that the speaker performs. The speaker's emotionally appropriative contention, "I'm sure I wouldn't be angry," highlights an empathy that is self-assured and insensitive. Specifically, the Christian belief in forgiveness and non-violence (markers of the ungod in this poem), as imagined by Birkeland's speaker, does not leave room for the anger that the actual victims may feel and/or

have felt.[77] Furthermore, while the speaker's admission that "It's hard to say what I'd be feeling" recognizes one of the challenges of empathy (the ability to realize – in the double sense of understand and achieve – the feelings of others), the subsequent catalogue of feelings delimits the possible emotional responses to "surprise, mystification, terror, glory." The presence of "glory" in this list is particularly striking in the context of imminent death. The spiritual splendour and praise to which the speaker's "glory" refers once again invokes the figure of God and functions as His proxy, an ungod; while glory is embedded in God's presence, glory also points to God's absence because it is not itself God. Echoing glory's divine invocation are the poem's final lines: the unnamed feeling that is "beyond terror" and "intolerably bright" intimates the heaven – another ungod because of heaven's direct link to the poem's absent God – that the speaker is approaching. The speaker, thus, filters empathy through the Christian values and divine allusions that function as ungod in the poem; in other words, the speaker's belief in God's presence, though He remains physically absent from the landscape of the poem, shapes the feelings that she imagines experiencing as a victim in one of the Towers.

Adding to the divine allusions or ungod in the poem is the doubleness of Birkeland's repeated word "fall." In particular, the line in which this word first appears – "the last fall of my life" – suggests that there are other falls prior to the final plunge that the speaker imagines herself taking from the World Trade Center Tower. In the Christian framework that the poem sets up, one of these prior falls may be the Fall from Paradise. The pious content of the text, especially the speaker's earlier instruction "to let me die with the dignity of my faith," implies that even though the terrorist attacks compel the speaker to fall physically (the jump from the Tower), she does not also want to fall morally, as the allusion to the Fall from Paradise

[77] Birkeland's speaker usurps emotional responses that are present at the time of the attacks, as well as emotional responses that continue into the present. These emotional responses belong both to the direct victims and survivors of the attacks and to the indirect victims who lost those close to them in the attacks.

exemplifies. While there certainly may have been devout Christians trapped in the Towers on 9/11, the perspective that Birkeland's poem presents defines the experience of victimhood through religion, particularly Christianity, and restricts the possibility of other religious and secular experiences (the speaker's declaration, "I'm sure I wouldn't be angry," is notable here). As such, the imaginative and affective projection that characterizes "Jesus Poem" enacts empathy's appropriative and symbolically violent tendencies by filtering empathy through the text's ungod.[78]

Although a problematic empathetic imagination drives most of Birkeland's poem, the penultimate line abandons empathy in order to restore the speaker's self to her own consciousness. The parenthetical interruption, "(from where we stand)," functions as a moment of empathetic dissonance, as it imaginatively removes the speaker from the World Trade Center Tower and the "last fall" of a victim and situates both the speaker and the reader outside of the situation that unfolds in the poem. On the one hand, this removal acts as a recognition of the speaker's actual position as *not* "trapped in one of those towers." The speaker's parenthetical remark adheres to Dominick LaCapra's "empathic unsettlement," an exemplary empathetic response that both imaginatively extends the empathizer into the other and respects the otherness of the other (97-102). On the other hand, the removal of the speaker from the situation of the poem acts as a kind of betrayal, a desertion of the victims in the Towers. Positioning herself in the safe space offered by the parentheses (she is bracketed off from the events of the poem), the speaker abandons the victims in their perilous positions. As well, the speaker's "stand" is

[78] As I mention in the Introduction of this dissertation, the proximity between the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks and the year in which "Jesus Poem" is published, 2002, may exacerbate a reading of this poem as appropriative and symbolically violent. Reading this poem today, over fifteen years after 9/11, the text's appropriation and symbolic violence inform my aversion to this poem. Yet, as the temporal distance from 9/11 grows, this aversion may transform into appreciation for Birkeland's literary response to a historically and politically significant moment in time.

particularly at odds with the earlier focus on the "fall"; the ground and support that the verb "stand" promises to the speaker – and to the reader through the collective "we stand" – are absent from the fall of the individuals in the Towers. Abandoning these individuals to take up her position among the living (the standing), the speaker leaves the dying individuals to the heavenly feeling that ends the poem: "a feeling which is / (from where we stand) / intolerably bright." The unbearable brightness of this feeling from the vantage point of the living casts the victims' seeing of this brightness as a kind of privilege. Although brightness here functions as a beacon of hope for the Christian prospect of Heaven, an ungod in the poem, brightness also problematically glamorizes the deaths of the 9/11 victims who are only privy to the brightness in their dying; in other words, Birkeland depicts death as a privilege that brings one closer to God. Through a Christian God, whom the text manifests as an absent presence (an ungod), Birkeland's "Jesus Poem" engages in empathetic dissonance that both appropriates the feelings of the individuals in the Towers and abandons these individuals to the "intolerable bright[ness]" of their deaths.

Offering a more ambiguous approach to God, Lucille Clifton's sequence of seven short poems "9/11/01 – 9/17/01" focuses on the week following the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. Although these poems first appear in the 2002 collection *September 11, 2001: American Writers Respond*, a slightly altered and retitled ("september song: a poem in 7 days") rendering of the poems appears in Clifton's 2004 collection of poems *Mercy*. With only minimal reference to the 2004 version, my discussion here takes up the more immediate 2002 series, "9/11/01 – 9/17/01," whose placement in an American anthology of 9/11 poems and whose date-as-title highlights Clifton's sequence of poems as a response to the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. Clifton, who was born in New York State, resided in Maryland at the time of the attacks (Lupton

56). Indeed, the "Sunday Morning 9/16/01" poem locates the speaker in front of Maryland's "st. marys [*sic*] river" (Clifton, "9/11/01 − 9/17/01" 83). Paralleling Clifton's geographical proximity to and distance from the sites of devastation on 9/11, the sequence of poems sets up a temporal proximity to (9/11/01) and distance from (the week that follows) the crisis to which these poems respond. This section will examine two of the poems in the series that are particularly resonant for the intersection of empathy and theology that this chapter foregrounds: "TUESDAY 9/11/01," which opens the series, and "MONDAY SUNDOWN 9/17/01: rosh hashanah," which closes the series. While "TUESDAY 9/11/01" encourages and subsequently destabilizes empathetic unity through a present and involved God, "MONDAY SUNDOWN 9/17/01" troubles empathy through an absent and uninvolved God who is only present through theological allusions. As such, the present-absent God in Clifton's series is an ungod who offers an empathetically dissonant response to 9/11.

Invoking a present and intervening God, the first poem in Clifton's sequence declares but also deflates empathetic unity. "TUESDAY 9/11/01" begins by imagining 9/11 as a Biblical-like storm (hitherto confined to elsewhere) that has altered the United States and the rest of the "world" and ends by asserting God's blessing or lesson about the oneness of the world:

> thunder and lightning and our world
> is another place no day
> will ever be the same no blood
> untouched
>
> they know this storm in otherwheres
> israel ireland palestine

but God has blessed America
we sing

and God has blessed America
to learn that no one is exempt
the world is one all fear
is one all life all death
all one[.] (80)[79]

Opening her sequence of poems with a storm that transforms "our world," – a term that projects the American tragedy of 9/11 onto the entire world – Clifton paints a scene that resembles the flood narrative in the Bible. Yet unlike the Biblical flood that God sends to punish humans for their sins, the flood in "TUESDAY 9/11/01" functions as God's blessing for America. Indeed, the flood-turned-blessing in "TUESDAY 9/11/01" parallels the rainbow that God offers as a sign of His covenant after the Biblical flood (*The Bible. Authorized King James Version* Genesis 9.8-17). God in Clifton's text emerges as both omnipotent – He is able to influence the events of the world – and morally ambiguous – His blessing for survivors comes at the expense of suffering and death for victims. Recurring twice in this short poem, "God has blessed America," which echoes the quintessentially American phrase and patriotic Irving Berlin song "God Bless America," invokes a present and intervening God to first echo and then deflate the American ideology of exceptionalism, an ideology that imagines the United States as superior to the rest of the world. The first occurrence of "God has blessed America," which appears at the exact centre of the poem, mirrors the imagined centrality of the United States: while places like Israel, Ireland, and Palestine (which the poem works to other by terming them "otherwheres") have

[79] This is "TUESDAY 9/11/01" in its entirety.

experienced terrorism, God has protected the United States from the storm. The pronoun "they," which begins the second verse paragraph, and the conjunction "but," which precedes the first instance of "God has blessed America," work in support of the ideology that sets the United States apart: "they" invites the dichotomy between *us* and *them*, while "but" sets up a conflicting relation between the two phrases that it connects. Moreover, the "we sing" that follows "but God has blessed America" depicts the singing of what many Americans consider their unofficial national anthem, Irving Berlin's "God Bless America." This patriotic song carries connotations of jubilance (a pre-9/11 image of the United States) and unity (a twenty-first-century successor of the Greek chorus). Significantly, this singing "we," which stands in opposition to the "they" a few lines previously, announces the jubilance and unity of America to the exclusion of other nations. Buttressing this mindset of exclusion and superiority is the discrepancy between the poem's capitalization of "God" and "America" and its lack of capitalization of both the beginning of sentences ("they know this storm in otherwheres") and proper nouns ("israel ireland palestine"). Similarly, the formal spacing that occurs in the line "israel ireland palestine" underlines the emotional space between these states and also between these states and the United States, which appears in the next line. These separations (in content and form) between the United States and other countries gesture at the lack of empathy between nations. Playing into this lack is empathy's familiarity bias, which holds that the more familiar the potential object of empathy, the more likely it is that this object will receive empathy. As such, lines of apathy may be more likely drawn along the borders of nation states.

On the other hand, the second occurrence of "God has blessed America" in "TUESDAY 9/11/01" debunks the American exceptionalism and outsider apathy that the phrase's first occurrence invites. Beginning with the linking conjunction "and," the second occurrence of "God

has blessed America" articulates the connection between the United States and the rest of the world: "and God has blessed America / to learn that no one is exempt / the world is one" (Clifton, "9/11/01 − 9/17/01" 80). Employing a present and involved God to promote a message of unity, Clifton uses this second instance of God's blessing for America to encourage international empathy (empathy across nations): if all people are the same, then all people can empathize with one another. The repeated terms "one" and "all" in the final lines of this piece highlight the oneness that ensures that "no one is exempt" from catastrophe. Indeed, the word "all" recurs throughout the sequence of poems: "all of us gathered under one flag" (81); "all of us americans / weeping" (82);[80] "afraid and sad as are we all"; "and i am consumed with love / for all of it" (83). Yet despite the empathetic unity that "all" suggests, "TUESDAY 9/11/01" also destabilizes the idea of a unified world. This poem "closes with the illusion of unity," argues Mary Jane Lupton in her analysis of Clifton's series (122). Unlike the first two quatrains of the poem, the final verse paragraph is a quintain, which, while arguing for oneness in content, exhibits disparity in form. Similarly, the extra spacing between words, which appears throughout "TUESDAY 9/11/01" and the other poems in the sequence, occurs most frequently in the final verse paragraph: "the world is one all fear / is one all life all death / all one" (Clifton, "9/11/01 − 9/17/01" 80). Ironically, although the content here declares unity, the form enacts division, the extra spaces working to rift the alleged oneness of the world. God's blessing, which debunks the American ideology of exceptionalism, takes place in a poem whose form exhibits separation. Empathy, the process of imaginatively and affectively bridging individuals, of moving away from exceptionalism (albeit the symbolic violence of empathy can reaffirm that

[80] Note the lowercase "americans." All of the cognates of *America* appear in lowercase after the first poem in the series, thereby deflating the ideology of American exceptionalism or superiority.

exceptionalism) is dissonant in this poem; Clifton's "TUESDAY 9/11/01" both encourages and resists empathetic unity through a present and involved God.

The final poem of Clifton's sequence, "MONDAY SUNDOWN 9/17/01: rosh hashanah," similarly offers an empathetically dissonant response to 9/11, but this dissonance works through ungod: unlike "TUESDAY 9/11/01," wherein God functions as a present and intervening figure, God is physically absent from and uninvolved in "MONDAY SUNDOWN 9/17/01." Instead, God's presence is marked by theological proxies, specifically allusions to the Bible, the Jewish holiday of Rosh Hashanah, and John Milton's epic recounting of the Biblical Fall in *Paradise Lost*; these theological allusions function as proxies because they point to God's presence (whether literary or ceremonial), but they are also markers of the ungod, because they underline God's absence in the poem. While the focus on unity in "TUESDAY 9/11/01" manifests in an absence of the first-person "I," "MONDAY SUNDOWN 9/17/01" begins with this personal pronoun:

> i bear witness no thing
> is more human than hate
>
> i bear witness no thing
> is more human than love
>
> apples and honey
> apples and honey
>
> what is not lost

is paradise[.] (84)[81]

The "i" here begins the process of empathy by bearing witness, by extending attention.[82] The phrase "i bear witness," which echoes the Biblical witnessing in both Isaiah – "Ye *are* my witnesses" (*The Bible. Authorized King James Version* 43.10) – and John – "If I bear witness of myself" (5.31) – alludes to the Biblical, one of God's proxies in this poem, to relate to the events of 9/11.[83] Yet the empty space and, particularly, the phrase "no thing" that follow both instances of the repeated phrase "i bear witness" leave absent the object that is being witnessed. This ineffable or missing object – perhaps ungod, perhaps the devastation of a post-9/11 America – complicates the process of empathy that the speaker's act of witnessing begins; if the object that "i" witnesses is absent or a "no thing," then the process of empathy, which requires a discernible receiver, cannot take place. As well, the empty space in the first and third lines of "MONDAY SUNDOWN 9/17/01" could be read as a place marker for a word that links the beginning and ending of each of the lines. Supporting this reading is the 2004 revised version of the poem in Clifton's collection *Mercy*, which places a preposition in the space that the 2002 version of the poem leaves empty. The 2004 version of the poem begins,

i bear witness to no thing

more human than hate

i bear witness to no thing

more human than love. (49)

[81] This is "MONDAY SUNDOWN 9/17/01" in its entirety.
[82] For more on witnessing as a kind of empathy see Chapter Two, "The Unhere."
[83] Although the phrase "i bear witness" is ubiquitous, I connect it to the Biblical because of the strong presence that Biblical stories play in Clifton's "9/11/01 − 9/17/01" series: Noah's flood in "TUESDAY 9/11/01"; Jacob's ladder in "THURSDAY 9/13/01"; Christ's life, death, and resurrection in "SATURDAY 9/15/01"; and the Fall from Paradise in "MONDAY SUNDOWN 9/17/01."

If the reader approaches the first and third lines in the 2004 version as self-sufficient units, then these lines declare that "i bear witness to no thing." Reminiscent of the "Nothing" and "No One" in Paul Celan's "Psalm," this reading underscores the deficiency of empathy that results from the lack of an object of witnessing or receiver of empathy, a "no thing." While the second lines in each of the couplets in both the 2002 and 2004 versions of the poem undercut this reading by qualifying "no thing," the qualification is a disembodied feeling: first "hate" and then "love." Bearing witness to the human feelings of hate and love, severed from any specific individual or individuals, the first two couplets again preclude the possibility of empathy, which requires a discernible receiver. In both the 2002 and 2004 versions of the poem, the Biblical "i bear witness" – a proxy for God because of its origins in God and, thus, one of the poem's ungods – functions as the site of empathetic dissonance; this phrase moves both toward empathy, through the attention that it promises, and away from empathy, through the empty space or words that follow it.

The other two allusions – to Rosh Hashanah and *Paradise Lost* – in "MONDAY SUNDOWN 9/17/01" similarly function as ungods or theological proxies (through religious holiday or Biblical retelling they point to God's presence) in their empathetically dissonant response to 9/11.[84] Subtitled "rosh hashanah," the final poem of the series takes place on the Jewish New Year. Rosh Hashanah also marks the beginning of the "Ten Days of Penitence," which culminate with Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement): "Rosh Ha-Shanah itself is thus a day of both joy and solemnity, joy in that it is a festival, solemnity in that it is the day of judgement" (Jacobs). Rosh Hashanah, as "a time for personal introspection and prayer" wherein one considers and atones for one's behaviour toward others (including transgressions against people and against God), involves the process of empathy, of turning toward others even as one

[84] The 2002 and 2004 versions of this poem are identical in the final two stanzas, which I will discuss here.

turns inward (Lupton 123). Sustaining this empathy is the repeated "apples and honey" in the poem's third stanza. Apples and honey, which are two of the traditional foods eaten by Ashkenazi Jews on Rosh Hashanah in hopes of a sweet new year, invite a familial, domestic scene that suggests interaction and the possibility of empathy. As such, through its allusion to a theological holiday – a proxy for God because of the nearness of God, through prayer and atonement, on Rosh Hashanah – "MONDAY SUNDOWN 9/17/01" moves toward empathy. Furthermore, in the context of this poem as part of a weeklong response to 9/11, Rosh Hashanah also suggests the possibility of beginning anew (a sweet new year, as the sweetness of apples and honey intimates), of repenting for humankind's sins (specifically, the sins that take place in the United States on 9/11). Yet the juxtaposition of apples in the third stanza with the allusion to Milton's *Paradise Lost* in the final stanza invokes the apple as the forbidden fruit, the site of sin that causes Eve and Adam's expulsion from Paradise. An apple, Christianity's marker of the original sin, is doubly present through the poem's repetition, suggesting that the original sin – and perhaps the sins that follow – cannot be expunged.[85] Atonement or expungement is further unachievable because, following the "i" in the poem's third line and the vague reference to "human" in the poem's fourth line, there are no individuals to implement this atonement. Indeed, the poem's eventual abandonment of any discernible being – both human and God – implies that the poem also abandons the empathy (a relation between beings) that the opening's "i bear witness" invokes.

Also undercutting empathy and gesturing at an ungod are the poem's ambiguous closing lines, "what is not lost / is paradise" (Clifton 84). Reversing Milton's *Paradise Lost*, this couplet

[85] The apple as both Jewish and Christian symbol requires some qualification: first, while Ashkenazi Jews eat apples on Rosh Hashanah, Sephardic Jews eat other symbolic foods on this holiday; second, while an apple is conventionally emblematic of the Fall, the Bible, in the original Hebrew, does not name the specific fruit that leads to the Fall.

opens to a number of disparate readings. First, the couplet can suggest that what remains is paradise and, thus, "we are graced with what is left" (Lupton 123). If paradise functions as a proxy for God because of its connection to Him as creator, then God here is present (albeit through a proxy) and open to the possibility of an empathetic relationship with humanity. Yet by phrasing these seemingly hopeful final lines negatively ("what is not lost"), Clifton points to the losses that have taken place in the week following September 11, 2001. The human barrenness – perhaps a gesture toward the lives lost on 9/11 – that ends the poem suggests paradise may be an ungod who does nothing to prevent this barrenness and who, thus, absents himself from an empathetic relationship with humans. Alternatively, the closing couplet can connote that paradise is not lost because we either never had it or we can only have it in some future world. In this reading paradise again functions as an ungod, an absence that, even if it remains present as a possibility in the hereafter, remains removed from an empathetic relationship with humanity in the here and now. As such, the ambiguity of the allusion to Milton's *Paradise Lost* figures paradise as an ungod that maintains an empathetically dissonant relationship with humanity. Along with paradise, the other ungods of "MONDAY SUNDOWN 9/17/01" exist alongside the God of "TUESDAY 9/11/01." In other words, the absent, uninvolved God (though He is present through the theological allusions that function as His proxies) in "MONDAY SUNDOWN 9/17/01" works with and through the present, involved God in "TUESDAY 9/11/01." The dissonant deity of Clifton's series offers an empathetically dissonant response to the events of 9/11.

Theological empathetic dissonance also drives Katie Ford's *Colosseum*, a collection of poems in response to Hurricane Katrina and other moments of ruin throughout history. Unlike

the geographical separation between the sites of terrorism on 9/11 and Susan Birkeland's and Lucille Clifton's physical locales, Ford was living in and had to evacuate New Orleans at the onset of Katrina (Ford, "Author Interviews"). Although *Colosseum* is published in 2008, three years after Katrina, Ford wrote many of the poems before the Hurricane.[86] This section will look at one poem from the collection, "Flee," whose content (specifically its references to the Superdome and FEMA search codes) situates it as a direct response to Katrina. In its response to the Hurricane, "Flee" depicts an empathetically dissonant relationship between an ungod and humans.

"Flee" employs the metaphor of light to invoke an ungod who initially suggests the promise of salvation for those affected by Katrina but subsequently separates itself from human agony. This promise of salvation aligns with the role that the speaker assigns to God in this poem: God is an omnipotent figure expected to "save," as the last line of the text announces, humans. In place of God, however, the poem foregrounds the metaphorical light, a figure that functions as an ungod because it absences itself, along with any possibility of salvation that it might provide, from humanity. The first part of the poem situates the speaker and the light at the onset of the Hurricane:

> When the transistor said *killing wind*

[86] Explaining both the rift and relation between *Colosseum* and Katrina, Ford recounts, "much of the book was written prior to Katrina and had nothing to do with New Orleans. And now in the book sequence, it'll feel like it's New Orleans, but really I was talking about Pompeii or something" ("A Conversation with Katie Ford"). While Ford situates a significant amount of her collection temporally before Katrina, her admission that "it'll feel like it's New Orleans" recognizes that many of these poems can function as response poems to the Hurricane. This ability of one event's literary responses to speak to another event is an interesting point of consideration, particularly in a project that juxtaposes three separate events or crises. In an article examining the poetry that emerged after 9/11, Rachael Allen begins and ends with reference to W.H. Auden's "September 1, 1939." While Auden wrote this poem at the outset of World War Two, Allen explains that "September 1, 1939" became one of the most circulated poems after 9/11. Listening to oral testimonies from the Shoah Foundation's Visual History Archive at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum as a Fellow from September 2016 until January 2017, I also came across numerous interviews in which survivors choose to read poems that precede the Holocaust but that nevertheless resonate with experiences during the Holocaust. This poetic traversing of time and event speaks to the connection or empathy that poetry is able to foster, particularly between events of crisis.

I felt myself a small noise

a call sign rubbed out
but still live where light
cut through the floorboards

and don't you think I dreamed the light a sign

didn't I want to cross
the water of green beads breaking
where one saw the other last

where the roof was torn
and the dome cried out
that the tearing was wide and far

and this is not just a lesson
of how to paint an X upon a house
how to mark one dead in the attic
two on the floor

didn't I wish
but didn't I flee[.] (Ford, "Flee" 9)

Opening with a radio broadcast of the Hurricane, the speaker employs the radio's disintegration to illustrate her own feelings of disintegration; "I felt myself a small noise // a call sign rubbed out" suggests both the radio's faulty signal and the speaker's emotional faltering. Introducing "light" as a source of "li[f]e" in the fourth line, the poem also introduces hope. The second mention of light, the poem's ungod, becomes part of the longest and most hopeful line in the poem: "and don't you think I dreamed the light a sign." As the poem reveals the division ("didn't I want to cross / … / where one saw the other last") and damage ("the roof was torn / and the dome cried out") that Katrina wreaks, light becomes the sign of a possible mending of these rifts and tears. The personified cry of the Superdome – the problematic refuge of many New Orleans residents during Katrina – underlines Katrina as a crisis affecting both humans and infrastructure; when "the dome crie[s] out / that the tearing was wide and far," the tearing is as much between the separated people in this poem as it is about the damaged roofs. Empathy, the traversing from one individual to another, stagnates in the text. Instead of connection and the life promised by the light, the centre of "Flee" offers death: the "X" painted on a house alludes to the search codes through which rescue workers communicated the details of the living or dead inside each residence, this poem bearing the latter ("one dead in the attic, / two on the floor"). Furthermore, the repeated "didn't I" ("didn't I want to cross"; "didn't I wish") focuses on the "I's" failure to move toward another. In particular, the word "cross" in "didn't I want to cross," coupled with the subsequent line's possible rosary "beads," gestures at the unfulfilled connection and empathy not just between the speaker and other individuals (an unfulfilled physical or emotional crossing), but also between the speaker and a Catholic God (an unfulfilled spiritual crossing). Culminating in "didn't I flee," a phrase that invokes Ford's own evacuation from New

Orleans, the speaker turns away from the other New Orleans residents and from the ungod, both of whom she abandons.

Also fleeing from the devastation of Katrina is the light or ungod – the God who abandons humanity – that initially offers "a sign" for the speaker. Disappearing throughout the poem's focus on the damage and death that the Hurricane causes, the light reappears, empowered with a voice, at the poem's closing:

> when the cries fell through
> the surface of light
> and the light stayed light
> as if to say nothing or
>
> what do you expect me to do
>
> I am not human
>
> I gave you each other
> so save each other. (9-10)

Unmoved – "the light stayed light" – by the "cries" of those affected by the Hurricane, the light relinquishes its role as potential saviour. The two possible responses to the Hurricane-induced suffering that the speaker assigns to the God-like light – silence ("as if to say nothing") or shirking of responsibility ("what do you expect me to do") – also position light as an unempathetic figure. Although a God who removes Himself from the flow of human activity does not necessarily lack empathy (consider deism), this poem's expectation of God's assistance

– the light's question, "what do you expect me to do," intimates a human expectation of action – and God's subsequent lack of assistance work to cast light (God's metaphor in the poem) as unempathetic. While light is a God-like physical and expressive presence in the text, this presence becomes an ungod by absenting itself from humanity. Formally set apart in its own verse paragraph, the light's declaration that "I am not human" sets the characteristics of light or ungod apart from the characteristics of humans, including the speaker. This setting apart or distancing in both form and content ensures that the light or ungod is too self-contained to be able to extend empathy to humans. Indeed, empathy's familiarity bias highlights the discrepancy and lack of empathy between the ungod and humans in this text. Examining the distance Ford establishes between light and humanity, Joelle Biele observes, "By ending 'Flee' with the light's reproach, the speaker seems to settle on the light as a judge who does not intervene. As roofs tear off buildings and the wind rattles the Superdome, the light admonishes humanity but does not come to its aid. Instead, it reminds the people that they are their brothers' keepers. They should not wait for rescue; they should save one another" (102). Admitting its insufficiency or reluctance to help humans, the light or ungod advocates for inter-human empathy and aid by instructing humans to "save each other" (Ford, "Flee" 10). The poem's closing couplet suggests that empathy between humans, not between humans and God, is the sought goal, albeit a goal that remains unfulfilled in this poem.

Similar to Katie Ford's "Flee," Brad Bechler's poems after Hurricane Katrina often feature an empathetically troubled relationship with God or ungod. Like Ford, Bechler and his family were also personally affected by Hurricane Katrina. In response to the Hurricane, Bechler writes what he calls "a documentary in poetry": "through the pain, isolation, and confusion [of

Hurricane Katrina], I saw a story unfolding, a timeline of rich African American history to be preserved through poetry …. a documentary in poetry began to crowd my thoughts as if I was a conduit by which this moment in history should be captured and memorialized" (Bechler, Foreword 9). Echoing the documentary drive of his writing, Bechler includes the word "documentary" in the subtitle of his ensuing collection of poems, *When Will the Sky Fall? Hurricane Katrina, a Documentary in Poetry*. The presence of the term "documentary" in both the collection's foreword and subtitle underline the testimonial value of Bechler's poetry. This section examines one of Bechler's documentary poems, "Water Mirror." Although a number of the poems in Bechler's collection ("Chalice," for example) focus on the speaker's faith in God, "Water Mirror" forefronts an ungod, an absent figure through whom the poem articulates its empathetic dissonance.

The speaker in "Water Mirror" turns away from an ungod who has turned away from the speaker. Imagining God as absence or ungod, "Water Mirror" cannot foster an empathetic relationship with this figure. The opening tercet confirms God's absence in the poem: "I had grown tired of looking / Up to the crimson sky; there / Were no answers, only silence" (55). Bechler's poem begins with a speaker who is weary of searching for God, the unnamed and absent figure who lives in the sky and allegedly offers answers. For the speaker, God should, ideally, be a responsive figure of guidance during difficult times; this figure is at once removed from the human world (He lives in the sky) and involved in human affairs (He offers answers). While the speaker does not renounce the possibility of God, the speaker concedes that God has renounced him. Through God's silence − much like the "nothing" that the light in Ford's "Flee" articulates (Ford, "Flee" 9) − "Water Mirror" thwarts the possibility of a responsive and empathetic God; again, as in Ford's "Flee," God lacks empathy in this poem not because He is

silent, but because the speaker views this silence as an unempathetic act from a deity who should be a source of answers and guidance. Instead, the poem offers readers an ungod, an absence with whom an empathetic relationship (a relationship that necessitates the presence of at least two beings and the presence of openness) is unattainable.

In contrast to the empathetically-deficient relationship with ungod, the speaker in "Water Mirror," similar to Ford's "Flee," situates empathy in inter-human relationships. The remaining three tercets of the poem employ spatial symbolism to turn away from the sky (with its possibility of God) and toward pavement (with its presence of people):

> Not surprisingly, the murky waters
> Bore no glimpse of the contents that
> Lay below in the milky labyrinth.
>
> Funny how the sky looks brighter
> In the water's reflection. Funny
> Still how the tears from the eyes
>
> Of others like me on the pavement,
> Fall like rain. Perhaps, this is why
> The waters rise. (Bechler, "Water Mirror" 55)

As the speaker turns away from the sky and toward "the murky waters," he also turns toward the flooded reality of Hurricane Katrina. Similar to the silent and unknowable sky (or ungod) above, the speaker is unsurprised to find the contents underneath the water unknowable as well. In the Katrina-affected landscape of the poem, the first entity that is knowable for the speaker is a

reflection that doubles as an illusion: “Funny how the sky looks brighter / In the water’s reflection.” The sky, which “looks brighter” − perhaps harbouring a more responsive God − is not actually made brighter by its reflection in the water. This reflection is merely a reproduction, indeed a false reproduction that turns away from the sky (and its ungod) toward the events on the ground. Formally echoing the falseness of reproduction are the poem’s tercets; instead of the perhaps more apt couplets in a poem whose title and content spotlight the two-pronged relationship between source material and reflection, “Water Mirror” employs tercets to suggest the messiness of reproduction and the possibility of distortions, whether more brightness or more God, between the original and the mirror image. Empathy itself can be imagined as a kind of reproduction, an attempt at feeling into another that harbours its own distortions between the feelings of the empathizer and the receiver of empathy. These distortions contribute to the possible dangers of empathy: symbolic violence and self-indulgence, among others. Through the anaphoric “Funny” that begins the sentences in the third tercet of “Water Mirror,” the speaker parallels the false reflection of the sky with a moment of empathy on the ground. Noticing “the tears from the eyes // Of others like me on the pavement, / Fall like rain,” the speaker imagines tears, physical markers of grief in the context of this poem, as points of connection between the people around him. These points of connection open a space for empathy, a process that thrives when its recipient is familiar, as, for example, the people on the pavement who are “like” the speaker. Likeness here may refer to experience and/or to race, Bechler himself part of the African American population that was disproportionally affected by Katrina. Although driven by likeness, the empathy in the poem, like the sky that appears brighter in the water’s reflection, is rooted in distortion, in the variations between the people’s tears or between the particular emotions that prompt the tears. This human empathy − however distorted by the difficulties and

manipulations of entering another person's experiences − may, the poem suggests, redeem the empathetic void left by the ungod. Empathetically dissonant, thus, "Water Mirror" harbours an absence of empathy through ungod and a presence of empathy (particularly a problematic empathy) through human tears.

Yet while the speaker recognizes the similarity between himself and "others" on the pavement, he does not disclose if he partakes in the collective weeping. Introducing the tears with the anaphoric "Funny," the speaker separates himself from the others on the pavement by characterizing the rain-like tears as "funny" or strange. If empathy renders individuals less strange to one another, then the speaker's framing of the tears' falling as strange diminishes the empathy between the speaker and those "like" him. Indeed, "like" functions as another false reflection or distortion in the text. Human empathy, both recognized and reproached, becomes another source of empathetic dissonance. Furthermore, the simile comparing tears to rain and the final line's musing that "Perhaps, this is why / The waters rise" bridge a connection between the human and natural worlds. Indeed, an empathy forms between the human tears and the Hurricane rains, the former affectively imitating or reflecting − however impossible it is for people's tears to amount to Katrina's storm − the latter. Significantly, the bridging of human and Hurricane is also subtly suggestive of the role humans played in Hurricane Katrina. "Perhaps, this is why / The waters rise" functions as a sentiment of both empathy (the waters rise because of human commiseration) and accusation (the waters rise because of human negligence). While God is absent in the poem, humans − who are "perhaps" responsible for the rising waters and, consequently, the damage of Hurricane Katrina − may be too present. Human empathy, thus, although possibly redemptive for ungod's lack of empathy, inadequately atones for the human involvement in the devastation of Hurricane Katrina.

Michelangelo's eminent painting *The Creation of Adam* depicts Adam and God, their arms outstretched, their index fingers nearly touching. Portraying Michelangelo's vision of God's creation of Adam, this scene also holds relevance for the current chapter. Specifically, Adam's and God's nearly touching hands gesture at both a desire for and a disappointment of connection − and possible empathy − between human and God. Unlike the focus on inter-human empathetic dissonance in the previous two chapters, the poems in this chapter largely examine empathetic dissonance in the extraordinary relationship between humans and God, specifically a God who becomes an ungod (a divine figure of absence).

The poems that this chapter considers variously imagine the ungod as a figure absented by speakers who refuse to worship him (Paul Celan's "Tenebrae," Brad Bechler's "Water Mirror"), a figure that has absented himself from the speakers (Celan's "Psalm," Katie Ford's "Flee," Bechler's "Water Mirror"), and a figure that underscores God's absence by functioning as a proxy or metaphor for God (Dan Pagis's "Autobiography" and "Written in Pencil in the Sealed Railway-Car," Susan Birkeland's "Jesus Poem," Lucille Clifton's "9/11/01 – 9/17/01," Ford's "Flee"). Significantly, in place of God, a number of the poems in this chapter (namely, Ford's "Flee" and Bechler's "Water Mirror") champion empathy between humans. This empathy, the poems argue, may be redemptive for ungod's lack of empathy. Simultaneously, however, inter-human empathy, as the texts in the previous two chapters show, is flawed, rendered dissonant through the unsaid or the unhere. Revisiting empathetic dissonance and the problematics of empathy, the Conclusion that follows opens to new questions about empathy and alternative avenues of considering poetry after crisis.

Conclusion

I met a Thai Buddhist saint once who for twenty years took on tiny tokens and charms people gave him so that he would carry their suffering. Eventually he wore a cloak of a couple hundred pounds of clanking, chiming griefs at all times, and then it became too heavy or he'd carried it far enough, and he put it down. At the end of his talk he threw out tiny charms of his own, and I caught and kept one, a tiny golden Buddha in a small plastic bubble. I carried its imperceptible weight for many years until my purse was stolen out of my car while I was walking on a mountain. (Solnit 116)

As the epigraph to my dissertation, the above story from Rebecca Solnit's empathetically-charged non-fiction collection *The Faraway Nearby* marks the beginning of my voyage into empathy. I use the word *voyage* because, firstly, the dissertation writing process has been a journey on which I have learned, stumbled, and grown. I also use the word *voyage* because, as both Solnit and Leslie Jamison have pointed out, the process of empathy is a journey that moves the empathizer and receiver of empathy closer together, however laden with symbolic violence that movement may be (Solnit 195; Jamison 6). Furthermore, I offer the above story as an allegory for the various possibilities and consequences of empathy: the carrying of the suffering of others, the emotional weight that accompanies this carrying, the sharing of one's own suffering, and the theft of another's experience. As I theorize in the Introduction, empathy hinges on openness − both in terms of definitions and schools of thought and in terms of affective and cognitive receptiveness to another. Yet as the introduction and the three chapters of this project demonstrate, while openness may construct a bridge between self and other,

openness may also serve as a source of manipulation. Recognizing empathy's benefits and dangers, the poetry after crisis that my dissertation examines displays empathetic dissonance; this poetry leans toward and away from empathy in order to question the value and possibility of empathy in the face of crisis, particularly the three crises − the Holocaust, 9/11, and Hurricane Katrina − that my dissertation considers.

Challenges and Limitations

While perhaps the most challenging − in the sense of theoretically and connotatively unruly − aspect of this work is the concept of empathy, I put empathy aside until the next section, wherein I can devote more attention to the concept at the heart of my dissertation. Also central to my project are the three crises through which I approach empathetic dissonance. My choice of crises − a genocide, a terrorist attack, and a natural disaster exasperated by human negligence and prejudice − while allowing for a multifaceted examination of empathetic dissonance, also restricts the scope of this examination. In particular, to foreground the Holocaust, 9/11, and Hurricane Katrina is to privilege the Western world and, as the latter two events and the sizeable population of Holocaust survivors and Holocaust literary responses in America indicate, to principally privilege the United States. Moreover, although it is not my intent to reduce the differences between these three events, juxtaposing the poetries of these events may suggest a comparative study of the three crises more than a study of the empathetic dissonance that characterizes the poetries of these crises. In other words, the dissertation's focus on empathetic dissonance in poetry after the Holocaust, 9/11, and Hurricane Katrina may unjustly and unintentionally conflate these three events.

Further limiting the geographical regions from which I have selected the crises and their texts are my own language constraints and the constraints of an English-language dissertation. Although I am fluent in Russian and have some proficiency in French, understanding poetry − with its linguistic registers and literary and formal idiosyncrasies − in these languages remains a challenge. Moreover, while I read some poetry in translation (Charlotte Delbo, Wisława Szymborska, Paul Celan, Dan Pagis), the majority of the poetry that the dissertation considers is, as per guidelines of an English doctoral degree, originally written in English. Translation of course carries its own limitations, as well as possibilities. Where relevant, my project endeavours to address some of these limitations and possibilities through, for example, references to source texts and comparisons of multiple translations (see my discussion of Delbo's *Auschwitz and After* in Chapter One or Celan's "Psalm" in Chapter Three).

The organizational framework of the dissertation is another point of concern. In particular, the terminology ("The Unsaid," "The Unhere," and "The Ungod") through which I filter each chapter, while providing a structure for the selection of texts and their subsequent analysis, produces a pre-moulded shape into which the texts and analysis must fit. When I initially imagined the chapters, "The Unsaid," "The Unhere," and "The Ungod" were loose thematic structures for a wider discussion of language, witnessing, and theology. Yet writing coherent chapters necessitated that these terms provide a foundation on which my analysis could lean. The foundation became too restrictive. First, the *un* prefix may have skewed some of my analysis toward a focus on negation, privileging the unsaid, for example, over the said. Second, the constant necessity to situate the analysis in relation to the taproot of the respective chapter's title sometimes felt artificial and amiss. Finally, my attachment to my initial iteration of the second chapter as "The Unseen" (in place of the current reimagining of the chapter as "The

Unhere") prohibited me from recognizing the problematics of sight as an organizing principle for the chapter; specifically, the pervasiveness of the three crises in our current visual culture cannot render these crises unseen. Furthermore, within each chapter, the organization of the crises (the Holocaust, followed by 9/11, followed by Hurricane Katrina), although based on chronology and consistency, may perhaps suggest some kind of hierarchical prejudice (one event as more valuable than another). Feeding into the idea of hierarchy are the chapters' uneven distributions of texts from each of the crises. Although I endeavour to devote more or less equal time (across the dissertation) to each of the crises, the Holocaust ends up garnering more attention than the other events, in part because of the prevalence (and my inclusion) of book-length poems in response to this crisis and in part because of personal inclination. Moreover, the variations in the lengths of discussion for each of the texts are a consequence of each of the texts' relevance to their respective chapters.

Another challenge that I encountered throughout the dissertation is the sensitive work of approaching poetry after events of devastation. While I remark that poets like Charles Reznikoff and Cynthia Hogue appropriate personal and communal histories of suffering for their own poetic objectives, my project too participates in such a vampiric act. Indeed, my dissertation pays attention to the poetry only insofar as it serves my argument on empathetic dissonance. Like the symbolically violent empathizer for whom the other's suffering functions as a portal for a focus on the self, I include and extend empathy to these various poetries for my own academic purposes. Yet a project that pivots on the pain of others owes a responsibility and a sensitivity to these others, particularly a cautiousness of appropriating those who have already suffered appropriation. As much as I have tried to approach poetry after crisis with sensitivity, the

participation of my project in appropriation − however unavoidable this appropriation may perhaps be − makes me uncomfortable.

On a personal level (and at the risk of navel-gazing), working closely with texts in response to traumatic events has been a moving but emotionally taxing experience. For instance, Delbo's detailed and visceral descriptions of life in a concentration camp and the subsequent disconnect ("it is hard to come back / and speak again to the living") that she feels in a post-Holocaust world haunt me long after finishing *Auschwitz and After* (256). The fact-focused accounts of callousness in Reznikoff's *Holocaust* render the poem, for me, emotionally wrenching to read for more than a few pages at a time. The catalogue of deaths in Dionne Brand's *Inventory* provokes me, as it intends to, into indignation at my own desensitization. The systemic racism that Claudia Rankine's *Citizen* courageously tackles is heartbreaking, particularly in the current political milieu of the United States. These emotional challenges speak to the strength and significance of the poems with which I work, as well as to these poems' stakes in empathy, the affective relation that threads this project together.

Yet one cannot forget, after all, that empathy is something that I have (at least partially) written on to this project. To read the texts through empathy, particularly those texts that make no explicit mention of empathy (and this is the majority of the texts), is to invade – and pervade – those texts with an idea that may be foreign to them. Moreover, framing the dissertation in terms of empathy may eclipse other possible responses to the crises (for example, predominantly intellectual or dispassionate responses). Indeed, empathy serves as a kind of equalizer here: although empathy itself is far from a uniform concept, the project's focus on empathy positions the reader to approach the disparate poems in the dissertation through the uniformity of a single concept. As such, the reader views texts that value detachment, such as Reznikoff's *Holocaust*,

through the same lens as texts that value connection and passion, such as Niyi Osundare's "Knowing Friend." In this way, my project risks reducing the various poems with which I work to only their resonances with empathy and empathetic dissonance.

Empathy: Thread and Needle

As I have learned over the course of the reading and writing for this project, empathy is both a thread and a needle. While empathy has the potential of threading together, with attention and tenderness, various subjects, empathy also has the potential of causing harm. This doubleness is at the root of the challenge that empathy poses as a possible ethical response to someone else's trauma. In the 2002 poem "Curse," which lends my dissertation the first half of its title, Frank Bidart imagines empathy for the victims of 9/11 as a curse for the perpetrators, whom he addresses in the second person:

> *May breath for a dead moment cease as jerking your*
>
> *head upward you hear as if in slow motion floor*
>
> *collapse evenly upon floor as one hundred and ten*
>
> *floors descend upon you.*
>
> May what you have made descend upon you.
> May the listening ears of your victims their eyes their

breath

enter you, and eat like acid
the bubble of rectitude that allowed you breath.

May their breath now, in eternity, be your breath.

*

Now, as you wished, you cannot for us
not be. May this be your single profit.

Of your rectitude at last disenthralled, you
seek the dead. Each time you enter them
they spit you out. The dead find you are not food.

Out of the great secret of morals, *the imagination to enter*
the skin of another, what I have made is a curse.[87]

Buttressed by bitterness and revulsion, Bidart's "Curse" employs empathy as needle, as source of violence and vengeance. This poem forces the perpetrators into the position of the victims trapped in the World Trade Center Towers on 9/11: "*one hundred and ten // floors descend upon you*." In a reverse empathetic gesture, the victims − or rather their disembodied ears, eyes, and breath − enter into and consume the perpetrators' righteousness. Emptied of their righteousness,

[87] This is the poem in its entirety.

the perpetrators "seek [to enter or empathize with] the dead," a desire which the dead find repulsive ("they spit you out"). In the surreal scene that Bidart sketches, empathy becomes, as the final couplet articulates, a curse, something to be inflicted upon another. Empathy as curse, even if that curse is directed toward the perpetrators, is incompatible with empathy as ethical response to another's trauma.

In its various possible guises, empathy may not be the most ethical or responsible approach to poetry after crisis, indeed to people after crisis. Tackling the Western fixation on empathy in her article "De-colonising Empathy: Thinking Affect Transnationally," Carolyn Pedwell considers the questions that proponents of Western liberal politics fail to ask about empathy:

> creating more or better empathy is now framed as an affective 'solution' to a wide range of social ills and as a central component of building cross-cultural and transnational social justice. Yet empathy ... can easily become a kind of endpoint. Precisely because it is so widely and unquestioningly viewed as 'good,' its naming can represent a conceptual stoppage in conversation or analysis. Thus, the most pressing questions tend less to be "what is empathy?", "what does it do?", "what are its risks?", and "what happens *after* empathy?", but rather the more automatic refrain of "how can we cultivate it?" (28)

The assumption that empathy is solely "'good'" is, as this dissertation has worked to show, problematic and unsupportable. Moreover, empathy's various risks may render positive assumptions about empathy and their consequent attempt to "cultivate" more empathy unethical. Discussing empathy's shortcomings in bridging transnational subjects, Pedwell further asserts that "empathy, or any other emotion, alone cannot be the *remedy* to complex transnational social

inequalities and conflicts, because it is always already bound up with, and produced through, these very relations of power" (45). That is, relations between culturally and nationally diverse groups, particularly in colonial and post-colonial contexts, complicate and inform the flow of empathy because of the power relations that dictate these groups. Additionally, empathy, which Pedwell posits cannot "alone" serve as social "*remedy*" because of its links to transnational power relations, also frequently fails as "*remedy*" because of its lack of links to discernible action. Unattached to specific behaviours, empathy can be, to borrow Pedwell's word, an "endpoint" (28); altruism, the moral promise that empathy does not necessarily keep or even pledge, is a response outside of the scope of both empathy and this dissertation.

Unsurprisingly then, empathy, with all its possible inadequacies, may be an unwelcome response for its receiver. Recounting a family evacuating Louisiana after Hurricane Katrina, Brad Bechler's poem "Out-of-State Plates" describes the "horrid looks of empathy" of those geographically and emotionally removed from Katrina that "trail us [the speaker and his family] like a coyote / trails its quarry" (133). Empathy as "horrid" and threatening (the simile of a coyote) intimates that affective correspondence is frequently neither solicited nor desired from those on its receiving end. Indeed, as Jackie Leach Scully argues, one can have empathy and it can be for the wrong reasons: empathizers may project their own understanding of another's experiences onto that other. Moreover, for the empathizer, empathy may function as an emotional notch on one's belt, a triumph marked by one's ability to feel for another. I have worked to be conscious of empathy's potential inclination toward the triumphant, particularly in my own responses to and empathy for the poems in this project. Writing a dissertation on empathy does not make me any more or less emotionally triumphant. More emphatically − responding to my Introduction's meditation on the conflation between one's ability to empathize

and one's status as human − writing a dissertation on empathy does not make me any more or less human.

One more note on an alternative perspective through which we can view empathy: In June 2017 I attended the *European Society for Literature, Science, and the Arts* conference in Basel, Switzerland, whose theme for this year was, fortuitously, "Empathies." Vast in both its disciplines and its empathy scholars (including Pedwell and Scully, whom I quote above), this conference came at a time when I was working on this Conclusion and attempting to thread together the various empathies (plural, as the conference name intimates, because of empathy's multiple conceptions and possibilities) that inform my project. Significantly, one of the most poignant and insightful talks of the conference came from the poet Denise Riley. Disclosing the personal experience of losing her child, Riley explained that loss renders empathy impossible. All that loss requires for the bereaved, argued Riley, is the outsider's recognition of the bereaved person's experience; this recognition need not manifest as anything more than the phrase, "I am sorry." During the discussion period that followed Riley's talk I asked a question that I would like to reiterate here: can we re-imagine or re-purpose empathy to be just that recognition? That is, perhaps empathy can indicate not an emotional and imaginative projection into the bereaved person's feelings, which necessarily remain at some inaccessible point (the gap of empathy), but empathy can instead signify an acknowledgment of those feelings, which is a kind of projection into the bereaved person's desire for recognition (though of course this desire cannot be homogenous, which would render this paradigm of empathy also problematic). Whether or not such a re-imaging of empathy is productive, Riley's talk and the various definitions of empathy that circulated throughout the conference remind me once again that writing a dissertation largely focused on *empathy* has not made that ever-slippery term any less complicated.

Alternative Avenues

As I have outlined above, the parameters of my project have dictated certain choices while precluding others. Specifically, I have selected the poems that are here because of their resonances with empathy and with their respective chapter headings. Although I could have enforced more constraints on these selections (for example, poems only written in the year after a crisis), I have worked to leave the project as open as possible for a more arbitrary (however much this is possible when the writer of the dissertation has biases and preferences) selection of poems through which I could consider empathetic dissonance. That said, there are many poems that I encountered while reading for the dissertation that, for one reason or another, did not fit into the project. For example, Frank Bidart's "Curse," which I include above, while teeming with empathetic dissonance, finds no comfortable place in any of my three chapters. Similarly unable to fit into the thematic shapes of the chapters are a number of other poems that I would have liked to consider because of their implications for empathetic dissonance; these poems include Nelly Sachs's "Chorus of Comforters," Abraham Sutzkever's "For a Comrade" (Sutzkever wrote this poem during the Holocaust, which further excludes it from the "after" scope of my project), Stephen Dunn's "Grudges," Bill Kushner's "In the Hairy Arms of Whitman," Ann Lauterbach's "Hum," Alison Pelegrin's "Ode to Contractors Possessing Various Levels of Expertise," and Brad Richard's "The Raft of the Medusa," among others. Alternatively, I also encountered poems that responded to the three crises that my project foregrounds, but these poems did not offer enough empathetic dissonance to warrant consideration in the current iteration of this project. Among these is Juliana Spahr's *thisconnectionofeveryonewithlungs*, a long poem after 9/11 whose insistence on connection and empathy between all things precludes nearly all

possibilities of empathetic deficiencies. On the other hand, some texts, such as Aaron Smith's poem after 9/11 "Silent Room," are so entrenched in the lyric voice that their concern with empathy is minimal.

Additionally, considering the poetry of three distinct crises (a genocide, a terrorist act, and a natural disaster) prohibits considering the poetry of, for example, other genocides in addition to the Holocaust, such as the genocide of Indigenous peoples in Canada. As I have already mentioned, the English dissertation also largely limits the choice of crises to particular national and linguistic areas. Yet reading poems in translation from the Armenian or Rwandan genocides or the 2011 earthquake and tsunami in Japan, for instance, would enrich the historical and cultural breadth of this project. Adding a new category of crisis, such as nuclear accidents (I am particularly interested in the Chernobyl disaster in Ukraine because of its personal implications for my family), would also enrich the breadth of the dissertation. Although the structure of my dissertation does not currently allow me to consider these other crises and their poetries, these events remain alternative avenues for future projects.

Future Directions

While my dissertation focuses on the role of empathy in textual poetry after crisis, I would like to further develop this project to consider the role of empathy in oral poetry after crisis. Although several oral testimony projects have emerged to document the voices of those affected by 9/11 and Hurricane Katrina, I am particularly interested in the extensive oral testimony collections (specifically, the University of Southern California's Shoah Visual History Archive and Yale University's Fortunoff Video Archive) that document the voices of Holocaust survivors. Fortunate enough to work closely with the Shoah Visual History Archive as a recent

Fellow at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C., I was struck by the number of Holocaust survivors who, as part of their oral testimonies, recited their own poetry. This collection of oral poems, which has been largely disregarded by both literary and historical scholars, is a critical source of first-hand literary responses, which can significantly add to the research on and understanding of Holocaust survivor experiences. On the one hand, the unpublished poems that survivors read comprise a collection of previously overlooked poetry from primary witnesses. On the other hand, the published poems that survivors read allow for an examination of the poems as embodied texts that are part of a larger oral narrative.

One of the poems that this future research will consider is Donia Blumenfeld Clenman's empathetically dissonant "I Dream in Good English Too." Born in Poland and now residing in Toronto, Blumenfeld Clenman was confined in the Opatów Ghetto and subsequently in the Skarzysko-Kamienna and Tschenstochau camps during the Holocaust. In her 1995 interview with the Shoah Foundation, Blumenfeld Clenman recounts the emotional disconnect that her Holocaust experiences engender between herself and her family. Endeavouring to articulate this disconnect, Blumenfeld Clenman opts to recite a poem. Although "I Dream in Good English Too" was published as a poem in verse in Blumenfeld Clenman's 1988 collection of the same name, I reproduce the poem here as a prose transcript in order to preserve the testimony's encounter with it as an oral text:

> Sometimes I am a stranger to my family, for I bring Europe's ghosts into the well-lit living room of Canadian internationalism and mobile, passionately objective youth. My scars are nicely healed and my concerns properly intellectual, yellow with the stamp of legality of naturalization papers twenty years old. Yet somehow, the smoke of the past darkens Heinz's clear consommé and, though

> only a witness, I spread fear by my very presence, a living fossil at a table worshipping the now. They love me deeply and tenderly, yet would exorcise a part of me, dreading an eruption of memory no matter how oblique to force them into captive partnership. This is my past not theirs, their hostile glances shout. We are all descendants of Adam. Why bring Abraham into happy Canadian homes? I was no child on arrival and yet, so well assimilated, even my verses are native, and I dream in good English too. So I put on the ointment of reason and tape heartbreak with band-aids, and they are relieved and reassured to get back their normal Canadian mother. (Blumenfeld Clenman, Interview)

Through her insistence on assimilation, on dreaming and writing "in good English," which, prior to beginning this poem, she explains is the only language in which she can now write poetry (shedding her native Polish), Blumenfeld Clenman locates herself in the Canadian "well-lit living room." She physically and imaginatively − through poetry and through what she terms "the ointment of reason" and the "band-aids" of "heartbreak" − enters the post-Holocaust world. This entering into or empathy with the person her family wants her to be is, in part, like the "put[ting] on [of] ointment," a putting on of a disguise. Continually frustrating this disguise, however, is Blumenfeld Clenman's past: the ghosts of Europe that she brings into the living room, her self-proclaimed status as fossil.

Just as Blumenfeld Clenman cannot fully enter her new life, her family also cannot enter her past. "Sometimes I am a stranger to my family," Blumenfeld Clenman concedes at the outset of the poem. Refusing empathy, a process of making individuals less strange to one another, Blumenfeld Clenman's children maintain a distance between themselves and their mother. Mapping this distance in temporal terms, Blumenfeld Clenman explains, "I spread fear by my

very presence, a living fossil at a table worshipping the now." Maintaining full eye contact with the interviewer − and, consequently, the viewers − and shaking her head while reading these words, Blumenfeld Clenman reminds us that those of us unfettered by the past are also worshippers of the now. We, like her family, are removed from her experiences, unable to emotionally approach them and, thus, unable to empathize with her. More than simply refusing empathy with her experiences, Blumenfeld Clenman's family fears this empathy: "They love me deeply and tenderly, yet would exorcise a part of me, dreading an eruption of memory no matter how oblique to force them into captive partnership. This is my past not theirs, their hostile glances shout." The dread and hostility that Blumenfeld Clenman's family exhibits at the possibility of "captive partnership" with their mother's Holocaust experiences is also a dread and hostility against the "captive partnership" of empathy, of finding themselves and possibly losing themselves in their mother's experiences. While the figure of Adam that Blumenfeld Clenman references suggests a common ancestry (the Hebrew word *adam*, which Blumenfeld Clenman would know, signifying both the Biblical figure and man or humanity), Abraham points to a Jewish lineage and the history that this lineage bears. The tension between Blumenfeld Clenman's attempt to empathize with her family's "well-lit" life and the family's refusal to empathize with Blumenfeld Clenman's dark past produces the empathetic dissonance in this poem. This empathetic dissonance stresses the difficulty of bridging the Holocaust experience with a new post-Holocaust life, the difficulty of empathizing with an experience that is removed from one's own.[88]

[88] It is important to note here that it is Blumenfeld Clenman's family that seems to assume (according to Blumenfeld Clenman, of course) that their mother desires their empathy. Blumenfeld Clenman herself never mentions this desire. Indeed, I would venture to speculate that she does not want her family to imaginatively experience any part of what she has undergone. Instead, perhaps Blumenfeld Clenman desires a familiar listening ear, a recognition or acknowledgment (along the lines of Denise Riley's proposition) of her experiences.

This brief examination of Blumenfeld Clenman's reading of "I Dream in Good English Too" gestures at some of the challenges and opportunities of oral poetry. Perhaps the most notable of these challenges is the indiscernible physical form of an oral poem. Substituting the printed poem's physical form is the oral poem's form of delivery. For example, instead of an analysis of the various line lengths, line breaks, and margins in the written version of Blumenfeld Clenman's text, the poet's oral delivery lends itself to an analysis of such aspects as eye contact, annunciation, volume of voice, body posture, physical movement, and possible interruptions. Moreover, the testimony in which the poem is situated offers the opportunity to contextualize the poem in a broader understanding of the survivor's Holocaust experiences. While secondary sources can similarly offer this opportunity, these sources are necessarily removed − in temporal, authorial, and/or emotional terms, for instance − from the poetic responses that they examine. Poetry in oral Holocaust testimonies, thus, can offer new challenges and opportunities for approaching artistic responses to the Holocaust.

To the Reader

It is my hope that instead of a passive surveyor of the project, the reader of this dissertation functions as an active co-participant in the project's goals (that is, in the attempt to understand the role empathy plays in poetry after crisis). Although I have devoted much of the dissertation to highlighting the dangerous tendencies of empathy, I believe that a dissertation focused on empathy and empathetic dissonance requires something of these responses in its reader. Indeed, the cognitive and affective processes of empathy suggest that a purely intellectual reading of this project is insufficient. At the same time, a purely emotional reading of the project is unfaithful both to the cognitive aspects of empathy and to the intellectual work of the

dissertation. As such, I ask the reader to approach the poems and my engagement with them through an informed and intellectual understanding of empathy and empathetic dissonance, but also through emotions that recognize the deeply affective stance of this project.

In this twofold approach is the openness that is crucial to my definition of *empathy*. This openness admits empathy even as it recognizes its risks. The three crises here, whose poetries function something like binoculars that on one side magnify empathy and on the other diminish it, remind of the empathetic void that can lead to genocide, terrorism, and racial and economic divides. In today's world, which has shifted since I began this project, the closing of borders (the restrictions on refugees, Brexit, Donald Trump's immigration policies) is another reminder of the effects of closing off to empathy. So, although armed with suspicion of empathy's treachery, my message to the reader echoes the "hope" with which Carolyn Pedwell ends her critique of empathy: "there is, I hope, something of the promise and power of empathy that lives on – an affective afterlife generated precisely through empathy's ambivalence, complexity and contingent relationships with other emotions and affects" (46). I hope that empathy resurfaces in and outside of my project as well (and as it must), even if what resurfaces is not exactly empathy, even if it goes by a different name.

Unconclusion

As Sheila E. Jelen remarks about Dan Pagis, "His greatest strength as a poet of the Holocaust lies in his absolute rejection of the possibility of resolution. The Holocaust, to him, is an open wound that resists closure or redemption" (94). Respecting Pagis's rejection of closure, a rejection that surfaces in many of the poems with which I work, I too would like to conclude with a rejection of concluding. Empathetic dissonance − that pull toward and push away from

empathy with which I weave through the texts in my dissertation − demands such a rejection. Indeed, empathetic dissonance points to the lack of resolution and to the necessarily uncertain role empathy plays in poetry after events of crisis. Ending inconclusively is also an ethical stance. The attempt to reduce the various idiosyncrasies of these messy poems − messy in the sense of unsettled and unsettling − into a neat conclusion would be to undermine the integrity of this project, which values tension over tidiness. Instead, I leave the questions where they are (and that is everywhere) in hopes that I have opened up a productive space in which they are comfortable enough to move outward.

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