



Signifying Pain: Constructing and Healing the Self Through Writing (Sunny Series in Psychoanalysis and Culture) (SUNY Series in Psychoanalysis and Culture (Paperback))

Judith Harris

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Explores the therapeutic uses and effects of writing in a post-Freudian age.

A deeply personal yet universal work, *Signifying Pain* applies the principles of therapeutic writing to such painful life experiences as mental illness, suicide, racism, domestic abuse, and even genocide. Probing deep into the bedrock of literary imagination, Judith Harris traces the odyssey of a diverse group of writers—John Keats, Derek Walcott, Jane Kenyon, Michael S. Harper, Robert Lowell, and Ai, as well as student writers—who have used their writing to work through and past such personal traumas. Drawing on her own experience as a poet and teacher, Harris shows how the process can be long and arduous, but that when exercised within the spirit of one's own personal compassion, the results can be limitless. *Signifying Pain* will be of interest not only to teachers of creative and therapeutic writing, but also to those with a critical interest in autobiographical or confessional writing more generally.

"*Signifying Pain* is one of a growing number of books that explore the parallels between the 'talking cure' and the 'writing cure.' It is perhaps the most impassioned of these books, written by a poet and scholar with a linguistic brilliance that few can match." — *American Imago*

"...Harris is a thoughtful and insightful scholar of literature and psychoanalysis, and relates her thoughts on the intersection of them with eloquence. She also has a personal story to tell that supports and furthers her thesis with an immediacy that academic writing, alone, cannot always accomplish." — *Clio's Psyche*

"...Harris' book represents a provocative link between the act of creative expression and the signification of pain and healing ... Pain is both thematic and universal to Harris, and recovery from pain is one of the primary uses of communication." — *Psychoanalysis, Culture & Society*

"Harris's style is poetic throughout, and although that is a rewarding feature and one of the book's strengths, it is her tenacious scholarship and intellectual rigor that will impress readers the most ... some individuals like myself will find her work invaluable, not only in work with clients and students, but for themselves. *Signifying Pain* is an important addition to the literature exploring the concept of writing to heal." — John F. Evans, *Psychiatry: Interpersonal & Biological Processes*

"This is an extraordinary book—sensitive, intelligent, and profound." — Marshall W. Alcorn, author of *Changing the Subject in English Class: Discourse and the Constructions of Desire*

"*Signifying Pain* will play an important role in the growing literature on psychoanalysis in education and in the college classroom, as it both shows and tells what a psychoanalytically informed sensibility can bring to understanding poetry. To be able to signify pain is a human triumph; to write about the signifying is, too." — Elisabeth Young-Bruehl, coauthor of *Cherishment: A Psychology of the Heart*

"Judith Harris's *Signifying Pain* presents a compelling argument for the profound healing that personal

writing can provide for psychological suffering. This wise and compassionate book will provide inspiration and guidance not only for teachers and students of writing but also for individuals struggling to find relief from mental anguish or to repair a damaged self." — Mark Bracher, editor of the *Journal for the Psychoanalysis of Culture and Society*

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Linda Wood:

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