

Jeremy Davies, *Bodily Pain in Romantic Literature*. New York & London: Routledge, 2014. Pp. 169. £80. ISBN 9780415842914.

In his engaging new book, Jeremy Davies illuminates the contribution of bodily pain to Romantic period thought, ranging from Bentham's utilitarianism to Shelley's poetry. The Romantic period was 'almost the last era' before the advent of surgical anesthesia in 1846, despite the existence of the technology to achieve it (8). This mystery, brought up in the first chapter and filling the conclusion, provides a sense of bodily pain's historical significance as well as a sense of excitement.

The first chapter places the idea of bodily pain both historically and theoretically. Evaluating modern theories of pain, Davies comes to describe 'bodily pain' as 'an experience that calls attention to our background sense of embodied existence, and hence as a reflexive feeling of our capacity for feeling' (2). Pain is, Davies writes, 'both extraordinarily intimate and extraordinarily, irreducibly alien' because it draws our attention to 'the most elementary level of our perceptual power' yet gets in the way of that perception (24). This chapter works as a fine introduction to pain studies, including a thoughtful critique of Elaine Scarry's *The Body in Pain* that interprets her idea of pain's 'negativity' – its status as 'an event that situates itself outside of representation' – not as a linguistic dead end but as a claim for pain's ability to inspire new representations, a view in keeping with the Romantic writers Davies examines (33).

The body of the book centers on Bentham, Sade, Coleridge and Hartley, and Shelley. This study is at its most compelling when it confronts the knotty contradictions involved in pain, and in Chapter 2, Bentham's defenses of torture present one such contradiction. According to Bentham, the pain of torture would be enough to guarantee a confession; also according to Bentham, confessing the name of an accomplice might outweigh the pain of torture. For his solution, Davies looks at what Bentham's writing on extreme pain says about his theory of the 'commensurability' of pleasure and pain, and *vice versa*. 'To preserve his commensurabilism' (61), which tends to 'erase' the individual (53), Bentham must demonstrate that 'all motivations...will give way if they are opposed by stronger ones' (61). Torture provides the means of this demonstration (62). But, since extreme pain is defined 'by the fact that it fills up a single, finite consciousness', Bentham's attention to 'pain that overcomes the will...readopts the finite irreducible individual' (64).

Like Bentham, Sade's libertines attempt 'to render sensations homogeneous' (5) and to abstract them from the individual. For the Sadean libertine, 'all kinds of experience', even extreme pain, 'can be felt as pleasure' (5). In their victims, the libertines desire pain itself rather than the victim, separating 'sensations from the bearers of those sensations' and turning pain into an exchangeable 'object' (87-8). Yet, in the victims' singular experience of pain, which the libertines desire but cannot experience, Sadean victims 'cannot be reduced to the structures dominated by the libertines' (89); as in Bentham, the pain that seems to underwrite homogeneity also heralds the return of the individual.

Whereas the chapters on Bentham and Sade discuss the failure of attempts to make pain homogeneous, the final two chapters examine how Coleridge's and Shelley's individual experience of pain inspired some of their most characteristic thinking. Davies argues that pain helped lead Coleridge away from David Hartley's Unitarianism and towards Trinitarianism rooted in 'reflection on Christ's experience of pain' (99). During the 'abstruse researches' period, Coleridge's attention to 'local pains in "disordered" parts of his body' contributed to his organicism through its illumination of 'the active sensibility' of healthy organs (110). And it is through Coleridge's loss of 'volition', or the ability to 'carry out the acts that we will ourselves to perform', that he finds assurance of free will (114).

Appropriately, Davies ends with Shelley's 'commitment to taking bodily pain as a way to envisage possibilities of renewal' (132). Shelley's experience of pain contributed to 'his ideal of non-teleological, self-revising creativity' (132). Davies's fields of interest here are *Laon and Cythna*, *The Cenci*, and *Prometheus Unbound*, which display Shelley's connection between pain and 'the thought of perpetually self-altering processes' with the ability 'to renovate stale and corroded structures, and so represent our best hope of political liberation' (161).

As Davies acknowledges in his preface, the study does not cover 'group differences in pain experiences', such as those between women and men, rich and poor (xiii). While a discussion of how his formulation of bodily pain applies to women's writing would certainly be interesting, its absence does not detract from the goal of this work. The significance of Davies's contribution lies in his development of a concept of bodily pain specific yet flexible enough to fit the Romantic authors he discusses. More broadly, the book offers an exciting new history of the relationship between the body, the senses, and literary production.

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