itself to identify the startlingly different responses to pain in other eras.

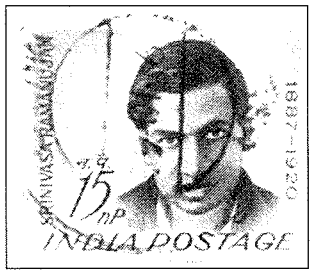
Stoics in antiquity considered pain ennobling, as did Christian flagellants in the Middle Ages. Romantics from John Keats to Friedrich Nietzsche believed pain the source of great art. Such attitudes lie worlds away from today's medical diagnoses. Physicians now are handicapped, Morris argues, by subscribing to the "myth of two pains," one physical, the other mental. Such a division is proven inadequate at every turn, by amputees who feel burning sensations in lost limbs, by lobotomized sufferers no longer bothered by pain, by patients registering relief from placeboes, and by sadomasochists who relish every hurt.

Pain today, Morris writes, "is now officially emptied of meaning and merely buzzing mindlessly along the nerves." Physical suffering is thus stripped of the cultural significance by which people once dealt with more pain despite having fewer medical resources. *The Culture of Pain* is, however, more than a historical investigation. It joins Arthur Kleinman's *The Illness Narratives* (1988) and Eric Cassell's *The Nature of Suffering* (1991) as an appeal to physicians to end the distinction between illness and disease, between persons and bodies, and to create a new approach which treats pain not as a symptom of various diseases but as the thing itself that must be diagnosed and healed.

THE MAN WHO KNEW INFINITY: A Life of the Genius Ramanujan. *By Robert Kanigel. Scribners. 438 pp. $27.95*

In 1913 a desperately poor Indian clerk in Madras wrote to Cambridge's leading mathematician, G. H. Hardy. Srinivasa Ramanujan was then a 23-year-old autodidact, untrained in such mundane matters as standard notation or rigorous proofs. But the bizarre mathematical formulas his letter contained had to be true, Hardy reasoned, since no one would have had the imagination to concoct them.

Thus began what Kanigel, who teaches literary journalism at Johns Hopkins University, calls one of the more romantic collaborations in the history of mathematics. Hardy brought Ramanujan to England and Cambridge, and together in 1916 they devised the general formula



for finding all possible ways of adding up integers to obtain a certain number—a formula that advanced the study of, among other matters, molecular combination. Mathematics was no dry, technical discipline to Ramanujan; it was instinct with life. Hardy once happened to comment that the taxi which had brought him to Ramanujan's lodgings was #1729—"rather a duller number." "No, Hardy," Ramanujan immediately exclaimed. "It is a very interesting number. It is the smallest number expressible as the sum of two cubes in two different ways." ($1{,}729 = 1^3 + 12^3 = 9^3 + 10^3$.)

Through Hardy's unstinting efforts, Ramanujan received professional renown in Britain, including election to the Royal Society. But while their association was an exceptional meeting of the minds, it was little else. Hardy never included Ramanujan in his Bloomsbury circle, never even realized that Ramanujan ate alone in his room because his strict Hindu diet made virtually everything served at High Table untouchable. Just barely in his thirties, Ramanujan—homesick, overworked, and suffering from tuberculosis—returned to his own country in 1919 to die. He is now considered the "Einstein of India."

Mathematicians to this day are still "proving" Ramanujan right, and his work continues to be studied for its applications in plastics and atomic research. But how Ramanujan came upon his insights, without the aid of computers, without proofs, and initially with only a few out-of-date 19th-century texts, remains a mystery. His own explanation appears perplexingly unhelpful: "An equation for me has no meaning, unless it expresses a thought of God." Yet his casual acceptance of the amalgamations and odd associations in Hinduism, Kanigel suggests, did allow Ramanujan's mind to make the bizarre leaps and analogies that led to his startling discoveries in number theory.