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INTRODUCTION

Only by means of promising can the will consolidate itself as will, and only in the act of promising does the will—and nothing else—promise and promise itself as the will. Promising—as the mode of discourse in which one speaks ahead of oneself in view of oneself—dictates the structure of the will.

Werner Hamacher, "The Promise of Interpretation"

"Maybe I better not tell."
"Why, Jim?"
"Well, dey's reasons. But you wouldn' tell on me ef I 'us to tell you, would you Huck?"
"Blamed if I would, Jim."
"Well, I believe you, Huck. I—I run off."
"Jim!"
"But mind, you said you wouldn't tell—you know you said you wouldn't tell, Huck."
"Well, I did. I said I wouldn't, and I'll stick to it. Honest injun *I will. People would call me a low down Ablitionist and despise me for keeping mum—but that don't make no difference."*

Mark Twain, *Huckleberry Finn*

Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn* poses innumerable philosophical questions, but I will begin with a relatively simple one: Is there a difference between *keeping* a promise and *not breaking* one? Keeping a promise of course implies not breaking one, but one might argue that the converse is not true: not breaking a promise might simply indicate a form of negligence—for example, a happy bout of forgetfulness. Keeping a promise tends to imply something stronger—perhaps, a resolution sustained through an extended act of will. As Nietzsche famously argues in the *Genealogy of Morals*, the capacity to promise (and thus to keep promises) epitomizes "an active *will* not to let go, an ongoing willing of what was once willed, a real *memory of the will*" (40, Nietzsche's emphasis). Nietzsche's meditation invokes an even stricter criterion: in keeping one's promise, one acts precisely *because* one has promised, actualizing the will implicit in the initial offering of one's word. But *Huck Finn* complicates *Genealogy*'s account of this will, in

which the promiser "must have become *calculable*, *regular*, *necessary*, even to his own mind" (40, Nietzsche's emphasis). In *Huck Finn*, the eponymous protagonist is so incalculable to himself that he at one point decides to play good Samaritan to a killer in trouble because, who knows, he might end up becoming one himself someday. The novel features two pivotal scenes in which Huck, whose agential principles are as fluid as the river that conducts him, decides not to renege on his word without exactly deciding to *keep* it, at least in the strong sense that Nietzsche imagines. Huck's two decisions not to betray his companion Jim, an escaped slave, seem to occupy a nebulous middle ground between keeping and not breaking an earlier promise to not inform on him.

In the passage I have cited as my epigraph, Werner Hamacher argues that promising does not merely instantiate one speech amongst others, but dictates the very structure of the will. If Huck simply stops short of breaking a "promise"—he never uses the word—can he be said to *will* anything at all? Or, alternatively, do his decisions evince what one contemporary philosopher has called, using Huck as an exemplary case, "inverse akrasia"—that is, a kind of beneficent failure to act in accordance with one's judgment?[1]

I will suggest that, if one is to adequately respond to these questions, Huck cannot be seen as an individuated moral agent, as philosophical thought experiments devoted to the problem of the will have made him out to be.[2] Rather, he is embedded within a complex, stylistically mediated social situation, whereby competing claims barrage him in the form of internalized and literal voices. It may seem obvious to point out that Huck cannot be isolated from the specificities of his literary world, but this is precisely what converting his dilemma into

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[1] See Richard Holton's "Inverse Akrasia and Weakness of Will".

[2] See Holton's essay, as well as Jonathan Bennet's "The Conscience of Huckleberry Finn," and Nomi Arpaly's *Unprincipled Virtue: An Inquiry into Moral Agency* (75-79).

a portable thought experiment does. If one is to understand how Huck comes to act without the aid of “ideas or ideals” (Trilling 248), one cannot seal off Huck as a character or agent from the stylistic and generic contortions to which the novel subjects him.

One unfortunate consequence of beginning with Huck as an independent moral agent—in Trilling’s words, as a “heroic character” at “the beginning of […] moral testing and development” (247)—is that this premise marginalizes the force of Jim’s interventions in these scenes. First, Huck’s ironic crisis of conscience—his sense that he has committed a sin by helping to free a slave—does not spring up ex nihilo, but responds to Jim’s ebullient sense of imminent freedom: Huck feels “trembly and feverish” only after “Jim said it made him all over trembly and feverish to be so close to freedom” (133). It is only at this point that Huck recognizes himself as an agent: “It hadn’t ever come home to me before, what this thing was that I was doing” (134). Moreover, because Huck’s action is still in progress—“this thing […] I was doing” is not a thing he *has done*—it remains open to reversal. But just when he plans to undo its consequences by giving his companion up, Jim’s voice, this time directly quoted, once again perturbs his sense of agency: “Pooty soon I’ll be a-shout’n for joy, en I’ll say, it’s all on accounts o’ Huck; I’s a free man, en I couldn’t ever ben free ef it hadn’t ben for Huck; Huck done it” (136). Jim’s appeal to Huck’s agency here is subtle: he figures an incomplete act as a *fait accompli*. What is more, he retroactively values this accomplished act as the keeping of a promise: “Dah you goes, de ole true Huck, de on’y white gentleman dat ever kep’ his promise to ole Jim” (136). We have seen that Huck not only has not kept “his promise,” but has never even explicitly said the word. And yet, Jim’s projective construction of what Huck has done decisively shifts the course of Huck’s action, as the boy mobilizes his lying ways not against but on behalf of Jim, telling an elaborate story to a white man so Jim can evade detection.

I do not mean to imply that, in order to track the shift from Huck's "relatively static social attitudes" to "the complications of response" (Poirier 200) he demonstrates, one must begin with Jim instead of Huck. It would be an error to merely invert the privileging of Huck and characterize Jim as the dominant agent within the scene. Jim's agency consists not in a direct consolidation of will, but in a rhetorical adjustment whereby he shifts his orientation toward Huck and expands the latter's volitional outlook. Jim does not simply address Huck as one character to another, but rather, takes up the perspective of a hypothetical "free man," which suspends the reality of the present in favor of an imagined future, thereby testing out the boundaries between fictionality and the real, and between ideal and concrete action. What Trilling calls Huck's moral testing must first of all pass through a stylistic shift which tests out the possibilities and limits inherent in a suspension of the real. In ventriloquizing an as yet fictional free man and thereby figuring Huck's act in the future anterior—as something Huck *will have done*—Jim's rhetorical position recalls not so much a character within a dialogue as a romancers's capacity to "bewitch time itself" (Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination* 154); drawing Huck into this suspended reality, Jim perturbs Huck's sense of what is to be done in the narrative present.

This bewitching of the time of action that infiltrates Huck's agential intuitions is intensified in a second scene, in which Huck, this time in Jim's absence, once again provisionally decides to reveal his companion's whereabouts. In this instance, it is not Jim's ventriloquizing speech acts but rather a *vision* that supplants practical deliberation and, displacing the affective protocols of novelistic realism with those of romance, eventually dislodges Huck's decision; even more overtly than Jim's earlier rhetorical act, this vision voids the narrative present, at once

recollecting past acts and propelling Huck toward an imminent choice.[3] The climax of Huck's vision, moreover, actually *revises* the order in which the remembered events had actually taken place: "[…] and at last I struck the time I saved him by telling the men we had small-pox aboard, and he was so grateful, and said I was the best friend old Jim ever had in the world, and the only one he's got now; and then I happened to look around, and see that paper [a letter he has written but not sent to Jim's owner]" (317). If we assume that this parataxis is supposed to comprise a linear narrative, it is in fact out of order: in the earlier scene, Jim claims Huck as his only friend *before* Huck saves him with the lie. In other words, what Bakhtin calls the bewitching of time is reenacted in this reverie: rather than recollecting an (actual) moment of weakness set off by Jim's voice, Huck assumes the (fictional) status of a wholehearted initiator of action. But lest we imagine that Huck takes on the status of a sovereign agent with a newly stable moral center, we must recall how Jim's voice continues to resound within his own. Most significantly, Jim's claiming of Huck as the only friend he has "now" is both conserved verbatim and transformed in Huck's vision: by re-voicing Jim's "now," Huck both absorbs Jim's performative claim and activates it within the "now" of impending action. A strict rendering of the memory *as* a memory might replace the "now" with a "then." But at this point, Huck bewitches time insofar as his vision resuscitates a past *now* and reinserts it as a climactic *now* that registers the urgency of a moral decision, which Huck marks as he decides to destroy his letter, saying to himself, "'All right, then, I'll *go* to hell' […]" (317).

[3] I will soon explore more explicitly Huck Finn's incorporation of romance. For now I will simply point out that, as Bakhtin has noted, the "vision" has a long history as a structuring device of medieval romance; the vision, like a dream, excludes the temporal dimension from the realm of action (*Dialogic* 156). While Huck's vision, in which he fondly remembers his time on the river with Jim, does not exactly install a timeless "vertical world" (Bakhtin 157) in place of the sublunary world of realism, it nonetheless radically destabilizes the time of action

Huck Finn vividly illustrates how volition can shift in accordance with generic and stylistic disruptions of realist conventions, disruptions which push the will toward a new form of social agency. Huck's act of assuming the hell-bound, lowdown status of the abolitionist, affirmed in the two negative acts I have discussed, marks his will as thoroughly inextricable from the social relations and attitudes in which he is embedded. Richard Poirier argues that Huck's character is at odds with the very notion of society, and hence "can exist at all only outside the society that the novel allows us to imagine" (206). I would qualify Poirier's claim: while Huck as an identifiable *individual* is rendered most salient at a remove from society, his *will*, emerging within the novel's loosening of realist conventions, cannot be separated from the concrete social world proper to the novel as a genre. Both Huck and Jim only exercise agency insofar as they are situated within a field of generic and stylistic tensions which complicate our sense of how the will operates.

This field of tensions is precisely that of the novel as a form, wherein romance and realism are given rein to resonate, conflict, and overlap. The history of the novel—the loose baggy genre I will be investigating in this dissertation—testifies to the way in which realism must reckon with an ambivalent attachment to romance, and vice versa. If Cervantes produced the quintessential novel in *Don Quixote*, the quixotic *Huck Finn* proves an exemplary generic descendent. As I am using the term, and as I will deploy it throughout this dissertation, *the novel* can be defined as a lengthy fictional prose narrative which sustains a productive tension between romance and realism. Romance and realism as I understand them do not constitute genres unto themselves but rather two *tendencies* that animate the novel form and which are at times, but not necessarily, in conflict with one another. Drawing upon various critical traditions, I will presume that *romance* comprises the following: a penchant for stylization, abstraction, and generic

admixture; an eagerness to play with language as such, often seductively, or to the effect of corroding the distinction between intra-novelistic fact and fiction; an emphasis on freely performed activity over personality; a free-wheeling manipulation of narrative temporality; and finally, a willingness to allow imagination to dictate the shape of a fictional world. In sum, romance narratives test out the efficacy of the "magical decree […] implicit in all language," the utterance, "*Let there be* such and such" (Burke, *Philosophy of Literary Form* 4, Burke's emphasis) articulated as a fiat already moving toward description.

By contrast, I understand *realism* to include the following features: a tendency to concretize or strip away immaterial aspects of a world; a commitment to the coherence of a fictional world, one which can be understood as *real* within the confines of the fiction; a commitment to the coherence of character, registered in a proper name or personal pronoun; a tendency to resist or constrain freely performed actions, which nonetheless are necessary to give coherence to character and plot; a demystifying or deflationary drive akin to the naturalizing tendency of the Enlightenment, which seeks to expose the forms embedded in culture or society as dubious, arbitrary, or illegitimate; an underlying linear temporality, befitting secular modernity's understanding of historical time; and, finally, as a dialectical consequence of its deflationary drive, a conservative tendency to reinstate a form of historical actuality, a world in which social or cultural forms, though critically examined, remain constituent elements of a represented world.

This dissertation will investigate how the problem of the will is at issue not only in Twain's work, but in the generic tensions that stimulate the rise and development of the novel form. Through my reading of *Huck Finn*, I have suggested that the problem of the will emerges precisely within the interplay between these two tendencies. Although my reading of Twain has

given indications of how I want to use the term "will," one might wonder what exactly I mean by "problem of the will" in this context, as the concept of the will has been for centuries notoriously difficult to pin down. For now, I will simply say that, by *problem of the will*, I mean the problem of how the subject is to orient herself in relation to a field of prospective action. For the purposes of my inquiry, this formal definition has the advantage of both capaciousness and specificity. First, it narrows down the question of will by excluding phenomenological criteria: willing need not entail any particular *feeling* of willing.[4] Similarly, this definition displaces the distinction between conscious *attitudes* we might associate with the will and unconscious *impulses*—which might seem willed or unwilled, depending on the theory.[5] Lastly, this definition retains a relation to *action*, thereby distinguishing it—in principle if not in empirical cases—from related psychological concepts such as belief and desire, as well as metaphysical concepts that attribute a will to vital forces, matter, or being as such.

I will now turn to three pioneering theorists of the novel— José Ortega y Gasset, Georg Lukács, and Mikhail Bakhtin—whose work offers three distinct vantages on the novelistic will.[6]

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[4] For this reason, my project will take a quite different direction than that pursued by Sara Ahmed's *Willful Subjects*, which is concerned with the experience of willing, including the experience of being labeled as "willful." For the same reason, the novelistic will on my account differs from what Hannah Arendt, in her account of the will from *The Life of the Mind*, calls the "willing ego," which has its characteristic "moods" such as impatience, disquiet, and worry (37-38).

[5] It is especially important to not confuse *orientation* with *attitude*, precisely insofar as the notions are so similar and overlap in many concrete cases. For the sake of contrast, consider the definition Stanley Cavell offers in the context of a reading of Dickens: "[…] I am not thinking of the will as a kind of strength which I may have more or less of, but as a perspective I may or may not be able to take upon myself. So one might say that a will is not a phenomenon but an attitude toward phenomena" (*The Claim of Reason*, 361). As I shall show throughout this dissertation, one might have an orientation or bearing toward a potential action that does not factor into a mental attitude. For example, in my first chapter, I will try to show that even if Melville's Ahab has the *attitude* of an extreme individualist, his *orientation* is toward his specific genre and style of sociality; his will works through the possibilities afforded through this socio-aesthetic form. Moreover, *orientation* will not be defined in opposition to what Cavell calls "a kind of strength"; an orientation toward action might very well depend on a quantum of strength or power.

[6] In a volume of essays devoted to the theory of the novel—a volume bearing that same name—Michael McKeon groups the writings of Ortega, Lukács, and Bakhtin under the imposing heading of "Grand Theory." McKeon's classificatory scheme suggests that more recent theorists have felt compelled to provide more nuanced (albeit theoretically indebted) accounts of the development of the novel, with the benefit of a much larger scholarly archive

While recent historicist and theoretical accounts of the novel have by and large marginalized or dismissed the philosophical problem of the will, these early theorists—all three of whom were, not incidentally, philosophers as well—viewed this problem, implicitly or explicitly, as fundamental to the development of this singularly modern literary form. By way of a critical engagement with these early critics, I will gradually shape my own account of what it might mean for the novel form to pose and respond to the problem of the will.

I. Novel Form and the Problem of the Will in Ortega y Gasset, Lukács, and Bakthin

I will begin with Ortega's early treatise, *Meditations on Quixote*, which revolves quite explicitly around the problem of the will. In Ortega's reading of Cervantes, the problem of the hero's will condenses a problem proper to the novel as a genre, the problem I have identified as the tension between romance and realism, which in this instance correlates with a tension between the fantastical and the actual: "[W]hat is related in the book of chivalry has reality in the imagination of Don Quixote, who, in his turn, enjoys an unquestionable existence. So that, although the realistic novel was born in opposition to the so-called novel of fantasy, it carries adventure enclosed within its body" (48).[7] As Ortega's paradigmatic novelistic hero, Cervantes' knight-errant, while "belong[ing] entirely to reality," also possesses an "untamed will" that is somehow included within this reality, the illusory basis of this will notwithstanding (48). Following his discussion of two famous scenes in the novel wherein Quixote intervenes passionately *within*

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and decades of time to pick out the elements of so-called Grand Theory of that might seem naïve, essentialist, or downright erroneous. While I will be engaged with these later theorists throughout this dissertation, part of my aim is to recuperate a theme running through the theories of Ortega, Lukács, Bakhtin that I believe has become unjustly neglected, or worse, treated with contempt.

[7] We have seen that this is true of *Huck Finn*, which carries *Quixote* enclosed within its body.

reality while failing to discriminate between the real and the fictional, the material and the ideal, Ortega lays out the philosophical problem that Cervantes' protagonist embodies:

> We had left something hanging in mid-air, wavering between the room in the inn and Master Pedro's puppet show. This something is nothing less than the will of Don Quixote. People may be able to take good fortune away from this neighbor of ours, but they will not be able to take away his effort and courage. His adventures may be the vapors of a fermenting brain, but his will for adventure is real and true. Now, adventure is a dislocation of the material order, something unreal. In this will for adventure, in this effort and courage, we come across a strange dual nature, whose two elements belong to opposite worlds: the will is real but what is willed is not real. (49)

For Ortega, then, the problem of the realistic novel's incorporation of romance—of the realm of the ideal or fictional—is concentrated within the hero, who carries a will, as it were, enclosed within his being, even as the object or rationale of this will is not part of novel's external world.

In Ortega's view, Quixote is an exemplary novelistic hero not because he is delusional, but because he offers a limit case of heroic agency itself, which is always predicated on the problem of how the ideal can overcome the inertia of reality—or alternatively put, how the adventures of the will can effect a "dislocation of the material order." From the case of Cervantes' hero, Ortega extrapolates an account of heroic will to which the novel genre, in contrast to the epic (286), can give form:

> How is it possible for that which does not exist—a projected adventure—to govern and alter harsh reality? Perhaps it is not possible, but it is a fact that men aim at altering the course of things; they refuse to repeat the gestures that custom,

> tradition, or biological instincts force them to make […] The hero's will is not that of his ancestors nor of his society, but his own. The will to be oneself is heroism. (49)

While this last definition of heroism may strike us as cloyingly sincere, Ortega tempers this effect by insisting that the novelistic hero is always on the verge of becoming comically ridiculous. The transition from the tragic dimension to the comic occurs when realism's finely tuned perceptual apparatus ruthlessly unveils a laughable fantasy at the heart of heroic idealism: "The transference of the heroic character from the plane of the will to that of perception causes the involution of tragedy, its disintegration—and makes comedy of it" (53). But for Ortega, this transference is never complete: the novel is inevitably tragicomic (51). That is, the quintessential novelistic protagonist is not *merely* unmasked as a delusional dreamer or a fraud, but remains to some degree on the plane of the will, wherein his attempts to act, "alter harsh reality," must be compelling as a factor *within* reality lest the novel fall into what Ortega calls "pure comedy" (51).

In a sense, the give-and-take of tragedy and comedy that Ortega identifies as constitutive of the novel recapitulates the tension between romance and realism that I have been tracking. In schematic terms, romance here would entail a tragic will to perform impossible deeds, while realism would entail a deflationary drive to puncture volitional pretensions and reduce willful heroes to farcical antiheroes. As I have suggested in relation to *Huck Finn*, however, the will cannot simply be located on the side of either romance or realism. Although Ortega seems to associate the will, defined as "that paradoxical object which begins in reality and ends in the ideal" (48), with the romantic and tragic dimension of heroism—the reduction of agency to the insubstantial—one must also note that the will, to the degree that it is novelistic, necessarily

exposes itself to corrosive powers of realism. One tendency of novelistic realism is to threaten not just the viability of action but its existential dignity (which tragedy, for instance, retains). *Don Quixote* looks ahead to an era in which the very idea of heroic action is rendered suspect or altogether impossible. Milan Kundera, in a sequence of meditations on the novel genre that reads like a contemporary homage to Ortega's *Meditations*, distinguishes the novel from the epic on precisely this basis:

> Like the epic in earlier times, the novel too is founded on action. But in a novel action is made problematic, appears as a multi-faceted question: If action is merely the effect of obedience does it count as action? And how to distinguish the activity of repetitive gesture from routine? And what does the word freedom mean, *in concrete*, in a bureaucratized modern world where the possibilities to act are so minute? (145)

Kundera here encapsulates the dilemma of the novelistic antihero, whose imperative to act stands in contradiction to a social world wherein action is disciplined, constrained, and controlled, often through systematic and imperceptible mechanisms. The possibility of meaningful action devolves into a leap of faith: "I believe in nothing if not in action," Ralph Ellison's desperate narrator tells us in *Invisible Man* after encountering a series of practical dead ends which, siphoning out any values that might inform action, have literally driven him into a hole underground. The Invisible Man's romantic investment in "ideas" and the possibility of their worldly manifestation register a kind quixotism without content, yet also subtly resist Weberian disenchantment: "Without the possibility of action, all knowledge comes to one labeled 'file and forget,' and I can neither file nor forget" (579).

This contradiction—between the paltry agential affordances of the modern social world and the irrepressible excessiveness of the novelistic protagonist—is the central preoccupation of Lukács' *Theory of the Novel*. For Lukács, the disjunction between subject and world undergirds the novel as a form, registering a split internal to novelistic action in particular; thus, Lukács anticipates Kundera's observation that the novel in founded on action, but action rendered problematic.[8] For Lukács, novelistic estrangement occurs "when the world of deeds separates itself from men and, because of this independence, becomes hallow and incapable of absorbing the true meaning of deeds in itself […]" (66). Far from deflecting focus away from action, then, the novel renders action salient and problematic precisely insofar as action, like the hero himself, fails to find a secure place within the novel's social order. According to Lukács, this situation manifests itself in crime and madness, the hallmarks of the novelistic hero: "For crime and madness are objectivations of transcendental homelessness—the homelessness of an action in the human order of social relations, the homelessness of the soul in the ideal order of a supra-personal system of values" (61-62). Consequently, the paradigmatic "hero" of the novel is less heroic than *demonic*; to cite an example Lukács does not use, one might imagine Milton's Satan as a transitional figure between epic and novelistic heroism: "The novel hero's psychology is the field of action of the demonic" (90). So while this "field of action" is at odds with the world's systems of evaluation, it also registers a kind of subjective energy that continues to insist within this world: Lukács sharpens his definition of the demonic by incorporating the terms of Goethe's reflections, which he cites verbatim: in Goethe's words, "Everything that restricts us seemed

[8] Hegel's brief observations on the "modern romance" (i.e., the novel) anticipate Lukacs himself. According to Hegel, "the knight-errantry of the heroes as they act in more modern romances is also altered [by civil society]. As individuals with their subjective ends of love, honour, and ambition, or with their ideals of world-reform, they stand opposed to this substantial order and the prose of actuality which puts difficulties in their way on all sides" (*Aesthetics* 592).

permeable by it [the demonic]; it seemed to arrange at will the necessary elements of our existence; it contracted time, it expanded space. It seemed at ease only in the impossible, and it thrust the possible from itself with contempt" (87). Lukács' appropriation of Goethe here brings together the notion of an impossible action—the novelistic action that cannot be subsumed within the world's value-system—and the problem of the will, with its irrepressible imperative to "arrange" the "elements of our existence" in the face of this impossibility.

Of course, the gamut of novelistic protagonists is far too wide to be squeezed within Lukács' and Goethe's category of the demonic. We are familiar with fiery characters such as Stendhal's Julien Sorel and Melville's Ahab, but also tepid non-agents such as Flaubert's Frédéric Moreau and Joyce's Leopold Bloom. Lukács is not unaware of the limits of this categorization; in spite of his provisional characterization of the hero as a sort of demon, he also recognizes, within what he calls the Romantic novel of disillusionment (118), an archetype that gravitates "towards passivity, a tendency to avoid outside conflicts and struggles rather than engage in them […]" (113). And yet, if these novels' heroes turn away from action, the novels register their concern for worldly action through the very ambivalence and incompleteness that marks the renunciation of the *vita activa*. The repudiation of deeds itself concerns the life of action, albeit negatively or indirectly: "An interiority denied the possibility of fulfilling itself in action turns inward, yet cannot finally renounce what it has lost forever […]" (118). This hero's incorrigible inwardness is not an *a priori* quality of subjectivity, but is itself an effect of foreclosed possibilities of action.

Thus far I have been insisting that in the accounts of Ortega and Lukács the problem of the will is a problem for the novel. Surprisingly enough, it is the example of the passive hero that allows one to appreciate the degree to which the novel form in particular is implicated in this

philosophical problem. Lukács argues that the "passivity of the epic hero" (drawing upon Goethe and Schiller) is fundamentally different than the passivity of the novelistic hero: whereas the former is passive by necessity, the latter need not be. It might seem counterintuitive to say that the epic hero is passive, but what Lukács means is that the epic hero, far from initiating actions of his own accord, integrates himself seamlessly within a totality, functioning as an "immobile point of the world's rhythmic movement" (89). Paradoxically one might say that the epic hero must be passive for the same reason that he must be active; such is the agential structure of the epic cosmos in which a single mode of activity is allotted to him. Lukács argues, by way of contrast, that "the novel hero's passivity is not a necessity," but "represents a distinct type in the structural possibilities of the novel" (89).[9] If the novelistic hero is not necessarily passive, it is because there is nothing inscribed in the order of things that dictates a given orientation toward action.[10] This is why even a novel ostensibly indifferent to human agency will nonetheless be haunted by its loss and evoke the specter of action within its style and form, if not its plot.

If the early Lukács' account of the novelistic hero seems all too dichotomous—assigning an active or passive quality to a given character type—it is likely because his "typology of the novel form" (95) proceeds from a single protagonist's relation to the world. Lukács' view of the hero tends to recapitulate the model of the subject Kierkegaard (a philosopher Lukács studied

[9] Lukács would later critique the modernist novel for disabling the protagonist in such a way that essentialized the passive dimension. In other words, the modernist novel deprives the human agent of "concrete potentiality"—that is, the capacity to make consequential decisions and enact them in the world. Instead, the modernist novel remains attached to "abstract potentiality," with its morass of fantasies, terrors, and self-delusions. For Lukács, of course, this critique is sociopolitical as well as aesthetic: in order to change the world, one must assume the possibility of meaningful action. Modernist ideology robs "human activity" of its meaning *a priori*, rather than testing out the possibilities and limits of its meaningfulness. Linking the early Lukács to the later critique of modernism, one might say that the modernist novel exemplifies an unfortunate offshoot of the Romantic "novel of disillusionment."

[10] A recurring joke in Denis Diderot's novel *Jacques the Fatalist* is that, while the eponymous antihero insists that all actions and events are already "written on high," he nonetheless must orient himself in a world in which the infallibility of the script can only appear as tautological. Jacques' own behavior demonstrates that even the character who is convinced of his complete passivity is not *necessarily* less passive than anyone else.

and admired) establishes, whereby the solitary subject faces an alien world wherein an act of faith is tantamount to madness. Novels, however, tend to build entire character systems which quickly break down the dualism that grounds his theory of the novel. Is there another way of thinking the novel's relation to the problem of the will, one more sensitive to the multiplicity of ideologies, points of view, and gradations of agential activity that novels accommodate?

Mikhail Bakhtin's account of the novel form offers, among many other things, the germ of a response to this question. Crucial to Bakhtin's view of the novel is the idea of agential *testing*. The theme of novelistic testing offers an apt entryway into the problem of the will, since testing out an idea, ideal, or worldview seems to demand the initiative of an agent: testing is necessarily a directional activity which, because it must proceed without guarantee, requires a kind of will. Invoking the idea of testing, Bakhtin reveals both his proximity to Lukács and his own distinctive approach. For Lukács,

> The novel tells of the adventure of interiority; the content of the novel is the story of the soul that goes to find itself, that seeks adventures in order to be proved and tested by them, and, by proving itself, to find its own essence. The inner security of the epic world excludes adventure in this essential sense: the heroes of the epic live through a whole variety of adventures, but the fact that they will pass the test, both inwardly and outwardly, is never in doubt […] (89)

On the one hand, Bakhtin's distinguishes epic from novel with an uncannily similar assessment: for Bakhtin, as for Lukács, "testing" is a response to a world in which there is no epic dispensation of value which could coordinate a character's worldly orientation.

> The idea of testing the hero, of testing his discourse, may very well be the most fundamental organizing idea in the novel, one that radically distinguishes it from

> the epic. From the very beginning the epic hero has stood on the other side of the trial; in the epic world, an atmosphere of doubt surrounding the hero's heroism is unthinkable. (*Dialogic* 388)

On the other hand, however, Bakhtin articulates the significance of testing in a radically different manner. First, for Bakhtin, it is not a *soul* that is tested but—as he puts it in a telling qualification of "hero"—a *discourse*. Thus, on Bakhtin's account, there is no significant difference between the "adventure of interiority" and the adventure of exteriority which might manifest itself in deeds. Both interiority and exteriority alike would be expressions of a discourse or language-image. That is, either interior or exterior representation would actualize one point of view within a heteroglossic assemblage—that is, a plurality of interacting and conflicting values and worldviews that, in Bakhtin's account, displaces not only the dispensation of the epic world but also Lukács' presumably unitary "supra-personal system of values," against which Lukács defines the novelistic hero. The displacement of the interior/exterior binary seems to provide a more flexible theoretical model insofar as it offers a common denominator for the wide variety of subjective orientations exhibited in this most unwieldy of genres.

One senses the potential of Bakhtin's approach to testing *in action* most vividly in his individual readings of texts—mostly notably those from his early work on Dostoevksy, that quintessential Bakhtinian novelist, whose work is devoted to "putting a person in extraordinary positions that expose and provoke him […] for the purpose of *testing* the idea and the man of the idea […]" (*Problems* 105). Bakhtin argues that the testing of a discourse works not through direct enactment, but through an interpersonal negotiation, which both informs and decenters the testing will. In one remarkable reading, focused on the dynamic between Smerdyakov and Ivan Karamazov in the events leading up to the murder of the latter's father, Fyodor Karamazov,

Bakhtin explores the mutual constitution of novelistic speech and action in meticulous detail. Even after Ivan has formulated his quintessential idea—that in a world without God everything is permitted—he still has not actualized the determination of his idea, which would depend upon testing. Even as Ivan maintains that he has no desire to kill his father, his discursive encounter with Smerdyakov suggests otherwise. As Bakhtin has it, Smerdyakov "invests [Ivan's] will with the concrete forms of a specific volitional statement. Through Smerdyakov, Ivan's internal rejoinder is transformed from a desire into a deed" (*Problems* 259). That is, Ivan's "internal rejoinder"—his Smerdyakovian sense that a desire for patricide can be deduced from the premise that patricide is permitted (259)—is transformed from what Bakhtin would call a "potential discourse" into a concrete act given determinate body within the novel's plot structure. If Ivan "comes to realize his external involvement in the murder as well" (260), it is because the murder has been fatally tested out. In other words, the action that comes to define Ivan's fate reveals a complex mode of volitional testing that works through the vicissitudes of a socially mediated discourse.

In readings such as these, the provisional idea and its actualization in the deed seems thoroughly interdependent yet distinct. When one views the question of the will in terms of Bakhtin's more general theoretical commitments, however, discourse-testing presents a problem, insofar as it renders vague the status of novelistic action as such. Bakhtin's work on the novel at times dismisses the significance of action altogether. In "Discourse in the Novel," he writes:

> No less than a person in drama or in epic, the person in a novel may *act*—but such action is always highlighted by ideology, is always harnessed to the character's discourse (even if that discourse is as yet only a potential discourse), is associated with an ideological motif and occupies a definite ideological position. (334)

Thus, novelistic action for Bakhtin seems nothing more than a symptom of a "definite ideological position" (which for Bakhtin means not false consciousness, but something like a concrete worldview). This devaluation of action raises another question: to what degree is action necessary to "test" one's discourse? A comparison with the position Lukács' comes to develop roughly around the same time Bakhtin publishes his essay (1934-35) is instructive. For the more polemical Lukács of "Narrate or Describe?" (1936), the novel must retain a connection with testing via concrete action: "Men's words, subjective reactions and thoughts are shown to be true or false, genuine or deceptive, significant or fatuous, in practice—as they succeed or fail in deeds and action" (123); "Without the interaction of struggle among people, without testing in action, everything in composition becomes arbitrary and incidental" (134). This is not the place to engage with Lukács' controversial aesthetic and ideological evaluations; I simply want to demonstrate, by way of contrast, the ambiguity in Bakhtin's view of action. On the one hand, Bakhtin holds that "[t]he action and individual act of a character are essential in order to expose—as well as to test—his ideological position, his discourse" (*Dialogic Imagination* 334). On the other, Bakhtin repeatedly reduces novelistic action to a mere accoutrement of this ideological position, often lumping it with the "discourse" on which it depends: "The activity of a character in a novel is always ideologically demarcated: he lives and acts in an ideological world of his own (and not the unitary world of the epic), he has his own perception of the world that is incarnated in his action and in his discourse" (*Dialogic* 335). If action is not subordinated to language, it is very often lumped in as a kind of afterthought.

Another problem arising as a consequence of Bakhtin's devaluation of action is his devaluation of plot, which, as Joseph Frank has suggested, distorts Bakhtin's understanding of the novel and its modes of social valuation (208). To devalue action is necessarily to devalue

plot, to the degree that the very intelligibility of narrative itself depends upon the complication of symbolically mediated action (including interaction) and temporal structuration and sequencing.[11] Plot is of irreducible significance to the novel insofar as it registers the *impact* of action on a novelistic world, and thereby raises the stakes of the problem of the will, which, as I have suggested, refers to the problem of how one orients oneself with respect to action. Just as Bakhtin's individual analyses at times imply the significance of the distinction between word and deed, they also frequently acknowledge the way in which plot can serve as a necessary structuring device for the novelistic will. In an essay on the *Bildungsroman* from the 1930s, for example, Bakhtin describes in detail an unwritten novel of Goethe's, inspired by the latter's trip to the ancient site of Pyrmont, wherein Goethe, on Bakhtin's account, witnessed in a pattern of planted trees the "*vestige of a single human will acting in a planned way*" (32, Bakhtin's emphasis). Goethe's apparent intention was to resuscitate this ancient will in a novel *about* a creative will testing itself. Bakhtin describes the unrealized work in terms that hint at an homage to *Don Quixote*: the novel "was to be written in the style of the late sixteenth century" (*Speech Genres* 49) and detail the progress of a knight, leading a mass migration to Pyrmont (49). "This entire plan," Bakhtin writes, "is nothing other than an attempt to transform historically creative will into a plot, both the spontaneous mass will of the people and the organizing will of the leader, of which Pyrmont is a direct visible vestige […]" (49). In describing Goethe's method, Bakhtin chooses as an exemplary case a literal *will to plot*, whereby the artistic will is redoubled in a collective will that synthesizes spontaneity and organization.[12]

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[11] Here, I am drawing on Ricoeur's compelling argument in *Time and Narrative: Volume 1*, 54-57.

[12] At one point in "Discourse in the Novel" as well, Bakhtin recognizes the significance of plot's ability to give structure to a protagonist's translation of thought (idea) into action (plot): for instance, considering the motif of testing in the adventure novel, he writes, "brute adventure cannot in itself ever be the organizing force in a novel. On the contrary, we always uncover in any adventure the traces of some idea that had organized it earlier, some idea

These particular analyses, however, remain in tension with Bakhtin's more general theoretical commitments. Perhaps it is not accidental that Bakhtin chose an *unwritten* project of Goethe's to study in such detail. In accordance with his more general view of human subjectivity, Bakhtin defines the novelistic protagonist in terms its incompleteness: "There always remains him in unrealized potential and unrealized demands" (*Dialogic* 37).[13] But Bakhtin's insistence on the protagonist's "unrealized potential" also functions to underwrite his demotion of plot and action, devices which novels depend on to formalize the effects of decisive agency. According to Bakhtin, the novel is fundamentally concerned with "the theme of the hero's inadequacy to his fate or his situation" (*Dialogic* 37). While there is something to this claim, one should nonetheless note that a character's "fate" and "situation" tell us a great deal about a character's *agential specificity*. A character's fate and situation necessarily reveals something about her "concrete potentiality" (to use Lukács' Hegelian language), about the specific way in which a character commits—or fails or declines to commit—to specific actions. For Bakhtin, however, the actualization of character is less important than the diffuse specters of the possible that novels conjure up: "Reality as we have it in the novel is only one of many possible realities; it is not inevitable, not arbitrary, it bears within itself other possibilities" (*Dialogic* 37). Because he minimizes the significance of the distinction between "concrete potentiality" and "abstract potentiality"—between the actualized and the abstractly possible—any effort to reconstruct a strictly Bakhtinian account of the will confronts a theoretical deadlock.

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that had structured the body of the given plot and had animated it" (*Dialogic* 390). Here, Bakhtin implies that the "idea" possesses the volitional "force" to galvanize a plot which would otherwise lack organization.

[13] In this case, the humanist Bakhtin seems to be speaking about both the novelistic protagonist and "man" as such.

At this point, I want to step back and reposition the theory of the novel by developing a schematic history of the will, which will focus on the manner in which a linguistically mediated will is seen to enable concrete action—or, in some variations, to undermine its import. This section will, on the one hand, help situate Ortega, Lukács, and especially Bakhin philosophically, and, on the other, provide the groundwork for one of my key arguments to be advanced in section following this next one—namely, that the novel opens up and renders a problematic relation to a palpable *a field of material action*, which functions as a condition of its intelligibility. In contrast to various philosophical threads that would absorb willed action into language without remainder, reduce it to naturalistic processes, or dismiss it as utterly mysterious phenomenon, novelistic form will be seen to both complicate the relation between willed action and language and render their *differentiation* salient.

II. The Linguistic Mediation of the Will: Philosophical Origins of a Novelistic Problem

The problem of the relationship of the word to the thought and the word to the desire, to the will, to the demand. Ideas about the magicality of the word.

Bakhtin, "The Problem of the Text"

For as soon as I had the will, I would have had a wholehearted will. At this point the power to act is identical with the will. Nevertheless, it did not happen. […] *For it is the will that commands the will to exist, and it commands not another will but itself. So the will that commands is incomplete, and what it commands does not happen. If it were complete, it would not need to command the will to exist, since it would exist already.*

Augustine, *Confessions*

As philosophers steeped in legacies of post-Kantian German idealism, Ortega, Lukács, and Bakhtin are well aware of the dilemmas inherent in thinking the reality of the will within a

naturalized cosmos and a disenchanted modern world. In this section, I want to show how the relationship between the will and the novel, which all three theorists intuit, stems from a prior imbrication of the concept of the will with language as such. We have seen that Twain's *Huck Finn* imaginatively narrates the tensions and resonances that obtain between spoken word and willed deed. This novelistic testing, as I shall suggest, is rooted in the tension between language and action that the philosophical conceptualization of the will brings into view. While both speech-act theory and philosophies of "symbolic action" have explored the conditions under which words can constitute deeds, the philosophical history of the will reveals both the mutual dependence and irreducible *difference* between words and actions.[14] In other words, if speech acts and symbolic actions are structured as scaled-down versions of divine volition, wherein there is no possible gap between linguistic fiat and consummated action, the problem of the will arises when the charged gap between word and deed is recognized as simultaneously galvanizing and insuperable. This is not, of course, to say that a willed action, in philosophical accounts or novelistic narratives, cannot take shape as a linguistic act. Rather, I want to focus on the way in which potential or actual action both depends upon language and remains in excess of language as such.

More specifically, the philosophical trajectory I will trace focuses on how problem of the will emerges as a function of language's capacity to *stipulate*. One reason this is necessary is because the specificity of the concept of the will—as opposed to, say, that of intention or purpose—inheres in the form of *command*. Propounding a definition much more traditional than he perhaps believed, Nietzsche differentiates the concept of the will on this basis: unlike striving or desiring, willing essentially involves the form of command and its attendant affects (*The Will*

[14] Cf. J.L. Austin's *How to Do Things with Words*, the seminal account of speech act theory. Cf. Kenneth Burke's *The Philosophy of Literary Form* and *A Grammar of Motives* for a theory of symbolic action in its many variations.

to Power 353). Moreover, by correlating will with the function of command, one can distinguish the problem of the will from the problem of *intention*. As the analytic philosopher Elizabeth Anscombe has pointed out, *command* is distinguished from *intention* by the fact that the former is instantiated through a sign or symbol (5); one speaks of the *expression of* an intention but not the expression of command, since command is *already* a kind of linguistic mark (5). While Anscombe may have meant simply to clarify the concept of intention by distinguishing it from a certain kind of speech-act, this distinction allows one to delineate the contours of the concept of the will. If the will is essentially bound up with command, and command is instantiated through a sign or symbol, the will can be shown to have an essential relation to the symbolic potentiality of language.

There is by no means a consensus regarding the origin of the concept of the will. One reason for considering Augustine the progenitor of this concept is that he possessed a novel intuition about the will's radical dependence on language—in particular on language's capacity to command. In his intellectual history of the idea of free will, Michael Frede disputes the notion that Augustine invented this idea, maintaining instead that his theory of the free will, far from breaking with the paradigm of late antiquity, follows closely upon the notion of will advanced by the Stoic philosophers, particularly Epictetus. Frede bases this claim on the idea that Augustine, like the Stoics, believed humans to be radically *un*free; while, unlike the Stoics, Augustine claims that humans lost their freedom as a result of the Fall, this distinction, for Frede, is not of paramount importance with respect to idea of free will itself. Frede believes that Augustine—once again following the Stoics—grants that humans have a *will*, in the weak sense that what they do is "up to them," but he denies that Augustine deems this will *free*. One might doubt that it is possible to separate "will" from "freedom" in this context—for reasons immanently

exegetical as well as conceptual. But even if one accepts this premise of Frede's claim, there is nonetheless another distinction to be drawn within the manner in which the Stoics and Augustine explicate their concepts of the will. I want to suggest that Augustine's reliance on Scriptural injunctions and exhortations, necessarily linguistic in form, signals a consequential break within this philosophical history.

Toward the conclusion of his early tract, *On the Free Choice of the Will*, Augustine argues, in a defense of God's punishment of Adam and mankind, that the virtues of rationality and wisdom are distinct in the following sense: while rationality enables humans to understand a divine precept, wisdom is required in order to *observe* it—that is, to actualize a good will. What is striking about Augustine's argument is that his notion of wisdom orbits around the idea of the prospective fulfillment of an articulated law—not the other way around: "[J]ust as the rational nature deserves to receive the precept, so to speak, so too does the observance of the precept deserve to receive wisdom" (122). Thus, in the context of the question of the will, wisdom as a practical capacity is not simply autonomous, but is drawn in by the hypothetical "observance of the precept" (122). Even if postlapsarian humans are not fundamentally good or wise, goodness and wisdom still must factor into their practical life. In his *Treatise on Grace and Free Choice*, Augustine argues that Scriptural injunctions would be unintelligible if humans lacked the capacity for wise observance: "Surely whenever Scripture says 'be willing' to do this or that, and wherever the will's work is required to do or not to do something in the divine admonitions, that is sufficient proof of free choice" (144). Here, the dynamic of command and obedience—which, for philosophers from Augustine to Heidegger, is constitutive of the concept of the will—depends upon the human capacity for free choice. Whereas Augustine recognizes that the doctrine of divine grace might seem to cast doubt on free will, he argues that Scripture

demonstrates the interdependence: “When God says ‘Turn to me and I shall turn to you’ [Zch. 1:3], one of these actions seems to pertain to our will, namely that we turn to Him, whereas the other pertains to His grace, namely that He also turns to us” (149). Augustine’s exhaustive analyses tend to construct the volition as a function of address: “When [Paul] bids them to work, this is addressed to their free choice” (158). Thus, while Augustine does not go so far as to say this explicitly, the will’s very actualization seems to depend upon our capacity to *receive* the word and respond accordingly.

Both following and radically departing from Augustine, Immanuel Kant views the human will as bound up with the form of a universalizable command, or what he calls a *categorical imperative*. Unlike Augustine, whose deductive arguments for the existence of the will accept Scriptural authority as axiomatic, Kant, a post-Enlightenment figure, recognizes that the argument for free will’s existence cannot appeal to the content of the Bible or any other text. Recognizing that the existence of will can neither be deduced from an authoritative source nor induced from empirical evidence, Kant inquires into the *conditions* under which we can imagine ourselves as free beings at all. To put it bluntly, Kant reverses Augustine’s argumentative tack: whereas Augustine deduces the will from the fact of a Biblical command, Kant deduces a form of command—one shorn of moral *content*—from the presupposition of free will. Concluding that rational beings can only be considered free and autonomous if they act under the *form* of a law by which they constrain themselves—rather than act from any content that would determine the will from without—Kant raises the question: What does it mean that the self-issued imperative commands us at every point? Kant argues in effect that, because we are finite beings and thereby subject to unconditional commands, we never actually fulfill the law; but far from being a cause for despair, this is the impossibility is the very condition of the finite will.

To show how Kant's analysis further develops Augustine's, one might cite Kant's own understanding of Scripture, as articulated in his *Critique of Practical Reason*. Like Augustine or any other devout Christian, Kant believes in the injunction to love one's neighbor as oneself. But Kant's understanding of the injunction is quite complex: he neither dismisses the commandment on the grounds of its impossibility nor thoroughly embraces its possible fulfillment. For Augustine, our deficiency as human beings implies that we need grace order to fulfill divine imperatives; for Kant, whose practical philosophy obviates the need for a theological edifice, the imperative as such is accorded a greater role, insofar as its formal force alone dictates our freedom from base inclinations. First, confronted with the notorious impossibility of loving on command, Kant must offer an interpretation that renders the law more subjectively approachable: "to love one's neighbor means to practice all duties toward him *gladly*" (69, Kant's emphasis). While such a practice, as rearticulated by Kant, might seem more viable than simply *loving*, Kant nonetheless concludes, "the command that makes this a rule cannot command us to *have* this disposition in dutiful actions but only to *strive* for it" (69). That is, even translated into an imperative to practice duties gladly, the commandment is in one sense self-contradictory: on the one hand, if we already possessed the requisite gladness, there would be no need for a command; on the other, "if we did it without liking to do it but only from respect for the law," this practice would contradict gladness (69). Thus, the necessity of striving to be adequate to the law stems from, on the one hand, our inability to act morally without the law, and on the other, the respect that enjoins us to continuously respond to the law's force. The notion of *striving* should not mislead here: unlike other evocations of striving from the history of philosophy, this striving is necessitated not by the nature of the striving being (beyond the formal presupposition of its rationality) or by external forces, but by the *form* of the command(ment) as such.

I have been arguing that, for Augustine and Kant, language is implicitly essential to the form of the command and thus to the very existence of the will. Moreover, I have suggested that Kant attributes more weight to the linguistic function itself, insofar as the imperative must be said to necessitate action without any recourse to an assumption of a divine grace that could supplement our wretched nature. Positioned within a post-Kantian framework, Hegel's account of the will, as developed in the section on "Morality" in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, renders the presupposition of language explicit and further specifies its function. In particular, in the transition from Kant's practical philosophy to Hegel's, we will see that the subject incurs the burden not only of giving himself the law, but of specifying *in speech* his precise relation to that law and thereby giving his will an overtly social dimension.

To show how this is the case, I will begin with Hegel's concept of *conscience*, which, perhaps counterintuitively, manifests itself solely as *action*. This rethinking of conscience is significant for the philosophical trajectory I have been tracking because it is in the context of this discussion that Hegel defines "acting as actualization" as "the pure form of willing" (*Phenomenology* 367). Conscience is not merely a feeling or a sensation, often supposed to sting, but rather, what Hegel will eventually call a "divine creative power" (377): it "knows and does what is concretely right"; "conscience is moral *acting* as acting," which transitions beyond the stage of an abstract morality "devoid of deeds" (368). Hegel further sharpens his definition of "conscience" by arguing that its actualization consists not simply in action's content—that is, the element of "*singular individuality*"—but in the action's form, which he posits as "*one's own conviction*." Hegel regards this form as the action's essence: conviction relates conscience to moral duty insofar as conscience has a "conviction about moral duty"—thereby bringing action to a status of being-recognized (*Anerkanntsein*), that is to say, to the status of actuality (372).

Furthermore, in Hegel's view, conviction itself only achieves actuality insofar as it is *articulated* in language. Lest action appear as merely "existent determinate action," which cannot on its own meet the demands of universal self-consciousness (376), consciousness must "*give voice to*" conviction, thereby securing the "validity of action," its universal dimension. The "knowing and willing" self can only become itself by testifying *in speech* to its conviction that it accomplishes its duty. In contrast to Kant, then, Hegel emphasizes the necessity of the willing subject becoming an *articulating* subject, one who literally formulates his conviction in language. The subject can only will an action insofar as he can speak to his concrete sense of right, and thereby render his action *explicitly* universal. But universality, at least at this dialectical stage, does not imply consensus; the willed action must simply be registered as such, and this registration does not preclude social contentiousness.[15]

At this point, I would like to return to Bakhtin—this time with both the Hegelian criterion of vocalization and Bakhtin's own stance toward novelistic agency in view. Having shown that Bakhtin privileges the "speaking person," I would now like to situate his account of volition in a wider context, as one must, since Bakhtin's theory of the novel is inseparable from his more general philosophical commitments. Whereas Hegel suggests that the willed deed is rendered actual and universal through articulation, Bakhtin, in a late essay, "The Problem of the Text," subsumes the deed under the category of speech from the outset. "Man's physical action," Bakhtin writes, "should be understood as a deed, but it is impossible to understand the deed outside its potential (that is, re-created by us) signifying expression […] *It is as though we are*

[15] In fact, in Hegel's dialectical narrative, articulated conviction will itself end up at a deadlock and thus give way to the necessity of mutual forgiveness. In a later text, *The Philosophy of Right*, conscience's conviction will yield to an undecidability between good and evil and thus be subsumed in dialectical movement toward the ethical form embodied in the modern state. For reasons that will become clear, the phase of *articulation* as the actualization of action on which I dwell here is most relevant for my account.

causing man to speak […]" (114, my emphasis). Bakhtin's insistence that action is at bottom signification is less surprising than how he enfolds his account of speech into the problem of the will; this maneuver helps place him within the lineage comprising Augustine, Kant, and Hegel. Bakhtin goes on to displace the willing self with what he calls a "speech will." The speech will articulates a specific point of view by measuring out an utterance; for Bakhtin, the speech will both initiates and "measure[s] the finalization of the utterance" (*Speech Genres* 77). According to Bakhtin, in contrast to the earlier philosophers I have discussed, this volitional expression is not necessarily tethered to moral commands or moral convictions; rather, it is related to *genres* and *styles*. "The speaker's speech will," Bakhtin writes, "is manifested primarily in the *choice of a particular speech genre*" (78). And the choice of genre carries with it the emergence of style: "Any style is inseparably related to the utterance and to typical forms of utterances, that is, speech genres" (63). Moreover, style is not simply subordinated to genre, but under certain conditions "violates or renews the given genre" (66).

The late Bakhtin's meditation of the dialectical relation between style and genre recalls his earlier literary-critical essay, "Discourse in the Novel," wherein he specifies the "stylistic uniqueness of the novel as a genre" in terms of "the combination of its styles" (262). Bakhtin's late essay makes visible a philosophical thread running through the earlier work that might otherwise remain obscure: in "Discourse in the Novel," the "speaking person" who epitomizes the novelistic channels volition *through* his very stylization. Bakhtinian stylization means something very specific. While his perplexing invocation of personhood might mislead, stylized subjectivity cannot take shape as the expression of an autonomous individual, but as refracted articulations constantly resonating within, and responding, to a social plurality. Not unlike the Hegelian conscience in its articulate form, the Bakhtinian figure needs an addressee in its bid for

universality and social recognition: “The distinctive qualities of a character’s discourse always strive for a certain social significance, a social breadth; such discourses are always potential languages” (333). Moreover, Bakhtin’s subject, like Hegel’s moral agent, is forced to open itself to social interrogation, and thereby becomes capable of *self*-interrogation. And yet, for Bakhtin, the striving for social significance and breadth never achieves any reconciliation with a universal self-consciousness; more in a Nietzschean vein, the Bakhtinian subject speaks agonistically within a field of social tensions, advocating for an ideological position that is “always open to contest” (334). In effect, Bakhtin shifts the dynamism of Nietzsche’s will to power into a linguistic register: what Bakhtin calls “internally persuasive discourse”—the subject’s appropriation, transformation, and transmission of alien discourses—is the first stage of a kind of self-overcoming via the other. The second stage of self-overcoming, in which a new level of creative speech becomes possible, occurs within an “intense interaction, a struggle with other internally persuasive discourses” (346). Bakhtin sees Dostoevsky as an exemplar here: the “profound and unresolved conflict with another’s word,” the “arena of never-ending struggle” (249), is constitutive not merely of Dostoevsky’s style but the stylistics of the novel as a genre. His citation of Dostoevsky in “Discourse in the Novel,” then, invites a transposition of his earlier work on Dostoevsky into a generalized account of novelistic agency—a form of agency we later see explicitly cast as “speech will.”

I want to pause to recapitulate the trajectory I have laid out. I have suggested that one way to tell the story of will’s philosophical conceptualization is as a series of accounts of the dialectic between language’s command-function and the will *qua* capacity for action. From the beginning of this history, philosophers have seized upon the resources of formal language not only as a supplement to a presupposed will, but as a way to ward off the suspicion that the

human will is pure fiction. Thus, defending the existence of the will in his early dialogue—as Milton will later put it, justifying the ways of God to man—Augustine draws upon the injunctions of Paul and upon God's Edenic prohibition, in an indirect demonstration that the very meaning of these words implies an extant will. With Kant, who occupies an epoch of increased skepticism regarding the will, the form of the moral law—which can only be approached by way of subjectively articulated maxims—saves freedom as an idea, even as its *existence* is indemonstrable. For Hegel's part, the abstract formalism of the Kantian law presents its own threat to the will; Hegel responds by compounding the volitional burdens of language. On the one hand, conscience, which both Kant and Hegel view as a medium through which one apprehends pure duty, is immune from any *given* content, from any specific action. On the other hand, conscience is immune from the determinate only because, in Hegel's phrase, "[i]t makes its determination *from itself alone*" (372), and *this* self-determination presents a problem insofar as "determinateness as such" (*Phenomenology* 372) plunges the self into the realm of sensibility or nature, wherein free will appears as "arbitrary free choice" and the rational agent appears in his "unconscious natural being" (372). As we have seen, the law alone—which guarantees only a "*mute*" moral consciousness at odds with itself (377)—cannot sublate this opposition internal to the movement of conscience; rather, the *declaring* of one's conviction transmutes the mere act into the "executive deed" (379). And finally, Bakhtin's account of volition as a form of speech imposes all the additional demands of authorship and stylization: just as the early Bakhtin imagines the authorial agent as free not only from causal or cognitive necessity, but also from "aesthetic necessity" (of the sort exemplified in *rhythm*) (*Art and Answerability* 119), the late Bakhtin formulates authorial agency in heroic terms, as a quest "for genre and style" (*Late Essays* 149).

During the course of this history, wherein language is increasingly counted on to guarantee the validity of action, something happens to the category of action itself. Action, that *sine qua non* of the will—and moreover, an *a priori* necessity for the very legibility of narrative[16]—comes to seem rather weightless. Whereas Augustine links the divine imperatives to the possibility of sinful or virtuous deeds, and Kant formulates the categorical imperative as an injunction to *act* in a universalizable manner, Hegel develops the progress of moral consciousness in a way that abolishes action altogether. In fact, it is his very elevation of the spoken word into a force of *actualization* that sanctions this erasure of *action*. At the end of the section on "Morality," Hegel suggests that the *confessing* consciousness facilitates, through speech, action's self-abolition: "The wounds of spirit heal and leave no scars behind; it is not the deed that is imperishable, but rather the deed is repossessed by spirit into itself [...]" (387). Thus, Hegel's valorization of spoken language as a moment in the progression of *Geist* ends up spiriting away the material traces of action. We have already seen that Bakhtin subordinates the reality of action to that of language, but this is not all. While he does not subscribe to Hegel's teleological and idealist commitment to the oneness of world-historical spirit, Bakhtin's promotion of dialogism to the status of *the* determining principle of the novel amounts to a comparable idealist dissolution of volition. "True," Bakhtin writes, "even in the novel heteroglossia is by and large always personified, incarnated in individual human figures, with disagreements and oppositions individualized. But such oppositions of individual wills and minds are submerged in social heteroglossia, they are reconceptualized through it" (*Dialogic* 326). To reconceptualize the will is one thing, to submerge it another: Bakhtin doubles down on this reduction, writing, "Oppositions between individuals are only surface upheavals of the

[16] Cf. Paul Ricoeur's *Time and Narrative: Volume 1*, 54-60; and Barthes' *S/Z*, 19.

untamed elements of social heteroglossia […]" (326). At this point, Bakhtin's account of willing recalls Schopenhauer more than Hegel or Nietzsche: the "untamed elements" that are individuated by way of, say, character, are rendered abstract and well-nigh unthinkable. The volitional dimension of style is reduced to a kind of blind striving that is constitutive of linguistic sociality as such.[17]

In the following section, and in the remainder of this dissertation, I will recuperate and critically develop Bakhtin's indispensable insights into the relation between novelistic stylization and volitional orientation. In contrast to Bakhtin, I will argue that what Lukács calls the novelistic "field of action" must be retained as central to any account of the form's inheritance and redeployment of the problem of the will. Just as confession can never fully heal the wounds of action (pace Hegel), heteroglossia can never neutralize the volitional ramifications of such novelistic devices as character and plot. In this next section, I will argue that the novel as a form rethinks the relation between stylization and the will precisely *through* its structural commitment to character and action. What will emerge is an account of character irreducible to a structuralist (functional) or humanist (mimetic) model—namely, an account in which character appears as a potential agent irreducible to a human-like entity or a structural function.

III. From Stylization to Volition: Toward a Definition of Novelistic Character

[17] The ambiguity running through Bakhtin's position—that he at once upholds the "speaking person" as the *sine qua non* of the novel and also dissolves persons within heteroglossia—may be rooted in an ambiguity within his favored figure of speech—that is, "speech" *as* a figure. Writing of Bakhtin's successors, Dorothy Hale has compelling argued that "[v]oice has become the metaphor that best accommodates the conflicting desires of critics and theorists who want to have their cultural subject and de-essentialize it, too. Fluid and evanescent yet also substantial and distinct, voice appeals to scholars as a critical term because it seems to provide a way of eliding the paralyzing dualisms that plague philosophical accounts of subjectivity" (197-198).

Unlike insignificance, which denotes a condition, style presupposes a deliberately embraced project. Insignificance might only befall one, whereas style, as the activist materialization of insignificance, one must choose, pursue, perform.

D.A. Miller, *The Secret of Style*

In defining novelistic character, I will give primacy to style over substance—that is, substance in both its philosophical and colloquial senses, as both an ontological category and a designation of concreteness as opposed to abstractness. In this sense, I am resisting the standard premises that have guided inquiries into novelistic character. That is, whereas critics and theorists have tended to organize their accounts around one of two questions—*Who* is a character? or *What* is a character?—I will begin with a different problem, which foregrounds the concept of stylization: *How* is a character? In what *manner* does a character exist in a fictional world?[18] My assumption is that character is invariably stylized insofar as it exposes itself to the stylizations that permeate the novel itself. Moreover, insofar as novelistic stylization exceeds the boundaries of the individual subject, it cannot be thought on the model of individual expressivity.[19] As we have seen in the case of *Huck Finn*, novelistic character cannot be quarantined from the more abstract and volatile operations of romance; Huck's character expands and shifts with his exposure to these dimensions. Moreover, even the "realist" text which attempts a strictly mimetic representation of human persons will contain dimensions of abstraction or stylization; sometimes it merely takes an adjustment in one's point of view to see them. Barthes, for instance, suggests

[18] I should mention two other works that, while following very different trajectories than my own, supplant these ontological premises in a similar way. Alan Bourassa's *Deleuze and American Literature: Affect and Virtuality in Faulkner, Wharton, Ellison, and McCarthy* offers a new image of novelistic character, wherein the humanist qualities often attributed to character are supplanted by various instantiations of Deleuzian "virtuality," which insists within character in a relatively determinate yet non-actualized form. S. Pearl Brilmyer, in her article "Plasticity, Form, and the Matter of Character in *Middlemarch*," derives from Eliot what she calls a "*physics of character*," arguing that novel's literal materialization of character undermines the assumption that character can be adequately thought in psychological terms.

[19] I follow Barthes here, who defines style as a citational and transformative operation, one based on "culture and not on expressivity" (*Rustle of Language* 99).

that the split between "person" and "figure" that for Frye marks the distinction between the novel and the romance is actually a division internal to the novelistic "character" (305). Moreover, what Frye identifies as the "something nihilistic and untameable" (*Anatomy* 305) that threatens to break out in romance is actually a threat proper to novelistic characterization, precisely to the degree that it is stylized.

I will argue not only that character is a site for novelistic stylization, but also that characters themselves act stylistically. Bakhtin's description of the *character zone*—a concept he deems "a most interesting object of study for stylistic and linguistic analysis" (322), but does not develop in detail—is helpful here. He defines "character zone" as "*the field of action* for a character's voice, *encroaching* in one way or another upon the authorial voice" (*Dialogic Imagination* 316, my emphasis). The character zone is thus not only *subject* to certain linguistic forms, but is simultaneously a mode of *subjecting* the world to a response that channels these linguistic forms. The zone constitutes a certain arrangement of stylized elements that does not merely add up to a context for a functional paper person, but effects the *transmission* of stylizations and thereby renders them transformative. Again, however, the crux of the issue is what sort of transformation is at stake. Bakhtin notes that the character zone, a "sphere of influence," "extends—and often quite far—beyond the boundaries of the direct discourse allotted to him" (320). But in my view, the "field of action"—and here I follow Lukács, who invokes the same phrase in reference to agents, not voices—implies a character's potential action as such, not simply its speech. Moreover, I want to suggest that part of what it *means* to orient oneself within a field of action is to bear the potential to open this field, expand it, or shape its contours. On account of the stylistic resources through which it is simultaneously determined and determining, the character exists as a potentially extended will, in the sense that some contemporary

philosophers speak of an "extended mind" that expands the scope of cognition beyond the material boundaries of the brain and even the body.[20]

Novelistic character can thus be defined as the *novel's site of mediation between stylization and a field of potential action*. Character, that is, marks a transitional site—but also, possibly, a site of suspension, blockage, or deflection—between literary stylizations and modes of willed action registered through structuring devices—most significantly, through what Barthes calls the "proairetic code" (*S/Z* 19). The proaieretic code is worth invoking here because it endows what Lukács and Bakhtin call the "field of action" with a structural and not merely thematic necessity; the code of potential actions becomes a condition of narrative intelligibility. Barthes takes "proairetic" from Aristotle's term, *proairesis*, translated as "the ability rationally to determine the result of an action" (18). The proairetic code not only accounts for the legibility of individual actions but also their sequential relations: "Such sequences [of narrative action] imply a logic in human behavior" (18). While Barthes is quick to insist that "in narrative […] the discourse rather than the characters determines the action" (18), he hedges by positing a mutually constitutive relation between discourse and character: "Sarrasine is impassioned because the discourse must not end; the discourse can continue because Sarrasine, impassioned, talks without listening. Both circuits are necessarily undecidable" (178). The concept of character as a site of mediation offers a new perspective on this problem. The category of stylization on my account cuts across discourse and character, in such a way that one could speak of stylized character "determin[ing] the action" without resorting to characters endowed with extra-textual free will or submitting to the tautological claim that discourse determines the action.[21]

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[20] See, for instance, Andy Clark's *Supersizing the Mind: Embodiment, Action, and Cognitive Extension*.

[21] In my view, Barthes' claim that discourse determines action lacks explanatory power. Elsewhere, he postulates a kind of "survival instinct" through which discourse determines characters to act**.** In metaphysical terms, this linguistic-vitalist claim this is clearly untenable. If Barthes means it as a metaphor (the more likely scenario), it is

Defining novelistic character in terms of stylization, however, presents some complications. With respect to the theory of character, most branches of criticism have viewed style as somewhat superfluous. Whether one attempts to define character in a structuralist sense, roughly, as a function or abstract entity within a plot, or in a humanist sense, as a mimetic representation of personhood, novelistic *style* seems to have little to contribute to the endeavor to define these textual non-persons.[22] Structuralist approaches, when they do not reduce characters to "actants" (Greimas' term for a specific functional agent within a plot), tend to view them as bearers of traits, which can be tracked on the level of narrative genres or codes.[23] Humanist approaches tend to invoke a character's complexity or ineffability, thereby running the risk of subsuming an epistemology of characterization into the much larger philosophical problem of other minds.[24] Even recent sophisticated theories of novelistic character such as Alex Woloch's, which systematically seeks to reconcile the antinomy between the structuralists and humanists, do not posit style per se as a necessary dimension of characterization. What is more, for some critics stylization seems to threaten the very integrity of novelistic character. As we have seen, Bakhtin's own elevation of combinatory stylization to the status of the novel's *sine qua non* is

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unhelpful insofar as it does not explain why discourse would need any *specific* action to begin or end—or for that matter, why discourse would ever come to an end.

[22] Jonathan Culler's suggests that, if structuralist attempts to reconceptualize novelistic character have been rather unsuccessful, it is because one aim of the structuralist project is to displace ideologically fraught terms such as "character" altogether (*Structuralist Poetics* 269). Fredric Jameson argues that this displacement of "character" encounters an impasse on structuralism's own terms, insofar as attempts to reduce it nonetheless leave traces of anthropomorphism, which resist the structuralist imperative of anti-humanist formalization. (Jameson's point is not made with respect to novelistic character in particular, but is relevant nonetheless.) For Jameson, even while theorists like Greimas produce systematic abstractions, they actually remain all-too-humanist, as their schemas surreptitiously convert "narrative function into so many acts or deeds of a human figure." Cf. Jameson 110-111. Rather than propose his own solution to this problem, Jameson (in 1981) calls for a historically grounded engagement with post-structuralist critiques of the subject.

[23] Cf. Barthes' *S/Z* and Todorov (39-49. Tellingly, Barthes' subsequent essay on style as a category mentions that he had not taken it up in *S/Z*.

[24] Cf. Martha Nussbaum's Stanley Cavell-inspired essay on Virginia Woolf. Cf. also Seymour Chatman's *Story and Discourse*, which pushes Barthes' understanding of the reader-responsive construction of character as a "paradigm of traits" in a humanist direction which celebrates the incompleteness and mystery of character.

bound up with his dissolution of character (*Dialogic Imagination* 335). More recently, D.A. Miller has suggested that the novelistic character-system tends to exclude figures who appear in the guise of style. Examining Robert Ferrars from Austen's *Sense and Sensibility*, Miller suggests that Robert's nihilistic investment in style and his correlative resistance to the "conjugal imperative"—in other words, his refusal of novelistic socialization—"is what renders him vacuous and inane, an almost self. His *style* would replace the self that, in any full historical, social, or *(above all) novelistic* way, can't yet cohere into something besides abjection" (28, my emphasis). Robert Ferrars, who Miller figures as an intra-novelistic version of Austen's own radically impersonal style, cannot fully occupy the narrative universe *as* a character (until, that is, he is ushered into the marriage plot at the novel's conclusion). With this exemplary case in mind, it is not surprising that, when one surveys the gamut of approaches to novelistic character—those fictional beings which, in Miller's phrase, "cohere into something"—style as such seems irrelevant at best.

At the same time, attempts to describe certain modes of characterization—those not necessarily deemed novelistic—have often appealed the effects of literary style. For instance, Northrop Frye argues that the novel and romance should be distinguished on the basis of characterization: whereas the novel gives an image of "real people," the prose romance—which in Frye's narrow definition includes many narratives we might want to classify as novels—features "stylized figures" (*Anatomy* 304).[25] Richard Poirier has taken up a version of this question in his work on the centrality of style in American literature, which in his view shares many of the characteristics Frye attributes to romance. Poirier critiques Leslie Fiedler's *Love and*

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[25] While Frye does suggest that these characters are somewhat dehumanized through their stylization, he also points out that the stylized character "radiates a glow of subjective intensity," thereby inviting the question—which he does not take up—of the relation between style and subjectivity, which intuitively seems like a significant problem for thinking novelistic characterization.

Death in the American Novel for putting an unwarranted "emphasis on 'character,' as if 'character' existed in nineteenth-century American fiction in the unfractured form it usually takes in English fiction of the same period" (34). The radical implication here is that the affirmation of style fractures character from within; this is epitomized by Henry James, whose radical late style gives him "total entry into the consciousness of all of his characters" (20), who, as readers of James have noted, could never speak or think with the refinement and abstractness of their author. The very opening of the proverbial windows of the house of fiction—to recall James' metaphor for the plurality of points of view contained within the novel—depends upon the fact that James "*is* his style" (20); within the "vast interior monologues" that define his characters, "James [is] playing all the parts at will" (20) through his imposing style, which Poirier rightly calls "an extraordinary invention in the history of language" (20).

At this point, then, I would like to turn to an example from James' *Wings of the Dove* that will help further elucidate my account of stylized character. But more than merely exemplifying character, the scene I will discuss actually *theorizes* novelistic character *qua* site of potential will. In this scene, Merton Densher, a poor Londoner secretly engaged to his beloved Kate Croy, finds himself feeling "perpetually bent to her will" (368): while she withholds the sexual intimacy he ardently desires, he continues to do her bidding, finding himself a pawn in Kate's scheme to have him marry their wealthy, dying friend in order to secure her inheritance. Like Don Quixote, Densher is not so much a positive entity unto himself, but a kind of charged void—one notably palpable in his lack of money—to be infused with romance stylizations. Having dutifully played along with Kate's ethically questionable scheme, he fancies himself rather chivalrous, feeling as though he has been, "as the French called it, *bon prince* with her" (368), compensating for his poverty by "living handsomely" and avoiding "reading the romance of his existence in a cheap

edition" (368). James' rendering of Densher's nascent volitional transmutation is worth quoting at length.

> The proof of a decent reaction in him against so much passivity was, with no great richness, that he at least knew—knew, that is, how he was, and how little he liked it as a thing accepted in mere helplessness. He was, for the moment, wistful—that above all described it; that was so large a part of the force that, as the autumn afternoon closed in, kept him, on his traghetto, positively throbbing with his question. His question connected itself, even while he stood, with his special smothered soreness, his sense almost of shame […] His question, as we have called it, was the interesting question of whether he had really no will left. How could he know—that was the point—without putting the matter to the test? It had been right to be *bon prince*, and the joy, something of the pride, of having lived, in spirit, handsomely, was even now compatible with the impulse to look into their account […] (369)

On the one hand, a Jamesian realism is on full display here: we see a concrete character working through a dilemma which will require concrete action, one informed by the pressures of family, social status, and of course, capitalist exchange value. On the other hand, the stylizations of romance inhere *within* this practical dilemma and are utterly indistinguishable from it. Densher's burgeoning volitional transformation is constituted *through* the tension between romance and realism. For instance, while Densher identifies his passivity as a kind of quixotic effort to live "handsomely," to eschew the "cheap edition" of his romance—his passage into a more active character, far from jettisoning this romance stylization in favor of a sober self-representation, *intensifies* it. First, the "proof" of Densher's "reaction […] against so much passivity" (369)

recalls not only the hard evidence proper to psychological realism, but, in the form of Jamesian figuration, the testing of a coin-minting process. Thus, Densher's "proof" aims to compensate for his lack of "richness"—in this case, to test out his volitional currency, to "put the matter to the test." Shortly thereafter, the metaphor consummates itself: Densher seeks "proof of his will." Even as Densher's ostensibly gives up on the romance of living handsomely "in spirit" (that is, tolerating celibacy), his quixotic pride carries over into his effort to recuperate his will, to shift the terms of "their account."

One might wonder whether the immediate meaning of Densher's "will" here—an assertiveness in his desire to have sex with Kate—undermines the import of what I have called his volitional transmutation. If Densher's sense of passivity is to be remedied by getting "what he wasn't having" (369), is the problem of the will not reduced to a banal symptom of wounded masculinity? But "the interesting question" of whether or not Densher has a will continues to "throb" throughout the remainder of the novel. James foreshadows this immediately: as though diffusing this question beyond the confines of Densher's consciousness, the narrator poses the "question" without naming it; we then see it "connect[ing] itself" with Densher's affective state, throbbing throughout the paragraph, leaving in question the question itself. In a dizzying maneuver, the narrator then assumes authorship of the "question" he has attributed to Densher ("His question, as we have called it…" (369)). Densher's ultimate response—his "testing" and offering of "proof"—occurs in the definitive act of will that concludes the novel: his renunciation of Milly's inheritance coupled with a stipulation that Kate must decide between him and the money. But neither paraphrase of the action nor a psychological explanation of motive accounts for the specificity of the novelistic will. The *style* in which Densher does this is the key dimension: *how* Densher acts—that is, how he translates novelistic stylization into a mode of

worldly agency—is embedded in any proper explanation of *what* he wills. Setting up his act by sending Kate a letter with the amount of Milly's inheritance sealed, Densher offers "proof" (his word) of his will to refuse the money, and moreover, does so to "test" Kate (his words again). In other words, the nuances and expansions of Densher's will are entirely immanent to James' stylized, ironizing repetitions: Densher's *proof* is, finally, in his renunciation of money; his *testing* of his own will, which will dictate his decision, is filtered through a testing of *Kate*, with whom he is inextricably tied. James stylization is not mere clever wordplay: at stake is nothing less than the intricate development of the answer to "the question"—the response to which Densher stylistically wills.

From the case of Merton Densher, one can mine a key insight into novelistic character: character constitutes the site of a test—not the testing of an idea or ideal, as Lukacs and Bakhtin would have it, but the testing of a literary style which *becomes* a testing of the will, of one's orientation toward action.[26]

Moreover, in the scene from *Wings*, a second dimension of stylized character emerges: this stylization of volition subverts the individualism that is so often assumed to undergird the concept of will. Here, we see James' fiction in tension with his own theory of the novel. Speaking of the aforementioned metaphor of the "house of fiction," James tells us that the house has innumerable windows, "every one of which has been pierced, or is still pierceable, in its vast front, by the needs of the individual vision and by the pressure of the individual will" (qtd. in

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[26] After hypothesizing that "testing" may be the single most important formal theme of the novel (388), Bakhtin hedges by pointing out that the "idea of testing cannot itself account for man's 'becoming'" (*Dialogic Imagination* 392). But he also finds a kind of ideal in the synthesis of testing and becoming: "The greatest examples of the European novel organically combine in themselves both themes" (393). (Lukács would almost certainly agree that some combination of testing and becoming is at the very core of the novel.) In the example of Densher, however, the themes are not even separable in principle: to test out the will *is* to induce self-becoming, since the testing of will does not presuppose any underlying content that would render identity static.

Hale 25). But as I have argued, Jamesian stylization calls into question this form of individualist subjectivity implied in his evocation of "individual vision" and "individual will." The will indeed can exert pressure, but this pressure consists precisely in stylization, not in the notion of a human individual.[27] To situate my argument in terms of James' architectural metaphor, the pressure the novelistic will exerts might depend on the window's tint or shape or thickness; or perhaps, the placing of the surrounding windows and a view onto other viewers; or, one might imagine, a capacity to not only look through but shatter the glass and explore the terrain outside.

The body of my dissertation will focus on the work of four American novelists. But I have avoided placing my project under the umbrella of that mythical category, "the American Novel," for a few reasons. First, attempts to argue for a unified body of American literature have been notoriously unsuccessful. Around the mid-20th century, it seemed that the best way to argue for the specificity of the American Novel was to subsume it under the category of the romance.[28] This argument found itself vulnerable, first of all, to the so-called New Americanists, who saw the "romance theory of American fiction" as an ideologically motivated project complicit in Cold War American exceptionalism.[29] Moreover, even as critics acknowledged the brilliance and

[27] One consequence of stylized character's subversion of the individualist will is that the novel form resists the correlation between stylized will and the romantic artist. For an example of this correlation, see Susan Sontag's "On Style," which defines individual style and will as mutually constitutive: "Style is the principle of decision in a work of art, the signature of the artist's will" (35). More recently, Philip Fisher, while not discussing the notion of style explicitly, suggests that the figure of the isolated artist embodies a paradigm of a modern individualist will: "The artist becomes an important model of authenticity because, working alone, he creates objects that more directly embody his uniqueness by means of acts of will than those who, in their working lives, cooperate with others […] The artist is the hero of a society of the will" (165).

[28] Seminal works that make this case with varying degrees of explicitness include D.H. Lawrence's *Studies in Classic American Literature*, Perry Miller's *Errand into the Wilderness*, Chase's *The American Novel and its Tradition*, Fiedler's *Love and Death in the American Novel*, Poirier's *A World Elsewhere: The Place of Style in American Literature*, and Michael Bell's *The Development of American Romance*.

[29] See Emily Miller Budick's "Sacvan Bercovitch, Stanley Cavell, and the Romance Theory of American Fiction."

continuing relevance of many of the studies, Romance Theory encountered trouble on its own terms: it seemed premised an untenable essentialism, evident first of all in the flagrant exclusion of American novelists who were less inclined to traffic in Cooper-style prose romance.[30] If a study like Lawrence Buell's *The Dream of the Great American Novel* is any indication, today's critics still invested in the canonical unity of American literature seem more inclined to approach the topic in meta-canonical terms—that is, as a body of literature whose apparent unity rests on the culture industry's mythologization *of* that unity.

The second and more interesting reason I have avoided locating my project under the heading of the American Novel is that the American novelists I will be reading—Herman Melville, William Faulkner, Toni Morrison, and Patricia Highsmith—provide fascinating case studies that novel theory today, considered as globally oriented field, would do well to consider. I agree with Jennifer Fleissner's contention that contemporary accounts of the novel as a genre have tended to neglect American fiction.[31] As will become clearer in the chapter summaries below and in the chapters themselves, these four novelists provide exemplary cases of novel form as I have loosely defined it—that is, as a longish prose narrative which mobilizes a dialectical tension between romance and realism.[32] While today critiques of the Romance Theory of American fiction seem unassailable, I also believe that critics such as Chase, Fiedler, and Poirier correctly intuited that romance tends to creep into American fiction more than into, say, the canonical 18th- and 19th-century British novels that have so often enjoyed pride of place

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[30] See John McWilliams' "The Rationale for 'The American Romance'."
[31] Cf. Fleissner's forthcoming work on the "maladies of the will" and novel form, which, as far as I understand, will focus on American authors. It goes without saying that I look forward to engaging with Fleissner's unpublished book.
[32] Unsurprisingly, like *Huck Finn*, the novels I will read are squarely within the tradition inaugurated by Cervantes.

within novel theory as we know it.[33] So, while there is a certain degree of arbitrariness in selecting instantiations of "novel form"—it would be nonsensical to assert that *Moby-Dick* is a "better" example of a novel than *Jane Eyre*—I have selected these four American novelists in order to ever so slightly resist the inertia of disciplinary formations, in a way that I hope will prove salutary for both Americanists and novel theorists.

This dissertation will include three chapters and a brief speculative conclusion. My first chapter positions Melville's *Moby-Dick* in relation to the theological practices and philosophical writings of the early American sermonizer, Jonathan Edwards. While Edwards' philosophical treatise, *Freedom of the Will*, argues for a strict determinism that accords with his Calvinist doctrine, I argue that his self-positioning as a preacher in relation to his congregation and community complicates the theory of agency propounded in his pious philosophical work. Namely, I suggest that Edwards' journals, essays, and sermons evince spaces of affectively charged willing which are routed through scenes of theatricalized call and response. *Moby-Dick*'s implication in the early American sermonic tradition is signaled early on with a chapel scene in which sailors congregate to hear a sermon on the biblical story of Jonah. This sermonic motif, I suggest, insinuates itself into Captain Ahab, who appears as a stylized figure oriented theatrically toward a collective. I demonstrate that, whatever Edwards or Ahab may say about themselves, their stylized social *practices*—historical in one case, fictional in the other—exemplify a *dramatic will* that differentiates itself from a model of volition predicated on self-transparent, conscious intention. Moreover, while the majority of Melville's critics have either celebrated or impugned what they see as Captain Ahab's strong-willed *individualism*, I contend that, through Ahab's rhetorically inflected relation to his crew, Melville dramatizes a

[33] Cf. Ian Watt's *The Rise of the Novel*, McKeon's *Origins of the English Novel*, and Nancy Armstrong's *How Novels Think*.

transpersonal will rooted in the call-and-response exchange. If Ahab's quest morphs from a spirited hunt into a fatalistic, suicidal determination to pursue the White Whale, this turn is not so much a reflection of Calvinist pessimism, but an effect of the stylized stance that Ahab adopts at the intersection of a romance of theatricality and a realism constraining material possibility. In sum, when Ahab's mode of action is juxtaposed with Edwardsian style, what might initially seem like an imposition of self-reliance is actually revealed to be complex and indirect form of *self-persuasion*, whereby Ahab's mediated rhetorical stylizations and social exchanges thoroughly determine his mode of willing throughout the novel.

Moving a century forward, my second chapter examines the work of Patricia Highsmith, a crime novelist who mobilizes a tension between 19th-century-style realism and the romance of suspenseful noir. Here, I use another theologian and philosopher to establish the terms on which I articulate the problem of the *suspenseful will*. I argue that Book VIII of Saint Augustine's *Confessions*, which famously offers a theory and phenomenology of the will, takes form as a peculiar kind of suspense narrative, whereby Augustine actively seeks conversion *by* holding himself in suspense, until he finds himself able to make a leap into a graceful state. While occupying the amoral space of late modernity, Highsmith's antiheroes must also endure the suspense of what Augustine calls the "birthpangs of conversion" (133) before making a leap to action. Highsmith's novels do not simply depict individual agents confronting the peril and terror of modern social life, but embed the very capacity for action within the stylizations of suspense technique. That is, novelistic suspense is not simply a set of generic codes that frames readerly expectation, but an affective force that is introjected *into* the novel as suspenseful volition. Poised at the interstices of domestic realism and noirish romance, Highsmith's subjects of conversion only *become* agents by suspending their habitual commitments, exposing themselves

to the invigorating rhythms of what I will call, following Mark Seltzer, stranger-sociality. After conceptualizing the form of will embedded in novelistic conversion, I turn to Highsmith's formalization of an *aversive* will, which, finding conversion to a certain mode of action impossible, tarries within the social space of suspense, willing forms of inaction which are nonetheless ethically and aesthetically consequential.

My third and last chapter pairs Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying* with Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, and argues that the incorporation of Gothic romance into the novel form allows both authors to reimagine the temporal boundaries and historical conditions of willing. The *Gothic will* is not a future-oriented faculty which would leave the past behind, but an organization of persistent forces from the past that inhere within ostensibly individuated characters. The possessed will brings about new potentialities and constraints, which reanimate modes of historical sociality and translate them as present-day action, which interrupts engrained forms of familial and cultural life. The chapter begins with an analysis of Edgar Allen Poe's tale "Ligeia," which figures the potential of a reanimated will to supersede the limits of individuated personhood and dictate the terms of responsive action. Distributing the reanimated will amongst a familial collective, Faulkner's novel imagines haunted volition on the level of agonistic entanglement, which emerges in the form of differential, stylized materializations of an undead matriarchal imperative. *As I Lay Dying* investigates the internal contradictions that inhere in collective action; far from unilaterally facilitating cooperative agency, stylized possession inspires converging and conflicting modes of fidelity. Complicating Faulkner's modernist use of the Gothic mode, Morrison's novel further expands the social scope of possessed willing, which must negotiate the tension between the claims of history and the imperatives of the present. In *Beloved*, undead wills bear the energy of entire collectives—the nameless victims of the Middle

Passage as well as generations of African-Americans bound by communal ritual. Through its pitting of Gothic romance against the conventions of domestic and social realism, *Beloved* probes the very limits of the novel form, testing its ability to imagine the vast ambit of reanimated historical determination.

I will briefly conclude this dissertation on a somber note, posing the following questions: Why is it that willed action in the novel, the modern literary form par excellence, so often takes the form of violence or destruction? Alternatively, why is the nonviolent novelistic will so often consigned to the task of remedying or preempting the effects of violence and destruction? How is it that even the most apolitical will can be relevant to the political imagination? While I will not adequately answer any of these questions, I will suggest that the novelistic will, insofar as it embodies virtual or actual collectives trespassing onto a field of action, cannot be cordoned off from our political aspirations and realities.

CHAPTER 1

MOBY-DICK, JONATHAN EDWARDS, AND THE DRAMA OF THE WILL

In a pivotal sequence of *Moby-Dick*'s famous "Quarter-Deck" scene, Captain Ahab deploys a form of call and response in an effort to commandeer his crew for his vengeful hunt. Here, Ahab does not issue direct commands, as he is often wont to do, but inaugurates a dialogic rhythm that allows his crew to emerge as respondents within an antiphonic exchange:

> "What do ye do when ye see a whale, men?"
>
> "Sing out for him!" was the impulsive rejoinder from a score of clubbed voices.
>
> "Good" cried Ahab, with a wild approval in his tones; observing the hearty animation into which his unexpected question had so magnetically thrown them.
>
> "And what do ye next, men?"
>
> "Lower away, and after him!"
>
> "And what tune is it ye pull to, men?"
>
> "A dead whale or a stove boat!" (180)

The efficacy of command no longer stems from the hierarchy of captain and crew; indeed, as Ahab later recognizes, it cannot, since his obstruction of the *Pequod*'s business venture could be resisted on both moral and legal grounds (232). Without normative guarantee, Ahab invests his staged commands with a subtle yet aggressive form of affective persuasion. In a less explicit manner, Ahab continues to use this form of call and response for the remainder of the chapter; while he does subsequently give commands, they are offered and received within a scene of heightened collective affect that maximizes responsiveness. Calling is prior to commanding and

responding is prior to submission. At this point, the crew seems so receptive to Ahab's commands that Ahab, while compelling his mates to engage in a ritualistic vow with the *Pequod*'s harpooneers, is able to claim, "I do not order ye; ye will it. Cut your seizings and draw the poles, ye harpooneers" (185). Thus, rather than directly order his crew to participate in the vow, Ahab claims that he orders nothing at all—that, instead, his mates have already *willed* to partake of his ceremony and, by metonymic extension, the hunt of the White Whale itself.

The term "will" has a curious function here: at the moment of its articulation, it is suspended between utterance and response; willing is neither proper to Ahab nor the crew, but traverses Ahab's claim and the harpooneers' and mates' subsequent obedience. Thus, "will" here is not a direct imposition on another person—as the simple command would be—but a form of agency embedded within the pulsating drama of call and response. The response of the mates and harpooneers—their silent obedience and implicit acknowledgment of Ahab's claim upon them—retroactively endows Ahab's utterance with a kind of pragmatic truth-value. By responding in the form of consent, the mates and harpooneers facilitate the operation of "will" even though no party has assumed ownership of it. In this instance, the notion of will is thoroughly bound up with its complex dramatic iteration; will here is neither a preexisting faculty of a subject or group of subjects, nor a sudden volitional thrust. Rather, it materializes within the dynamic tension between the captain's exhortation and the crew's galvanized responsiveness. Ahab's commentary on this scene invites us to imagine will as dramatically generated rather than psychologically localized. After this drinking ritual takes place, Ahab is able to declare the vow consummated: "Ha! Starbuck! but the deed is done! Yon ratifying sun now waits to sit upon it" (185). Ahab's taunt—"the deed is done!"—orbits around an absent performative: there is no single moment in "The Quarter-Deck" in which an explicit vow is taken. The ontology of the

willed deed is radically unstable, as it seems to depend upon Ahab's process of persuasion rather than a transparent public act performed at a single moment in time. The vow inheres in the form of consent given within Ahab's dramatic convocation. Only in light of the entire *movement* of this dramatic interlude does Ahab appear justified in suggesting that a willed action, that is, the collective vow, has been accomplished.

This picture of will—wherein volition, instead of stemming from private self-reflection or issuing in direct worldly self-affirmation, depends upon the mediation of a dramatic situation to articulate itself—is not confined to this episode alone, but permeates the entirety of *Moby-Dick*. Melville's novel on the whole demands that we rethink the philosophical category of the will as essentially informed by the antiphonic structure dramatized in the "Quarter-Deck" scene. Will, on this account, is not an interior faculty of mind or property of a subject, but instead is constituted within a scene of call and response that orients its force in the world. Ahab's relation to his crew models his capacity for self-relation and worldly action; far from being mere aesthetic adornments, the forms of theatrical exhortation and responsiveness that Ahab exhibits constitute the expression of will itself. The idea at the core of this chapter is that will in *Moby-Dick* takes the form of a dramatically mediated and affectively charged process of self-persuasion. Furthermore, I want to argue that it is precisely *Moby-Dick*'s peculiar deployment of novelistic form that renders visible this picture of will as a power of self-persuasion. If will in *Moby-Dick* is constantly spanning a gap between call and response, it does so as both an evocation and interruption of the novelistic tendency to figure agency as a dimension of individuated personhood.

In a novel riddled with ambiguity, paradox, and subterfuge, one thing seems clear enough: the figure of Ahab, perhaps more than any other in American fiction, gives us something

to talk about when we talk about the will. But perhaps for this very reason, the concept of will in *Moby-Dick* has rarely been scrutinized as a literary and philosophical *problem*. Instead, it has served as ballast for understanding Melville's most extravagant character and the political, ethical, and metaphysical dilemmas he poses. Melville's most prominent critics, at least since Matthiessen's influential 1941 study, *The American Renaissance*, have tended to reproduce a certain commonsensical image of the will, linking the notion, particularly as embodied in Ahab, to an individualist ethos. In an interpretation that finds echoes throughout the subsequent history of Melville criticism, Matthiessen reads Ahab, whom he describes as possessing "superiorities of mind and will" (454), as an embodiment the darker implications of Emersonian self-reliance. For Matthiessen, Ahab constitutes Melville's "most profound response to the problem of the free individual will *in extremis*" (447); "Melville created in Ahab's tragedy a fearful symbol of […] self-enclosed individualism" (459) and "provided an ominous glimpse of what was to result when the Emersonian will to virtue became in less innocent natures the will to power and conquest" (459). Charles Olson, likewise, associates "will" in *Moby-Dick* with an American assumption of sovereign individualism: "For Melville it was not the will to be free but the will to overwhelm nature that lies at the bottom of us as individuals and a people. Ahab is no democrat. Moby-Dick, antagonist, is only king of natural force, resource" (12). Similarly, Alfred Kazin, in a 1956 introduction to the novel, summarizes the Captain thus: "He seeks to dominate nature, to impose and inflict his will on the outside world […] Ahab is all will" (11). All three critics suggest that "will" is the property and emblem of an individual character; the more will, the higher degree of individuation.

While more recent critics have painstakingly interrogated the notion of self-reliance, they have followed Matthiessen, Olson, and Kazin in grounding Ahab's mode of willing in an

individualist ethos or ideology. For instance, Leo Bersani's argument that *Moby-Dick* stages a contradiction within American democracy depends on an initial identification of "self-assertion" with "will to power": "The opportunity for self-expression and self-assertion in a democratic society is, Melville's novel suggests, existentially translated as will to power." Wai Chee Dimock equates Ahab with an "all-encompassing, all-responsible individual self" (162)—a self that is the "seat of agency." William Spanos, arguing that Ishmael's writing and activity offer a subversive alternative to the monomaniacal, "panoptic" Ahab, associates "will to power" (or "willful impulse") with Emersonian self-reliance. Diverse (and sophisticated) as these arguments are, they all rely on the implicit axiom that Ahab's mode of agency is confined within individualism's ontological and ideological strictures.[34]

If this critical move seems wholly justifiable, even obviously so, it is because it finds warrant from explicit characterizations within *Moby-Dick* itself. To take just a few examples: Ishmael immediately associates Ahab's willful attitude with a defiant isolation; his "unsurrenderable wilfulness" (143) appears to Ishmael when the Captain is standing alone. Later on, an exasperated Starbuck describes Ahab in terms that might be suited to a Kantian or Nietzschean sovereign individual: "Flat obedience to thy own flat commands, this is all thou breathest." And of course, the self-aggrandizing Ahab fancies himself the consummate

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[34] K.L. Evans *Whale!* is a notable exception to this trend. In a Wittgensteinian analysis, Evans rightly points out that Ahab cannot be severed from his social role. In her exegesis of the "Quarter-Deck," Evans argues that the hunt is from the beginning a thoroughly communal project:

> The exchange is not a seduction by Ahab of his crew, or proof of his art, though it is testimony to Ahab's organizing principle. He asks them what they know already. He taps into the only sure thing that animates them and in doing so joins his authority to the authority of the whaling community. This is important; he does not lure them away from their purpose—he confirms it. (106)

While Evans rightly points out that Ahab's desire cannot be considered apart from its status within a given "form of life," which links him to his crew, I believe she misrepresents the Ahab/crew dynamic by reading the hunt as an embodiment of social consensus. After all, "what they know already," what the crew wants to do, is precisely what is negotiated in the exchange; in other words, there is no readily intelligible "purpose" prior to its articulation via call and response.

embodiment of individual will: “What I’ve dared, I’ve willed, and what I’ve willed I’ll do!” (186). At the level of character-description, then, will falls within the parameters of the individualist ethos. What I want to argue, however, is that at the level of *dramatization*, which *Moby-Dick* repeatedly foregrounds, the constitution of will as a form of self-persuasion entails a negotiation within the process of call and response. This dynamic itself complicates our understanding of both character and will: far from expressing individual personhood, will indexes its own incompletion, that is, its reliance on a transpersonal form.

To define will as a function of dramatic interaction is to bring an unexpected literary and cultural precursor into view, one who will make Ahab appear less as an exemplar of Emersonian individualism and more as the inheritor of a specific form of early American devotional subjectivity. As both a product and agent of 18th-century American Revivalism, Jonathan Edwards anticipated Melville’s concern with the dramatically inflected will. His sermons in particular register a form of agency that works through dramatic anticipation; the reactions from his audience are part of the very aim of sermonic address. As Wilson H. Kimnach points out, “Edwards understood the sermon to be primarily a vehicle of power rather than of reason or beauty” (105). Edwards deployed this homiletic drama to enact and enforce the religious virtues that he espoused—for example, spiritual violence, zealousness, and persistence. While Ahab’s mode seems more demonic than sermonic, his way of acting, I will argue, animates these Edwardsian virtues in an uncanny manner. Pairing Edwards and *Moby-Dick* in relation to the question of the will also opens up a new way of thinking about the novel form’s capacity to reimagine how the social exercise of religious agency puts pressure on the ideological category of the individual. In the following section, I will closely attend to this process whereby the private individual, under the pressure of culturally and historically contingent circumstances,

becomes part of a dramatic scene of action. In doing so, I will demonstrate how Edwards' account of interruptive agency can shed light on *Moby-Dick*'s disjoining of will and individualism.

I. Jonathan Edwards, Revivalist Agency, and the Dramatic Will

Edwards' task as an intellectual and preacher was to continually reimagine and enable pious action; dramatic performance was the route through which this was possible. I want to argue that this mutually constitutive relation between will and dramatization allows us to understand the way in which Perry Miller is justified in claiming that Edwards' sermonic style channels a "stupendous assertion of will" (160). In order to pursue this argument, I will begin with Edwards' ostensibly "private" writings, his journal entries and "Resolutions," and show that Edwards' relation to these writings already generates scenes of minimal dramatization, which prove to be structurally continuous with his public homiletic performances. These public dramas trouble any stable boundary between performer and audience, insofar as they open up a space wherein the practical and affective dispositions of both minster and churchgoer are exposed to a resounding scene of address.

Edwards' personal writings anticipate his commitment to transforming aesthetic forms into powers of action. Although it is tempting to view his journal entries and Resolutions as symptoms of a tormented and repressed Puritan, afflicted with a crippling sense of guilt—these entries often take the form of self-reproaches and confessions of inadequacy—they return repeatedly to the same theme: the question of whether a personal resolution can actualize itself. Edwards scrupulously details the implications of his actions and the means by which he might

improve them. He also indicates that any sense of personal continuity depends on a resolute will that does not fluctuate with one's mood. In one suggestive entry, he writes:

> I find myself miserably negligent, and that I might do twice the business that I do, if I were set upon it. See how soon my thoughts of this matter, will be differing from what they are now. I have been indulging a horrid laziness a good while, and did not know it. I can do seven times as much in the same time now, as I can at other times, not because my faculties are in better tune; but because of the fire of diligence that I feel burning within me. (*Jonathan Edwards Reader* 270)

Notably, Edwards' bad conscience does not stem from any positive wrongdoing, but from an acute sense of negligence—it is not so much that he's been a bad agent or manifested some ill will, but that he has not been *enough* of an agent. The "fire of diligence" does not produce this or that good or bad action, but instead, a mode of resolve that augments a general power of action. The very form of Edwards' stated resolutions—a long list that he constantly revised and vowed to visit once a week—seems designed to increase this power by counteracting the fluctuations that desire is prone to. But what allows for this counteraction? A mere description of successes and failures is not enough to promote pious action; Edwards must turn these writings into occasions for actualized dramas of fidelity.

Edwards' readers often take the "personal writings" as evidence for his remarkable capacity for private introspection, and with good reason. Throughout his life Edwards was unusually vigilant with regard to his own thoughts and actions, and always keen to track down and preempt the possibility of self-deception. Without denying that these writings intensify a process of self-scrutiny, I want to identify their essentially *productive* function. First, the Resolutions seem designed to effect action at the level of syntax. Edwards inaugurates each

resolution with the emphasized adjective "*Resolved*", thereby performing the resolution in the act of penning it. By emphasizing the word, Edwards suggests that inscription itself invokes a commitment; the emphasis gives "*Resolved*" the sense of *hereby resolved*. These are not merely descriptions of decisions made: he does not recount a prior decision, but externalizes and registers the commitment in the very act of writing it down. Far from being mere records of already formed commitments, then, the Resolutions function as rituals of repetition within a larger practical context. Edwards prefaces the list with an injunction to himself: "Remember to read over these Resolutions once a week." The Resolutions are not simply indexes of punctuated decisions, but serve as provocations toward repeated encounters, that is, as conditions for auto-affective volitional renewal. The Resolutions are not simply absorbed into the psyche, but bear a productive power akin to a sermon. In one journal entry, Edwards tells himself that the private writings must occasion future encounters that promise to galvanize the affections and will:

> When I find myself listless and dull, and not easily affected by reading religious books, then to read my resolutions, remarks, reflections, &c.—One thing that would be of great advantage to me, in ready to my profit, would be, the endeavoring, with all my might, *to keep the image and picture of the thing in my mind*, and be careful that I do not lose it in the chain of the discourse. (*Reader* 269, Edwards' emphasis)

Here, the prospect of reencountering his own writings serves to provoke a new endeavor: to hold a concrete image in his mind, instead of glossing over imagery in favor of a narrative message. While Edwards, who of course subscribed to the Calvinist doctrine of God's absolute sovereignty, recognizes that only God can help him keep his resolutions, he nonetheless takes

measures to counteract his "listless and dull" moods through repeated encounters with the Resolutions.

But what is the relation between the moral practice associated with the Resolutions and Edwards' overtly public enactments? It would be misleading to posit too large a gap between Edwards' valuation of "private" writings and his sense of the import of public action. According to Edwards, the sermon form has the potential to do more than address a congregation from on high. The pulpit is not a sanctuary that exempts the minister from self-condemnation; indeed, in one diary entry, Edwards commits himself to deploying the sermon as a form of self-interrogation (*Reader* 272). Thus, the public address seems to flow two ways: toward his congregation and back to himself.

Edwards' polemical writings on the Awakening insist on a strong reliance on the agency of public responsiveness. In his detailed account contemporary events, *Some Thoughts Concerning the Present Revival of Religion in New England* (1742), Edwards implicitly argues that the vocation of the minister entails the encroachment of public appearance on personal essence. This appearance takes the form of a promotion of God's work (*WGA* 254); in other words, the minister is one for whom the boundary between promotion of God's work and virtuous life as such is entirely dissolved. He interprets a passage from Matthew—"*Wo unto you, for you shut up the Kingdom of Heaven;—for ye neither go in yourselves* […]" (qtd. in *WGA* 254)—as an imperative for the minster to publicize his vocation: "If we are very silent, or say but little about the Work, in our publick Prayers and Preaching, or seem carefully to avoid speaking of it in our Conversation, it will, and justly may be interpreted by our People, that we who are the Guides […] are suspicious of it" (253-254). For Edwards' ideal minister, what we might think of as virtuous inner qualities of character—namely, "Zeal and Courage" and "great Abilities"—

must be exhibited in a public setting in order to exist at all. In fact, Edwards at times extrapolates this ontological primacy of self-exposure to articulate a more general principle of virtue:

> The very Sight or Appearance of a thoroughly engaged Spirit, together with a fearless Courage & unyielding Resolution, in any Person, that has undertaken the managing of any affair amongst Mankind, goes a great Way towards accomplishing the Effect aimed at. 'Tis evident that the Appearance of these Things in Alexander, did three Times as much towards his conquering the World, as all the Blows that he struck. (*WGA* 391)

Thus, for exemplary agents, inducing a "Sight," creating a spectacle, is more conducive to "accomplishing the Effect" than any physical action alone could be.

The very opening of a scene renders this sort of agent exposed in a manner that, far from compromising his ability to act, augments it. That is, zeal, courage, and power, for instance, are not first closed-off and subsequently transmitted to a collective; rather, these virtues from the beginning are in circulation, available for appropriation and transmission.[35] In his summary of the Book of Joshua's Battle of Jericho, Edwards seeks to defend the vigorous public performance of speeches and songs. Comparing the contemporary minster to the position of the trumpet-blowing priests, and the church-going public to the "People" present at this scene, Edwards writes: "[…] when the Priests blew with the Trumpets, in an extraordinary Manner, the People shouted with a great Shout, and the Wall of the City fell down flat" (*WGA* 285). In Edwards' biblical parable, the Priests' action *depends* upon the antiphonic process; the responsive "great

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[35] I have, throughout this chapter, opted for the term "affect" over "emotion" to designate Edwardsian virtues such as "zeal" and "courage." While an exhaustive defense of this distinction is beyond the scope of this chapter, I am convinced of the usefulness of its articulation in the work of Brian Massumi, among others: affect is impersonal insofar as it is subject to transmission and exchange, and tends to resist the stable categories evident in accounts of personal "emotions." See Massumi 27-28.

Shout" is what causes the wall to come down. Here, we see a triangulated account of agency: call and response together make a relation to the third term—the destruction of the wall—possible. Notably, the roles of the priests and collective are still asymmetrical; thus, this is not an instance of homogeneous collective endeavor but a call-and-response relation that enables material action.

With this parable in view, it is easier to understand why Edwards takes pains to defend the exaggerated bodily and affective responses of the church-attending public. This defense is a prime instance of the manner in which the pressures of history (that is, the singularity of the Awakening) inform Edwards' implicit philosophical commitments. While in some of his works—for example, *Freedom of the Will* or "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God"—seem to address persons as purely isolated individuals, the very nature of the Awakening, its intrinsically social character, mediates Edwards' thoughts on human agency. Edwards views these "extraordinary outward Manifestations" as salutary signs from God that have invigorating effects on their witnesses. Thus, the responder here, even one who seems to lose composure, is herself a vital force within a scene of public action:

> Those that in the latter Days should be fill'd, in an extraordinary Manner with the Holy Spirit, so as to appear in outward Manifestations, and making a Noise, are spoken of as those of God, in these uncommon circumstances, will set up to the View of others, as a Prize or Ensign, by their Example and the Excellency of their Attainments, to animate and draw others […] set up in their view. (*WGA* 279)

The audience here gains the power one might expect Edwards to reserve for the minister; simply by revealing an affective response the audience can set an "Example" to be imitated, and "animate" others. Inasmuch as Edwards views *all* humans as subject to affections, and as we

have seen, closes the gap between affection and agency, “a confused Uproar” can be seen as integral to religious collaboration:

> [T]hey wondered that Christ would tolerate it [noisy commotion]. But what says Christ? *I tell you, that if these should hold their Peace, the Stones would immediately cry out.* The Words seem to intimate as much, as that there was Cause enough to constrain those whose Hearts were not harder than the very stones, to cry out, and make a Noise; which is something like that other Expression, of *causing the Lips of those that are silent to speak.* (*WGA* 283)

Christ’s teachings, and by extension Edwards’ sermons, are meant to produce “cry[ing] out” *immediately*. Here, the response is immanent to the call itself. Moreover, far from signaling an enervation of agency, these cries are elevated to the status of speech emerging from silence. Thus, For Edwards, the power to be a meaningful agent does not reside in the minister alone, but in the interaction made available through publicized exchange.

It is precisely this form of social exchange that is at stake in *Moby-Dick*, although in vastly different moral and philosophical registers. I will now turn to the following questions. How does the novel as a genre, exemplified here by Melville’s work, integrate Edwardsian socializing practice? What would it mean to weave the genre of sermonic call and response into the fabric of novelistic discourse? How do transpositions of sermonic form condition Melville’s imagination of human will?

II. Novelistic Animation and Non-Sovereign Self-Persuasion

We have seen how Edwards' own moral and aesthetic work functions as a self-reflexive and self-assertive interruption of the tendencies stemming from original sin. We have also seen how Ahab's "Quarter-Deck" speech deploys this kind of galvanizing artistry in order to create the conditions under which a collective vow can establish itself. What I now want to explore is how the rhetorical and ritualistic modes in *Moby-Dick* undercut the pretense to agential self-sufficiency. In Melville's novel, will does not first belong to a subject who then imposes it on other persons and the world; rather, the very existence of will depends on a movement routed through the form of the *call*. The call subverts Ahab's claim to complete sovereignty while also opening the very possibility of will's actualization. Far from attenuating agential power, the relinquishment of sovereignty—indicated more by a commitment to specific aesthetic styles than by a conscious expression of psychic content—actually enables the social form of the will to emerge. Furthermore, by integrating the rhetorical devices of soliloquy and apostrophe within the novel form, Melville is able to link the actuality of the call to the possibility of a response, without which will would be stillborn, powerless to take material effect.

What happens during those scenes in which Ahab's thought seems to retreat from the realm of ordinary activity into the realm of the overtly dramatic? What sorts of possibilities are conditioned by this dramatic space? It will be helpful to draw a contrast between Melville's literary antecedents and his own novelistic use of soliloquy. According to Hegel's influential account, the Shakespearean tragic soliloquy—a touchstone for Melville's construction of Ahab—suspends the hero in a space beyond the causal chain of the drama, thus ensuring his expressive freedom (417). In an analysis of the trope of the simile, yet clearly intended to encompass the tragic hero's more general use rhetorical artifice, Hegel argues that heroic speech allows for the theoretical objectification of passions by which the hero is moved. So while

“[d]rama has for its subject-matter warring passions, activity, ‘pathos,’ action, accomplishment of what is innerly willed” (416), the tragic hero’s eloquent interpolations express “the liberation of the inner life from a purely practical interest or from the immediacy of feeling into free theoretical shapes” (418). Whereas Hegel’s account situates artificial speech on a plane separate from the passions and the will—indeed, stakes its claim to freedom through this very separation—Edwards’s sermons and Ahab’s soliloquies, insofar as their stylized mode of address transforms both affect and volition, demonstrate the chiasmatic knotting of rhetorical form and passionate willing.

Melville’s novelistic use of soliloquy situates Ahab within practical life and its causal determinations. But how so? First, one must note that Ahab’s soliloquies tend to take an apostrophic form, which, unlike the simile, posits an absent respondent and thereby constitutes a call. (If Melville dramatizes practical life through call and response, then one can see how apostrophe might take practical effect, unlike the “theoretical” speech in Hegel’s account.) As Barbara Johnson defines it, “Apostrophe is a form of ventriloquism through which the speaker throws voice, life, and human form into the addressee, turning its silence into mute responsiveness” (30). In other words, Ahab’s speech aims to animate an imaginary interlocutor and hence create a formal structure of rhetorical and affective exchange. In his “Sunset” soliloquy, which immediately follows the “Quarter-Deck” scene, Ahab enfolds his spirited declaration of intention into an address to unnamed divinities:

> What I’ve dared, I’ve willed, and what I’ve willed, I’ll do! They think me mad—Starbuck does; but I’m demoniac, I am madness maddened! That wild madness that’s only calm to comprehend itself! The prophesy was that I should be dismembered; and—Aye! I lost this leg. I now prophesy that I will dismember my

> dismemberer. Now, then, be the prophet and the fulfiller one. That's more than ye, ye great gods, ever were […] I will not say as schoolboys do to bullies,—Take someone of your own size; don't pommel *me!* No, ye've knocked me down and I am up again; but *ye* have run and hidden. Come forth from behind your cotton bags! I have no long gun to reach ye. (186-187)

Indulging in a fantasy of total sovereignty, Ahab assumes the role of prophet, traditionally a mediator of divine intelligence, as well as agent: his prognosis of the future includes his own prospective action within it. Given the conclusive ring of his meta-prophesy—"be the prophet and the fulfiller one"—one might wonder why he continues speaking at all. At the moment of consummated self-identification, Ahab transitions into the apostrophic mode, which betrays a need for the function (if not the material being) of another agent. Apostrophe breaks the closed circuit of sovereignty's fantasy, wherein the prophet and fulfiller are embodied harmoniously in one being; the specter of another agent intrudes into the arena of practical concern.

Ahab's turn to apostrophe recalls Johnson's paraphrase of the speaker's attitude in Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind": "I will animate you so that you will animate me, or reanimate me" (31). While Johnson's essay is primarily concerned with voice in lyric poetry, I want to examine the implications of apostrophic form's mediation of novelistic character. In the "Sunset" soliloquy quoted above, the transition from prophetic utterance to apostrophic address initiates an erosion of sovereignty inasmuch as Ahab "animates" the absent gods so that they, or rather, the charged space of their non-being, might imbue him with an agonistic responsiveness. Filtered through apostrophic address, his address to the gods culminates in proleptic defiance: "Swerve me? ye cannot swerve me, else ye swerve yourselves! […] Naught's an obstacle, naught's an angle to the iron way!" (187). Naught's an obstacle: Ahab simultaneously animates the adversary

and declares it void. This rhetorical double-move might seem self-annulling—a zero-sum game played with oneself—but it nonetheless produces an affective agitation that cannot be separated from the way in which will, as the power of creating and sustaining commitments, comes into being. The nascent expression of will through rhetoric has less to do with a self-transparent process of reasoning than it does with the capacity for inflamed dramatic speech to feed back into willful determination. With a nod to Michel Foucault, one could view the soliloquy as a peculiar form of "care for the self," a self-reflexive technique that is prior to the demand to "know thyself."[36] Melville's commentators have often noted Ahab's putative self-deceptions, but we need not view Ahab's speech as merely an instance of failed self-knowledge. To return to a phrase from Edwards, Ahab induces the "fire of diligence" within himself by means of apostrophic detour.

The importance of Ahab's apostrophic form gains special salience when juxtaposed with that more conventional form of apostrophe—prayer. In *Moby-Dick*, prayer most often marks the self-annulment of agency; in a novelistic world thoroughly haunted by God's absence, prayer constitutes a desperate, almost involuntary cry to a voided cosmos. This relinquishment of will without remainder, its deferral to an absent and unknowable authority, is most apparent in the reactions of Starbuck and Stubb to Ahab's intimidating presence. In "Dusk," which follows Ahab's "Sunset" soliloquy, Starbuck's determination to "try to fight ye, ye grim, phantom futures!" (144) gives way to a vague supplication: "Stand by me, hold me, bind me, O ye blessed influences!" (144). Similarly, in "The Musket," Starbuck eschews the potential trauma of inciting mutiny, and in a panicked appeal to divine practical wisdom, cries, "Great God, where art thou? Shall I? Shall I?" (536). Prayer in *Moby-Dick* constitutes a response to crisis that

[36] See Foucault's lectures, published as *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, for an account of the primacy of "care of the self" in the formation of Western subjectivity.

transfers the responsibility for action to the unknown divine. It's no accident that the dissolution of Stubb's capacity to respond to Ahab appears as an unexpected urge to pray. After being threatened by Ahab at the outset of the *Pequod*'s journey, Stubb is perplexed by his own reaction: "It's very queer. Stop, Stubb; somehow, now, I don't well know whether to go back and strike him, or—what's that? Down here on my knees and pray for him? Yes, that was the thought coming up in me; but it would be the first time I ever *did* pray. It's queer; very queer [...]" (146). In Stubb's case the gesture of prayer is not an expression of religious piety, but the self-abolition of will; prayer here is not an act within a religious form of life, but the spontaneous neutralization of potentially combative action.

Rather than transferring responsibility for action to an other, Ahab's apostrophic speech generates a kind of momentum that will subsequently issue in refined practical commitments. Significantly, however, Ahab does not abandon the *form* of worship; his mode of speaking and acting does not amount to a secular elimination of religious ritual. As Ishmael suggests, Ahab's entire project can be seen as a kind of inverted form of worship:

> That intangible malignity which has been from the beginning; to whose dominion even the modern Christians ascribe one-half of the worlds; which the ancient Ophites of the east reverenced in their statue devil;—Ahab did not fall down and worship it like them; but deliriously transferring its idea to the abhorred white whale, he pitted himself, all mutilated, against it. (203)

Confronted with an "intangible malignity" that haunts his thought, Ahab launches a full-fledged hunt for the "practically assailable" (203) White Whale, rather than resign himself to worship's withdrawal from the world. Stubb later comments on Ahab's refusal of prayer: "I never yet saw him kneel" (190). And yet, although the "ungodly, god-like" (100) Ahab refuses to pray, he

nonetheless deploys the apostrophic mode and thereby subverts the tempting dualism that would pit complete self-sufficiency against the dependence of his crew. Moreover, Melville complicates the import of Stubb's aforementioned observation by way of an unusual structural maneuver: "I never yet saw him kneel" is followed by a break in the chapter, which then turns its focus to another character, Fedallah, who, it will turn out, habitually adopts a kneeling posture (520, 526) on behalf of the blasphemous Ahab, as if to sponsor the captain's demonic perversion of pious worship. Thus, the religious gesture of kneeling is not so much repudiated as delegated to an appointed co-participant. The refusal to kneel involves Ahab in agential deviations, as he is compelled to displace prayer with socially mediated gestures of what he will later view as defiant worship (527).

With the sudden appearance of Ahab's darkly mysterious sub-crew—the Fedallah-led "Parsees" who are in charge of Ahab's boat—Ahab's apostrophic mode becomes *explicitly* social, as Ahab's hunt comes to depend upon particular novelistic characters. Here, the interpolation of apostrophic form made available in novelistic discourse distinguishes itself clearly from the sealed-off apostrophe in, say, dramatic monologue. One might take Tennyson's dramatic monologue, "Ulysses," which transforms the figure from Homer and Dante into a kind of proto-Ahab, as an apt illustration of this distinction. Like Melville's novel, "Ulysses" features a strong-willed speaker who must invoke a collective in order to articulate his will:

> Tho' much is taken, much abides; and tho'
> We are not now that strength which in old days
> Moved earth and heaven, that which we are, we are;
> One equal temper of heroic hearts,
> Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will
> To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield. (ll. 65-71)

Just as Ahab's move to the apostrophic register indexes his own incompleteness as a potential agent, Ulysses' invocation of the "we" precipitates a rhetoric summoning of "will." Moreover, Both Ahab and Tennyson's Ulysses rely on forms of tautological assertiveness to compensate for an ontological absence. When Ulysses says, "that which we are, we are," the first "we are," a qualified in terms of the negation of "strength," describes collective being as mere remainder; the second "we are," however, transmutes description into formal act of affirmation, signaled by the rhetorical excess in repetition. Before he vows "not to yield," he has rhetorically performed this unyielding, imposing a "we are" that, having been "made weak," is itself on the verge of yielding to "time and fate."

Ahab's character, another figure made weak by time and fate, is also redoubled, not at the level of rhetorical animation, but at the level of a novelistic character system. It is hinted from the outset that "Dark Ahab," as Ishmael dubs him, already has a secret crew of stowaways; Ishmael himself catches a glimpse of them boarding the ship and wonders if they are shadows. When the crew prepares for its "lowering," these "shadows" appear as characters for the first time. But significantly, the amendment of the character system is inseparable from the sort of rhetorical animation that both Tennyson's Ulysses and Ahab enact. Whereas the "Sunset" soliloquy produces the specter of divine agents, Ahab's gesture of rhetorical animation at the end of "The Mat-Maker," wherein the *Pequod* prepares for its first hunting venture, seems to animate an actual ensemble of *characters*: "[A]t this critical instant a sudden exclamation was heard that took every eye from the whale. With a start all glared at dark Ahab, who was surrounded by five dusky phantoms that seemed fresh formed out of air" (235). Thus, in a moment that interrupts the novel's nautical realism, the Parsees seem fashioned out of verbal "exclamation" itself, summoned "out of air." What is significant here is that, with the appearance of Ahab's sub-

crew—the novelistic actualization of the sort of crew poetically conjured in Tennyson's Ulysses—Ahab's act of will is thoroughly de-individuated, made subject to rhetorical dynamism of call and response. So, while Ishmael describes Ahab's will in terms of a dichotomy—between Ahab's perceptible "dissembling" (his playacting at being a sane and tolerant captain) and the invisible "thing of his dissembling" (his stubborn goal) which his "will determinate" prevents from budging—this very "will determinate" is distributed *amongst characters* who are themselves, like Ahab himself at the outset, invisible. The novel itself makes Ahab's ostensibly individual will legible in terms of the shadowy characters who multiply and ramify his "private purpose."

Thus, no longer confined within the form of the soliloquy, the act of rhetorical animation extends into *Moby-Dick*'s plot, which integrates the Parsees into its inaugural adventure yarn ("The First Lowering"). The will's actualization within the structure of the adventure plot is precisely what distinguishes it from the will claimed by the dramatic monologue of Tennyson's Ulysses, which, aiming "to strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield," is itself without a quest. The pathos of the aging Ulysses is bound up with the very strictures of poetic form: the poem concludes with a series of transitive verbs without an object, as though the death anticipated in the aimless quest has already been formally inscribed. By contrast, Ahab is ready for concrete action; and yet, Ahab's readiness is emplotted within call and response—that is, within anticipated assent of Fedallah, the leader of the Parsees:

> While yet the wondering ship's company were gazing at these strangers, Ahab cried out to the white-turbaned old man at their head, "All ready there, Fedallah?"
>
> "Ready," was the half-hissed reply.

> "Lower away then; d'ye hear?" shouting across the deck. "Lower away there, I say." (236)

With the arrival of the Parsees, Ahab's own status as sole object of wonder and admiration is undermined; the crew marvels at these figures as they have at Ahab himself. As if acknowledging his own rhetorical (as well as material) dependence on the Parsees' leader, Ahab opts to call out to him before launching into his series of commands. The question, "All ready there, Fedallah?" recapitulates the call of the "Quarter-Deck," but as an immediate spur to action rather than as a hypothetical query. Invoking obscure power in the form of actualized characters, the episode calls into question Ahab's reputation as sovereign dictator: "[…] the affair still left abundant room for all manner of wild conjectures as to Ahab's precise agency in the matter from the beginning" (239).

Ahab's use of rhetorical animation challenges us to view even his most ostensibly solitary meditations as socially inflected processes of self-persuasion. At first glance, for instance, "The Dying Whale" looks like a private communion with nature in the vein of a transcendentalist withdrawal: Ahab's lament, which dramatizes the movements of a dying whale he has just speared, subtly morphs into a "lesson to [himself]" (517) about the treachery of the sun's life-giving power: "In vain, oh whale, dost thou seek intercedings with yon all-quickening sun, that only calls forth life, but gives it not again. Yet dost thou, darker half rock me with a prouder, if a darker faith" (517). The ramifications of Ahab's apostrophic calls here are complex. Ahab is initially interested in calling out to the whale because he sympathizes with its orientation toward the sun: "He too worships fire" (516). Thus, Ahab's very urge to call stems from his prior summoning of the fire-worshipping Parsees with whom he has forged a tight bond. To further complicate this, however, the failure of the sun to give life to the whale prompts him to issue a

second call, to "thou, darker half." While Ahab most obviously refers here to the sea, the "dark Hindoo half of nature" (516), he can also be said to be addressing Fedallah, his shadowy "darker half" who (as the following chapter, "The Whale Watch" establishes) is with him in his boat. Thus, in a vertiginous rhetorical move, Ahab simultaneously calls upon the sea and Fedallah so that they may endow him with a prouder and darker faith. Thus, it is not only the case that Ahab is a kind of Zoroastrian, but rather, that he deploys forms of rhetorical animation, simultaneously outward-directed and self-reflexive, in order interrogate and reconstitute the concrete practical implications of Zoroastrianism.[37] Thus, the process of self-persuasion here entails tortuous rhetorical forms that thoroughly condition Ahab's capacity for responsiveness.

III. Fedallah, Ahab, and the Novelistic Extension of Ritual

Thus far I have argued that Ahab's rhetorical mode both modifies the aim of tragic soliloquy and demonically repurposes the form of prayer. But how does Melville develop the narrative consequences of this dramatic self-persuasion? That is, how does will in the non-sovereign form of call and response actualize self-persuasion *as* externally directed action? While it is tempting to view the Gothic underworld of *Moby-Dick* as somewhat removed from the events that drive the plot—say, in the way that the witches in *Macbeth* seem to occupy a separate narrative plane[38]—I want to show how the temporally extended, materially instrumental action obeys and ramifies the logic of dramatically mediated self-persuasion. The actual pursuit of the whale does not represent a direct, dyadic relation between mad Ahab and the White Whale; rather, the

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[37] See Patell's "Cosmopolitanism and Zoroastrianism in *Moby-Dick*" for an extensive analysis of Ahab's Zoroastrian worldview and the limitations of Ishmael's cosmopolitanism.
[38] Charles Olson makes this very comparison and suggests that Fedallah's world is closed off in the same way.

pursuit constitutes an extrapolation of a triangulated drama that includes Ahab, the crew/Fedallah (considered as a unit or as surrogates for one another), and the Whale.

Just three chapters prior to Fedallah's first appearance, Ishmael invites us to conceptualize will in terms of this triangulated drama. In Chapter 44, "The Chart," Ishmael tells a kind of philosophical origin story for Ahab and Fedallah that stages will not as an independent faculty, but as a relational power that mediates between "thoughts and fancies" and agential "purpose." At the end of the chapter, Ishmael depicts a remarkable scene (which he nonetheless describes as occurring "[o]ften" (220)), wherein Ahab experiences a violent nocturnal self-division: "[T]hese spiritual throes in him heaved his being up from its base, and a chasm seemed opening in him, from which forked flames and lightnings shot up, and accursed fiends beckoned him to leap down among them […]" (221). While this fiery chasm seems to open as a result of his "intense thoughts" carried into the night, beckoning fiends (who prefigure the Parsees' arrival) appear to summon him to make a leap. Ahab responds by returning his thoughts back to the fiery realm: "[I]n Ahab's case, yielding up all his thoughts and fancies to his one supreme purpose; that purpose, by its own sheer inveteracy of will, forced itself against gods and devils into a kind of self-assumed, independent being of its own. Nay, could grimly live and burn […]" (221). In this compressed episode, we have an ontologically ungrounding dynamic of call and response being played out, one wherein agential powers are constituted through the dramatic dissolution of personhood. The living and burning purpose, far from being *directly* willed by an individual agent, comes into being through a duet comprising "beckoning" and "yielding," calling and responding.

As indicated by the word *often* that qualifies the entire passage, this scene anticipates a tension that will develop between novelistic ordinariness and dramatic intensity. A paradoxical

embodiment of the typical and the singular, Fedallah more so than any other character functions as a fulcrum between the novelistic and dramatic tendencies of *Moby-Dick*. On the one hand, he fits right in with *Pequod*'s novelistic assortment of "mariners, renegades, and castaways"; Ishmael characterizes Fedallah's arrival in terms that reflect the 19th-century novel's generic commitment to social inclusivity and ordinary life: "[…] such unaccountable odds and ends of strange nations come up from the unknown nooks and ash-holes of the earth to man these floating outlaws of whalers; and the ships themselves often pick up such queer castaway creatures […]" (250). On the other hand, Fedallah embodies an internalized exception within *Pequod*'s capitalist lifeworld and mode of production. He does not labor in the manner of the harpooners, the cook, or the blacksmith (even though he is in charge of rowing Ahab's boat), and he appears most often as a shadowy, inhuman, insubstantial apparition, as though condensing the anonymous collective of a dramatic audience in his very appearance as a spectator. Furthermore, unlike the other crewmembers, Fedallah seems "to have some sort of half-hinted influence [over Ahab]; Heaven knows, but it might have been even authority over him; all this none knew" (251). An emblem of social democratization, Fedallah also bears the potential to *dramatically* destabilize structures of interaction.

To further clarify Fedallah's peculiar narrative role, one might situate his generic mediation in terms of his status as novelistic "helper." In his seminal work on minor characters, Alex Woloch has adduced three different functions of the novelistic protagonist's "helper," broadly defined as a character whose primary importance on the level of both story and discourse is to aid the central figure of the narrative. Woloch proposes "three distinct kinds of narrative help":

> the *plot-helper*, who facilitates external developments within the story itself; the *psychological-helper*, who more directly helps to elaborate the protagonist's interiority within the story itself, often as a friend, interlocutor, or confidante; and the *thematic-helper*, who functions within the overall semantic field of the narrative discourse, as this discourse itself elaborates the symbolic identity (and centrality) of the protagonist. (92)

Fedallah in some sense participates in all three kinds of help. I am centrally concerned, however, with Woloch's notion of the psychological-helper, because of its suggestive proximity to and distance from Fedallah's role. As Ahab's confidant, Fedallah seems at first glance to most thoroughly embody the psychological-helper. I would argue, however, that it is not psychology or interiority at issue in Ahab's relation to Fedallah but a potential for action inherent in Ahab's enhanced responsiveness. Thus, one might call Fedallah a *volitional-helper*: rather than aid *directly* in the development of plot or the elaboration of psychic complexity, Fedallah offers promptings for Ahab to respond to—like an actor issuing cues[39] or an audience whose very anticipation functions as a call to performance.

Because Fedallah, unlike the other crewmembers, seems to have privileged access to Ahab, Nathaniel Philbrick has compared him to a political adviser (35). Such an analogy is apt insofar as Ahab does in fact heed Fedallah's words (unlike those of Starbuck, who, as second-in-command, one would expect to secure the role of consultant). But in contrast to the language of a

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[39] I was compelled to use this metaphor after reading Walter Benjamin's strikingly resonant characterization of the German satirist Karl Kraus: "The endurance of his convictions is persistence in a role, in its stereotypes, its cues. His experiences are, in their entirety, nothing but this: cues. This is why he insists on them, demanding them from existence like an actor who never forgives his partner for denying him his cue" (264). Two aspects are particularly relevant for my purposes: first, the implicit dialectic between *demand* and *cue*, either one of which could function as a call *or* a response, depending on the context; and second, the idea that a cue is not merely an isolated gesture, but an act that one might respond to by *persisting* and *enduring* in. Perhaps it is no accident that Benjamin's Krauss and Melville's Ahab are thoroughly shaped by their Shakespearean inheritance.

typical political adviser, Fedallah's speech lacks determinate content—the concreteness of a judgment, an opinion, a bit of information—that might be acted upon; what Ahab responds to is the very *form* and *force* of Fedallah's presence and speech. It may be more apropos to think of Fedallah and Ahab's encounters as modes of interaction that eschew *conversation*. The exchange that takes place between Ahab and Fedallah is too opaque to be channeled in conversational form and instead involves a relay of asymmetrical words and gestures.[40] Stubb's comically literal interpretation implies that a cryptic exchange between the two is involved in the hunt for the White Whale itself. "Why, do ye see, the old man is hard bent after that White Whale, and the devil there is trying to come round him, and get him to swap away his silver watch, or his soul, or something of that sort, and then he'll surrender Moby Dick" (346). While Stubb speculates here in his typically jocular tone, the narrative forces us to take seriously this Faustian logic of exchange. As will become apparent, Ahab's very ability to "thr[ow] his brooding soul into this unfaltering hunt" (219) increasingly hinges on Fedallah's claim on Ahab's attention.

With the appearance of Fedallah, then, Ahab is *thoroughly* implicated in the form of call and response I've been tracking: his reliance on Fedallah's dramatic cuing dissolves any residue of sovereignty that might seem inherent in the power to command. (Fittingly, Ahab refers to Fedallah as his "pilot" (519), thus throwing into question Ahab's own sovereign position.) Fedallah, then, facilitates the operation of a non-sovereign will insofar as Ahab's very endurance in the quest and valuation of what he's doing are grounded in an interaction with Fedallah that

[40] By invoking the term "asymmetrical," I mean to say that their exchanges do not achieve or even seek mutual understanding. Here, I am indebted to Nancy Yousef's work on "romantic intimacy." For Yousef, "intimacy involves asymmetrical and nonreciprocal forms of relation, attention, and appreciation" (3). Rather than privilege conversation as a paradigm of intersubjectivity, Yousef is interested in "encounters that are affectively and conceptually fluid precisely to the degree that they eschew the rigidity of epistemic and ethical demands for symmetry" (22). For my purposes, the refusal of symmetry is a condition of will, insofar as call and response is itself a volitional process that is indifferent to liberal aspirations toward formal recognition and equality.

involves inhabiting the functions of both caller and respondent, often at the same time. These calls that Ahab heeds are not always verbal: on the contrary, most of their exchanges involve a charged silence that nonetheless inspires responsive action.[41] (In this sense, Fedallah concretizes and thus renders worldly the "mute responsiveness" that Barbara Johnson attributes to the conjured object of apostrophic address.) For instance, while Ahab is commissioning the construction of a harpoon with which to pierce the White Whale, Fedallah's very act of surreptitious witnessing seems to inform the entire scene:

> […] Perth [the blacksmith] was about the begin welding the twelve [rods] into one, when Ahab stayed his hand, and said he would weld his own iron. As, then, with regular, gasping hems, he hammered on the anvil, Perth passing to him the glowing rods, one after the other, and the hard pressed forge shooting up its intense straight flame, the Parsee passed silently, and bowing over his head toward the fire, seemed invoking some curse or some blessing on the toil. But, as Ahab looked up, he slid aside. (508)

Soon after this missed encounter, Ahab, absorbing the blessing/curse, as it were, transfers it to the harpoon itself: "'Ego non baptize te in nomine patris, sed in nomine diaboli!' deliriously howled Ahab, as the malignant iron scorchingly devoured the baptismal blood" (509). Ahab's Latin exclamation—translated as, "I baptize thee not in the name of the Father, but in the name of the devil!"—can be read as a *response* to Fedallah, the "devil in disguise" who serves as a vanishing mediator for this ritualistic enactment. Moreover, insofar as Ahab's crew abets this undertaking, they do so as proxies for Fedallah. Immediately prior to reenacting Fedallah's

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[41] Jean-Louis Chretien's *The Call and the Response* has prompted me to think through the idea of a "silent call." His account of the phenomenology of calling and responding in Augustine and Heidegger, among others, has helped shaped by sense of what non-verbal call and response might look like.

blessing/curse, Ahab tempers his freshly forged harpoon with the blood of the harpooneers, who restage Fedallah's demonic ratification in Ahab's call-and-response ritual: " 'Ahoy there! Tashtego, Queequeg, Daggoo! What say ye, pagans! Will ye give me as much blood as will cover this barb?' holding it high up. A cluster of dark nods replied, Yes" (509). The silent "Yes" is both a response to Ahab and a soliciting approbation. Fedallah's absent presence over this scene is further registered in Stubb's observation that he (Fedallah) both smells fire and smells *of* fire (508)—that element that circulates throughout the ritualistic event. It is as though Fedallah's very disappearance renders him immanent to the entire action.

Fedallah thus presents the paradox of a "minor character" whose very peripheral position, his double-status as off-stage spectator and subtle provocateur, renders him all the more influential.[42] In one of his final meditations, Ahab claims that "all things that most exasperate and outrage mortal man, all these things are bodiless, but only bodiless as objects, not as agents" (583). Although Ahab is here referring to the "wild winds" during the third day of "The Chase," such a reflection also evokes Fedallah and the form of depersonalized agency he makes possible. If the bodiless agent has the power to elicit Ahab's outrageous action, and Fedallah is the novel's foremost exemplar of this kind of agent, we would do well to track the manner in which agency itself is routed through insubstantial forms of spectrality. In this light, one notices several moments in which Ahab's attentive commitment to the details of chase operates within a spectral version of the call-and-response ritual. For instance, in "The Quadrant," a chapter wherein Ahab smashes his solar-oriented navigation tool in favor of "the level ship's compass," Fedallah's very manner of looking uncannily precipitates Ahab's ostensibly autonomous act of destruction. Initially, Ahab looks to the sun, trying to determine his latitude: "Meantime while his whole

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[42] Woloch's study admirably elucidates the formal-theoretical and sociopolitical consequences of the minor/major paradox as exemplified in 19th-century realist fiction.

attention was absorbed, the Parsee was kneeling beneath him on the ship's deck, and with face thrown up like Ahab's, was eyeing the same sun with him; only the lids of his eyes half hooded in their orbs, and his wild face was subdued to an earthly passionlessness" (520). Fedallah's sunward gaze is devoid of passion, his look brought down to earth; Ahab's response converts Fedallah's own manner of gazing into physical action: " 'Level by nature to this earth's horizon are the glances of man's eyes […] Curse thee, thou quadrant!' dashing it to the deck, 'no longer will I guide my earthly way by thee; the level ship's compass, and the level dead-reckoning, by long and by line; *these* shall conduct me […]" (521). Lest one think that Fedallah has himself usurped a sovereign position in this agential dynamic, he is once again placed in the role of spectator, tending to Ahab's response: "a sneering triumph that seemed meant for Ahab, and a fatalistic despair that seemed meant for himself—these passed over the mute, motionless Parsee's face" (521). An affective transaction is made visible on Fedallah's visage: he receives "a fatalistic despair" but gives "a sneering triumph."[43]

As the *Pequod* moves closer and closer to the White Whale, Ahab, instead of recuperating a sovereign form of power, finds himself further subordinated to the subtle and impersonal exchanges that inflect the unfolding of collective action. Fedallah's unyielding

[43] One might be tempted to classify such acts as the harpoon-forging and the smashing of the quadrant as superfluous antics on the part of mad Ahab. One critic, for instance, has suggested that Ahab's smashing of the quadrant amounts to an irrelevant "subtractive action"—mere histrionics that contribute more to atmosphere than to the movement of plot. But I would argue that, insofar as such actions are weaved into the novelistic constellation of action, such gestures are highly consequential and relevant for any thought of the will's possibility. For example, the demonically baptized harpoon does not simply disappear from the plot. Several chapters later, in "The Candles," Ahab uses the burning harpoon (which has caught fire in a lightning storm) to preempt mutiny: he first threatens to "transfix" any instigators, then demands that his crew adhere to the oaths they have just made (526, 528). It is as though the harpoon itself, ritualistically made as a weapon "[f]or the white fiend!" (509), condenses these purposeful energies. Similarly, the quadrant-smashing continues to inform willful action. Eight chapters later (at the opening of "The Life-Buoy"), we are reminded that this action, far from being isolated and negligible, has indirectly but decisively determined the very manner in which the Pequod traverses the sea: "Steering now south-eastward by Ahab's levelled steel, and her progress solely determined by Ahab's level log and line; the Pequod held on her path toward the Equator" (543). The novelistic mode allows Melville to make visible the manner in which an expressed will, far from merely lending drama to an isolated episode, stretches itself across time to reorient the more obviously instrumental actions through which one might track the movement of plot.

vigilance becomes even more dominant, to the point where Ahab's responses to Fedallah often take the form of imitative gestures. If Ahab, by Chapter 130 ("The Hat"), has completely subjugated his crew by "something in the old man's [Ahab's] eyes" (555), Fedallah's glance in turn conditions the captain's own powerful gaze. Ishmael's description of this doubling of the glance is worth quoting at length, since its capture of the intricacies of ongoing life is strikingly novelistic and yet depends upon an involution of the dramatic into its depiction:

> But did you deeply scan him in his more secret confidential hours; when he thought no glance but one was on him; then you would have seen that even as Ahab's eyes so awed the crew's, the inscrutable Parsee's glance awed his; or somehow, at least, in some wild way, at times affected it. Such an added, gliding strangeness began to invest the thin Fedallah now; such ceaseless shudderings shook him; that the men looked dubious at him; half uncertain, as it seemed, whether indeed he were a mortal substance, or else a tremulous shadow cast upon the deck by some unseen being's body. And that shadow was always hovering there. For not by night, even had Fedallah ever certainly been known to slumber, or go below. He would stand still for hours: but never sat or leaned; his wan but wondrous eyes did plainly say—We two watchmen never rest. (556)

What is striking about Ishmael's description is that the moment he ushers the reader into "secret confidential hours," he immediately draws attention to a complex exhibition of looking and responding; theatrical gestures thoroughly determine the import of the "secret hours" that we might associate with the novel's capacity to de-dramatize human temporality. First, we are invited to "scan" Ahab, who, while imposing his gaze on the crew, is in turn being watched by Fedallah, who for his part is creating a spectacle of his own spectatorship to which the crew can

only respond with a “dubious” look. If the attentive gaze is a primary source of power in *Moby-Dick*—the way in which will is made palpable—then this vertiginous circulation of gazes makes it impossible to locate the *origin* of this power, which is spectrally and affectively dispersed. While Fedallah seems to occupy the role of a spectator to a tragic drama—his “shudderings” are reminiscent of Aristotle’s speculations on the spectator’s pity and fear—his own gaze is the one “affect[ing]” Ahab and the crew. By the time we get a sub-vocal translation of Fedallah’s mysterious look—“We two watchmen never rest”—we are left with a process of willful vigilance that nonetheless is located in a circuit of ocular gestures rather than in an individual mind.

These gestures are shown to have decisive consequences for the structuration of narrative itself. Significantly, the first of *Moby-Dick*’s three climactic chapters (“The Chase—First Day”; “The Chase—Second Day”; “The Chase—Third Day”) is immediately preceded by Ahab’s unexpected sight of Fedallah’s omnipresent gaze (at the end of “The Symphony”): “Ahab crossed the deck to gaze over the other side; but started at two reflected, fixed eyes in the water there. Fedallah was motionlessly leaning over the same rail” (564). Ahab’s “starting” can be read in two ways: on the one hand, he is shocked to see Fedallah’s ominous eyes meet his own, and on the other, his “starting” connotes an act of initiative—he is *beginning* his chase in response to the reflected gaze. Thus, the moment of shock and the spectral production of volitional upsurge are inseparable. And indeed, at the beginning of “The Chase—First Day,” we find Ahab *in medias res*, already involved in redirecting his attention to the water by way of Fedallah’s silent call: “That night, in the mid-watch, when the old man—as his wont at intervals—stepped forth from the scuttle in which he leaned, and went to his pivot-hole, he suddenly thrust out his face fiercely, snuffing up the sea air […] He declared that the whale must be near […] Ahab rapidly

ordered the ship's course to be slightly altered, and the sail to be shortened […]" (565). If Melville doesn't imply a strict *causal* relation between Ahab's "starting" at the conclusion of "The Symphony" and his perspicuous sense of how to orient the ship, he nonetheless implies a *responsive* relation: it is as though Fedallah's jarring spectral presence in the water has enhanced Ahab's olfactory and visual reception of the "sea air."

One might wonder here whether Ahab's course of action subtly reconsolidates the sovereignty that I've argued is undermined by the persistence of the call-and-response ritual. If Ahab is the "lord and keel" during the middle of the chase (on day two) toward fatality, is his sovereign position not restored? I don't believe so. For to make this case, one would have to ignore Fedallah's additional function as *prophet* and the manner in which this function not only dissolves sovereign agency but displaces any conceptual dichotomy between personal autonomy and impersonal fate.[44] Unlike ancient Greek tragedy, which, as Jean-Pierre Vernant has compellingly argued, operates on two coincident yet mutually exclusive levels—that of fate determined by the gods and willed actions determined by persons—*Moby-Dick* represents prophecy and action as an extension of the call-and-response form, which in this case renders prophetic proclamation and interpretive action thoroughly interdependent. Interestingly, while Ahab has deemed himself a "prophet" in the "Sunset" soliloquy, he now invests Fedallah with the clairvoyant authority on which he depends for guidance. At issue here is not so much how Ahab processes the prophecies psychologically, but what he *does* with the prophetic utterances, how he riffs on them through actions that take on a sense of necessity.

[44] This is a significant displacement, because Ahab's own remarks tend to invite a dichotomous understanding of agency and fate. His famous cosmological question—"Is Ahab, Ahab? Is it I, God, or who, that lifts this arm?" (564)—wants to attribute causal force to an *entity*, whether a person, God, or someone as yet unidentified. What I'm trying to show is that Ahab's own question gives a misleading impression about how agency actually works in the novel. Will is intelligible within a dynamic formal structure, but not ascribable to a substance.

For example, in “The Whale Watch,” which serves as a structural link between two aforementioned chapters, “The Dying Whale” and “The Quadrant,” stages the dissociation between the truth-value of the prophesy and the volitional determinations that issue from it. Upon waking from a nightmare in which he foresees his own death, Fedallah is there to reassure him that his quest is worth continuing. But instead of offering reassurance in the form of a concrete assertion, Fedallah offers a prophecy that Ahab can interpret in multiple ways. The last part of the chapter is worth quoting at length. Here, Fedallah is convincing Ahab that he cannot die before two hearses are seen on the sea:

> “Believe it or not, thou canst not die till it [the sight of the hearses] be seen, old man.”
>
> “And what was that saying about thyself?”
>
> “Though it come to the last, I shall still go before thee thy pilot.”
>
> “And when thou art so gone before—if that ever befall—then ere I can follow, thou must still appear to me, to pilot me still?—Was it not so? Well, then, did I believe all ye say, oh my pilot! I have here two pledges that I shall yet slay Moby Dick and survive.”
>
> “Take another pledge, old man,” said the Parsee, as his eyes lighted up like fire-flies in the gloom—“Hemp only can kill thee.”
>
> “The gallows, ye mean.—I am immortal then, on land and on sea,” cried Ahab, with a laugh of derision;--“Immortal on land and on sea!”
>
> Both were silent again, as one man. […] (519)

The sense of fatalism that hangs over the novel is not some metaphysical or phenomenological feature *added* to the novelistic cosmos, but emerges as an immanent consequence of exchanges

such as this one. Fedallah's fatalistic speech and Ahab's willful interpretative responses (as mobilized in later courses of action) are mutually reinforcing. Furthermore, the questions of whether Fedallah's prophecies end up coming true (they do) and whether Ahab has correctly assessed their meaning (he hasn't) are not of primary importance. The passage above is significant because Ahab, initially rattled upon waking from his dream, views Fedallah's "pledges" as reasons to renew his commitment to the hunt. Fedallah, importantly, does not occupy an externalized or affectively neutral position: his offering of "another pledge" (with lighted-up eyes) implicates him in Ahab's own reading of the prophecy. "[S]ilent again, as one man," Ahab and Fedallah have shed all doubts that might compromise resolve; they are permitted once again to fall into a stoic silence wherein speech loses the capacity to disrupt action.

IV. Stylized Speech and Giving Up: Maximizing the Generic Tension of the Will

A passage from a late chapter, "The Hat," beautifully illustrates the way that drama becomes both an alien genre within novel form and also a kind of activity that is fundamentally inflected *by* novel form. Melville writes,

> But though [Ahab's] whole life was now become one watch on deck; and though the Parsee's mystic watch was without intermission as his own; yet these two never seemed to speak—one man to the other—unless at long intervals some passing unmomentous matter made it necessary […] At times, for longest hours, without a single hail, they stood far parted in the starlight […] but still fixedly

gazing upon each other […] If by day they chanced to speak one word, by night, dumb men were both […]" (556).

A *watch without intermission*: Melville slyly evokes the scene of a theater, with Ahab and Fedallah as both spectators and players, but also stresses that the action continues behind the scenes, even in those quiet moments in which call and response modulates into a silent mode of vigilance. Dramatic interruption both occupies the novel and adjusts to the novel's temporal rhythms. The watch without intermission is crucial to both the directionality of the plot and the theatrical mode that suffuses this trajectory.

But what is the status of consummated action in *Moby-Dick*? How should we understand the generic tension between romance and realism that inheres within the hunt up until its very end—which both concludes the plot and injects an excess that overflows it? How does this ending retroactively shift the way in which we have viewed the willing of the hunt as a protracted process of willing?

If I have throughout this chapter refused to draw a firm distinction between theatricality and drama, it is because both alike are necessary to account for the manner in which the stylizations and genre-conventions of theatrical call and response inhere *within* the dramatic action of a plot—which, in *Moby-Dick*, becomes inseparable from novelistic action. In *Theatricality as Medium*, Samuel Weber has argued for a sharp distinction between theatricality—which privileges the "scenic medium" (101) or staging as such—and drama, which, since Aristotle, invariably implies a privileging of character, plot, and action. Likewise, Weber argues for a distinction between "acting" proper to theater, and action proper to drama: theatricality "detaches the movement of acting from the conscious and goal-directed decision" proper to dramatic action. David Kurnick's recent in effect reworks the Weberian conceptual

distinction: in this case, the difference between theatricality and drama is recast as a tension between novelistic theatricality and structured novelistic narrative. Without denying the necessity of novelistic plot and character, Kurnick argues that the novelistic invocation of theatricality resists the fixed structures of individuated characters and plots:

> [P]erformance tugs against individuation with a collective impulse that assimilates the most discrepant characters into a common category. The collaborative nature of theater—like theatrical impersonation—can to that extent be described as powerfully dethematizing: no matter the plot, what happens on stage communicates first and always the fact of collective endeavor. (21)

Writing of the realist "novel of interiority," Kurnick the invocation of a theatrical imaginary within the novel gestures toward a longing for communal engagement, one not satisfied on the terms of character and plot development. While I do not dispute Kurnick's compelling argument on its own terms, I believe the problem Melville raises for the dramatic novel is distinct. Articulating this difference will involve deploying the will as a mediating category between theatricality and plot—whether considered in terms of drama or the novel.

It is not just that Ahab imagines that he occupies theatrical space, speaking to an absent audience; rather, he quite literally enacts the theatrical, forcing a cut into the texture of the novelistic world—one Ishmael registers through devices such as stage directions, incorporations of spectatorship, tonal shifts, and literary allusions. If for Kurnick's novelists the theatrical insinuates itself at the level of desire and fantasy, for Melville it does so at the level of assertive rhetorical action. Ahab *acts*—in both a theatrical and volitional sense—within the interpolated dramas, and even when he simply speaks, his stylized vocalizations insinuate themselves at the level of plot, of materially consequential action. Thus, *Moby-Dick*'s theatricalizations are not

simply rhetorical flourishes, but are part and parcel of the mode of dramatized action that inheres in its novelistic form. Like Jonathan Edwards, Ahab is simultaneously a composer, performer, and spectator; and as in Edwards' religious practice, the vigorous exercise of will depends upon both the theatrical potential of staging and the drama of action. Indeed, in *Moby-Dick*, will in the form of dramatic call and response is incorporated in a way that both preserves the structural integrity of theater and drama and also reorients the very trajectory of the novel.[45]

I would like to conclude by articulating, via a couple examples from the novel, a third way of accounting for the relation between theatrical style and narrative form that sidesteps two possibilities: on the one hand, to see the novel here as an insatiable mode of incorporation that absorbs drama in its maelstrom; on the other, to cast the tension between theatricality and the novel as one between an "anti-narrative torsion" (Kurnick) and the structuring devices of narrative. I want to argue that the tensions between theatrical stylization and narrative play out precisely *at the level of plot itself*: this tension both fuels the will and remains a problem for the novelistic will, which never quite resolves the generic tensions that galvanize it.

To this end, I will juxtapose the conclusion of Melville's novel and that of Shakespeare's *Othello*, to which *Moby-Dick* cryptically alludes. Othello's act of suicide absorbs what Weberian theatricality as well as narrative drama: on the one hand, Othello's act is not simply a

[45] Jonathan Arac's essay, "'A Romantic Book': *Moby-Dick* and Novel Agency'," compiles a useful intellectual history of theories of the novel that define the genre in terms of agential possibilities, or more precisely, lack thereof. Following Goethe, he roughly aligns dramatic heroism with action, and novelistic subjectivity with passivity or suffering (44). In reading *Moby-Dick* as a kind of novelistic deflation of the pretense to action, he draws a conclusion diametrically opposed to my own: "Ahab, in his modeling on tragic heroes, and in the passionate power of his quest, seems an obvious source of action. Yet here too serious problems arise, for […] the overall movement on the book does much to compromise the status of his action" (45). Whether or not the action is "compromised" depends upon what one wants out of action. By focusing primarily on *will*, rather than an action the value of which is fixed ahead of time by an individual agent and narrator, I have tried to suggest that *Moby-Dick* is more interested in the operations of volition than in the question of whether the hunt succeeds or fails. At any rate, to assess the question of success or failure one would need stable criteria, which are impossible to discern by the conclusion of the novel.

teleological moral decision, but a Weberian theatrical gesture, which, to use Weber's terms, at once "cites" his (Othello's) own previous action and "arrests" the movement of plot, whereby Othello is about to be condemned as a murder before the Venetian state. Before he interrupts this legal proceeding by committing suicide, Othello not only argues for his fidelity to the state, but deploys suicide as a reenactment of this act of fidelity:

> Set you down this;
> And say besides, that in Aleppo once,
> Where a malignant and a turban'd Turk
> Beat a Venetian and traduced the state,
> I took by the throat the circumcised dog,
> And smote him, thus.
> *Stabs himself.* (V.2.367-372)

Othello's *thus* not only cites a certain style of killing, thereby synthesizing political duty and personal morality, but also brings the plot to a close. In other words, stylized suicide does not only arrest a potential plot but definitively and willfully concludes the plot of *Othello*.

Ishmael sets up Ahab's quest for revenge by explicitly alluding to this speech. Of the White Whale, Ishmael tells us, "No turbaned Turk, no hired Venetian or Malay, could have smote him with more seeming malice";[46] moreover, just as Othello kills the "malignant" Turk, Ahab, according to Ishmael's interpretation, seeks an "intangible malignity" that becomes "practically assailable" in the figure of the White Whale. When Ahab finally gets his opportunity to assail Moby Dick, he pursues the Whale in a manner that condenses Othello's two acts—his smiting of the other and of himself—into a single one. Embracing both the final chase and its necessary incompleteness, Ahab ends up embracing a kind of suicide, but only indirectly. If

[46] One should note that by characterizing the Whale's smiting in terms of both the Turk's act and the Venetian's, Ishmael overdetermines the meaning of the event. This saturation of meaning is typical of the novel's characterization of Moby Dick.

Ahab wills the finality of suicide, it is not, as it is for Othello, as a moral imperative to be directly materialized; on the contrary, suicide ends up being an effect rooted in call and response.

He begins his final climactic speech as though in belated response to Fedallah's earlier turn from solar transcendence to earthly and sea-bound immanence: "I turn my body from the sun" (591). And as though invoking the necessity of a call to which he can respond, Ahab enjoins Tashtego to continue nailing a red flag to the mast: "What ho, Tashtego! let me hear thy hammer!" (591). This injunction to Tashtego recalls the aforementioned moment in "The Quarter-Deck" in which Ahab, "with hammer uplifted" (180), promises the doubloon to the sailor who first espies Moby-Dick:

> '[…] look ye, whosoever of ye raises me that same white whale, he shall have this gold ounce, my boys!'
>
> 'Huzza! huzza!' cried the seamen, as with swinging tarpaulins they hailed the act of nailing the gold to the mast. (181)

If Ahab's hammering during "The Quarter-Deck" inaugurates the process of tracking the whale, Tashtego's hammering, occurring after Ahab acknowledges the imminence of death, inaugurates its conclusion. Ahab's final actions both concede the whale's "all-destroying power" *and* resolutely refuse to give up the chase. Ahab's actions here are all *gestures-toward*, actions which in effect will their own incompleteness. In a series heavy on direction-giving prepositions, Ahab exclaims: "Toward thee I roll"; "to the last I grapple with thee"; "from hell's heart I stab at thee; "let me then tow to pieces, while still chasing thee, though tied to thee, thou damned whale!" (591). He concludes by articulating his final act: "*Thus*, I give up the spear" (591). Ahab's physical actions are precise embodiments of his self-descriptions; by this climactic moment, outwardly directed physical response precisely coincides with self-reflexive calling.

It is this embrace of ritualistic open-endedness instantiated in call and response that enables Ahab to forsake the teleological demand once and for all: the "grappling" articulated within the form of the call and enacted in the form of the response is enough. Ahab's final utterance—"*Thus*, I give up the spear"—is on the one hand a literal description of the act of launching his weapon, and on the other, a declared resignation—a giving up on the chase. Or rather, this utterance bears within itself the tension of a will which must acknowledge its resignation while *at the same* time affirming the primacy of the chase. If Ahab's *thus* recalls Othello's, it differs insofar as it bears a contradiction that the latter's *thus* does not. Othello's *thus* seamlessly merges the universal dimension of moral and political heroism with a singular stylized act; the singular act indexed in Ahab's *thus*, on the other hand, cannot decisively consummate itself, and in fact decompletes its own articulation. This *thus* must qualify itself with an utterance that leaves the material act in excess of its saturated symbolic articulation. Indeed, to "give up," in both senses, is to will his own exposure to empty time and material causality; indeed, his own rope comes back to strangle him, cutting of his speech and evacuating him from the novel.

I do not mean to suggest that the novel simply asserts the primacy of an endless temporality over the tragically flawed projects of human agents. I want to suggest, rather, than the mode of call and response becomes increasingly *responsive* to the constraints of realism, and incorporates them in its very mode. If an excess emerges in the realm of action, it is only because of this fundamental form of willing that insists throughout *Moby-Dick*. Furthermore, to will *incompleteness* is to give a novelistic form—that is, a paradoxically formless form—to those sealed-off yet empty forms evokes by Tennyson's Ulysses—"to strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield."

CHAPTER 2

IN THE HIATUS OF ACTION: STRANGER-SOCIALITY AND THE SUSPENSEFUL WILL IN THE NOVELS OF PATRICIA HIGHSMITH

In his well-known discussion of suspense, Alfred Hitchcock vividly evokes a film audience in the grip of a frightful scene: "[F]rom the very start they want to scream out to all the other characters in the plot, 'Watch out for So-and-So! He's a killer!'" (qtd. in Chatman 59-60). In the scenario Hitchcock imagines, suspense seems to derive from the audience's lack of agency and irrational desire for intervention; as in a nightmare, we suspect the worst, perhaps even know it is coming, but can do nothing to alter the inexorable course of events. The reader or audience of suspense, then, seems to embody the anxious subject theorized by the psychoanalyst Leslie Farber—that is, the subject whose anxiety stems from a futile attempt to will the un-willable.[47] But perhaps one could complicate the notion that the suspense audience is condemned to an utterly crippling (if thrilling) experience of anxiety. Erich Auerbach gestures in this direction in the opening of *Mimesis*, suggesting that the reader of the biblical story of Abraham and Isaac, though powerless in relation to what transpires within the narrative, actually gains a different kind of agency by enduring suspense. Auerbach argues that in contrast to the Homeric epic the story of Abraham and Isaac produces in the reader a sense of "overwhelming suspense" (11)—like "a holding of the breath" (10). Reworking Schiller's account of tragedy, Auerbach writes: "[I]n the story of Abraham's sacrifice, the overwhelming suspense is present; what Schiller makes the goal of the tragic poet—to rob us of our emotional freedom, to turn our intellectual and spiritual powers (Schiller says 'our activity') in one direction, to concentrate them there—is effected in this Biblical narrative […]" (11). One might rephrase Auerbach's formulation as a

[47] Cf. Farber's *The Ways of the Will* 87-112.

generic ultimatum: Suspend all emotional freedom ye who enter here—and concentrate new spiritual powers of activity.

I would like to pose a question that Auerbach invites but does not pursue: What would this generic ultimatum look like if it were not merely the condition of reader response, but the subject matter of suspense narratives themselves? In this chapter, I will turn to an exemplary 20th-century suspense novelist, Patricia Highsmith, to take up this question. Highsmith's novels explore the possibilities and limits inherent in Auerbachian spiritual powers by introjecting them *within* fictional worlds of suspense. Highsmith's method of characterization synthesizes the breathless Auerbachian reader and the novelistic agent, yielding what I will henceforth call a *subject of suspense*. The typical Highsmith antihero, in other words, is a self-observing suspenseful agent: he endures suspense in relation to himself, within and across interconnected scenes; through a deprivation of "emotional freedom," he comes to inhabit a new volitional position within the space of novelistic action. Highsmith's method has a significant precedent from late antiquity, Augustine's *Confessions*, which allows us to situate this narrative introjection of Auerbachian suspense in relation to the philosophical problem of the will. In Book VIII of the *Confessions*, "The Birthpangs of Conversion," the conceptual problem of the will's fortification is bound up with a narrative problem, the endurance of almost unbearable suspense. At this juncture in his religious development, the hero[48] anxiously awaits the consummation of his conversion; even as he actively makes strides toward bringing this conversion about, he experiences the suspense of the weak-willed subject reliant upon the freely given grace of God. As Augustine puts it, "The nearer approached the moment of time when I would become different, the greater the horror of it struck me. But it did not thrust me back nor

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[48] To avoid confusion, I will use "hero" to designate *The Confessions'* object of focalization, who is of course Augustine himself at a younger age. I will refer to the author of *The Confessions* by his proper name.

turn me away, but left me in a state of suspense" (151). What is remarkable here is that the hero himself is the one seeking conversion, yet he is left "in a state of suspense" by the very prospect of achieving his goal. Within the process of conversion, the striving religious agent and the anxious reader are absorbed into one and the same figure.

As late modern narratives of both conversion and perversion, Highsmith's novels radically reimagine Augustine's subject of suspense. Situating Augustine's questions within a modern world abandoned by God or any reliable norms of social or moral engagement—a world wherein a murderous confidence man like Tom Ripley (from the *Ripley* novels) or a cunning sociopath like Charles Bruno (from *Strangers on a Train*) can flourish—Highsmith figures the will as a problem immanent to the form of the 20th-century suspense novel. Whereas Augustine dramatizes the perspective of the individual subject awaiting the gift of divine grace, Highsmith's novels build suspense through what Mark Seltzer calls "stranger-sociality," which, defined in contrast to personal relationality, binds together intimacy and late modern forms of alienation. If Highsmith's characters seem to be as deprived of agency as Hitchcock's panicked audience members, they are nonetheless forced to assume a specific role within the field of stranger-sociality. For Highsmith, the problem of the will is figured within a hiatus—the anxiety-ridden time of suspense marked out within novelistic form—which at once strips one of freedom (considered as a capacity to reflectively make choices amongst a set of alternatives) and enjoins one to *become* an agent. I will argue that Highsmith's characters can only be said to will, or even confront the problem of the will, insofar as they negotiate novelistic suspense from a point of view unsettled by stranger-sociality.

The three main sections of this chapter comprise interrelated ways of thinking the will as an effect of suspense, rather than a self-subsisting faculty used to negotiate what Highsmith calls,

in her definition of the suspense genre, “the threat of violent physical action and danger” (*Plotting and Writing* 3). The first section will consider how Highsmith, in implicit dialogue with Augustine, reworks the theological motif of the “leap” to action. As a sudden moment of decision or action, the leap can be construed as suspension or hiatus in its most contracted form. In these novels, the leap embodies a fundamental irony embedded in narrative structure: significant decisions and actions are often rendered as lacunae within the fabric of the narrative; the most consequential acts of will within the underlying *story* take the form of omissions, or sudden swerves, within the *discourse*.[49] If the concept of the leap seems to bear an internal tension—between heteronomous impulse on the one hand and groundless self-determination at the other—Highsmith, after Augustine, negotiates this tension by figuring the leap as a reflexive act: a self-suspension, an immanent overcoming of one’s familiar habits of action.

In Highsmith’s novels, however, the dramatic leap marks neither the beginning nor the end of the problem of the will. The second section of this chapter, focusing primarily on *Strangers on a Train* and *Ripley’s Game*, argues that this self-suspension of the will, far from indicating a climactic occurrence here or there within the course of Highsmith’s narratives, is at the very heart of the extended temporalities of suspense. Here, I will examine the temporally protracted intervals wherein characters suspend their social identities, reinhabiting points of view via oblique negotiations with characters at a remove from socially sanctioned personhood. I will argue that Highsmith’s suspense is internal to the form of volition that stranger-sociality mediates, one which displaces any form of will predicated on intersubjectivity, mutual

[49] I borrow these now standard narratological terms from Seymour Chatman. On his account, discourse refers to the manner in which an underlying story—that is, the bare sequence of events one reconstructs from discursive presentation—is structured and stylized. Cf. Chatman’s *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film*.

recognition, or contractualism. To take an exemplary case, in my reading of *Strangers*, I will seek to show that the "no-motivation scheme"—the plan for two strangers commit murders for one another and thus remain untraceable—is enacted not on the basis of a mutual agreement, whether explicit or tacit, but through a redistribution of responsibility that works through subtle forms of exchange, refraction, solicitation, and delegation—forms of minimal action which seem deliberate even as they are often opaque to the agents themselves. The central figures in these two novels, strangers to others and in some sense to themselves, *will* actions, but will them slantwise, in a manner only intelligible within subtle manipulations of novelistic point of view.

My final section, taking up two of Highsmith's most radical novels, *Ripley Under Ground* and *Those Who Walk Away*, poses the question of how the will persists even as the suspenseful process of radical self-transformation is itself suspended. If *Strangers* and *Ripley's Game* reimagine what Augustine calls the birth pangs of conversion, *Ripley Under Ground* and *Those Who Walk Away* take place within the temporality of an aborted rebirth. Finding conversion to be impossible, the central figures of these novels nonetheless reveal a dynamism of the will through which we can distinguish inaction from mere passivity. The Auerbachian turning of spiritual powers is not a matter of making new positive actions possible, but of inhabiting a space of negativity, whereby willing takes shape as a form of aversion rather than conversion. This inquiry will open onto a revised conceptualization of what Seltzer calls aversive sociality, whereby social agents habitually tend to turn away from one another and thereby produce a paradoxical social bond; aversive sociality is coextensive with a society "whose members have in common only that they are all on their own" (175). I will argue in this section that aversive sociality is not merely a default condition of late modernity; rather, it is at once a condition and object of the will. Willing aversion comes to look like a perverse late modern

instantiation of *amor fati*. Here, willing one's fate does not culminate in self-recognition, but in a self-aversive movement that drives willed omission.

I. Over the Brink: The Leap to Action in Augustine and Highsmith

That leap had succeeded. He had taken another leap in killing Murchison. To hell with it. Nothing ventured, nothing gained.

Highsmith, *Ripley Under Ground*

Within the space of philosophical abstraction, as Robert Pippin notes in his book on noir, it is doubtful "that anything we would want to count as an action can fit under one basic paradigm" (18). Nonetheless, without universal criteria to anchor an ontology of action, novels ceaselessly articulate distinctions between action and inaction which are immanent to narrative form. One conspicuous characteristic of the worlds of suspense fiction in particular is that certain acts stand out as determinate, well-defined deeds. In other words, suspense—and in particular, noir as a sub-genre[50]—often relies upon certain kinds of actions (namely, intentionally committed crimes) counting as narrative markers, the climactic force of which depends upon the fact that characters actively perform them. For Highsmith, murder functions as a paradigm of this sort of action. In fact, the very definitiveness and finality of murder as such is often what makes it so enticing to those considering it. Charles Bruno, one of the titular strangers on a train, imagines murder as an

[50] While my primary focus in this chapter is on suspense, I follow Andrew Pepper in associating Highsmith with what might be considered a sub-genre of suspense fiction, the "American roman noir." Adapting a distinction from film theorists Raymond Borde and Etienne Chaumeton, Pepper suggests that, in contrast to hard-boiled fiction, noir fiction privileges the perspective of the "criminal adventure" (as Borde and Chaumeton call it) instead of the procedure of detection. While Pepper acknowledges that the generic classification is unwieldy, he seems right to suggest that a group of mid-century American novelists were concerned with exploring "the corrosive effects of money, the meaninglessness and absurdity of existence, anxieties about masculinity and the bureaucratization of public life, a fascination with the grotesque and a flirtation with, and rejection of, Freudian psychoanalysis" (Pepper 60).

almost miraculous act, whereby one assumes the extraordinary power to annihilate a particular human life: "[T]he instant when he felt that life had left her, everything else had fallen away, and only the mysterious fact of the thing he did remained, the mystery and the miracle of stopping life" (106-107). Whereas religious conversion, a symbolic rebirth, constitutes a definitive act within the theological schema of Augustine, murder in noir fiction functions as an anti-natalist inversion of this religious act of faith.[51]

In order to establish the boundaries of these paradigmatic acts, Augustine and Highsmith make prominent use of threshold points, often indexed through spatial structures, whether real or metaphorical. The hero of the *Confessions* and the criminals in Highsmith's novels very often find themselves on a threshold between inaction and action. As Bruno remarks in *Strangers on a Train*, "People get so far—and it just takes the least little thing to push them over the brink" (29). What is suspenseful in these narratives is often bound up with an action that may or may not be carried out; thus, suspense is tied to our recognition of the distinction between inaction and action proper. In Augustine and Highsmith, willed action takes place as a provisional suspension of suspense itself, whereby suspense and its attendant anxieties are intermittently allayed. As I will later discuss, this suspension, far from eliminating suspense, generates its own suspenseful sequences that must be negotiated in turn. For now, it is sufficient to note that willed suspension occurs as a sort of *leap*: Augustine desires "to make the leap where I was being called"; an internalized allegorical figure, Lady Continence, advises him to "[m]ake the leap without

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[51] In invoking a concept of "anti-natality" I mean to invert Hannah Arendt's concept of "natality," which she derives from none other than Augustine. Arendt draws from Augustine an intimate connection being free will and the fact of being born as a singular individual: "[H]ad Kant known of Augustine's philosophy of natality he might have agreed that the freedom of a *relatively* absolute spontaneity is no more embarrassing to human reason than the fact that men are born—newcomers again and again in a world that preceded them in time. The freedom of spontaneity is part and parcel of the human condition. Its mental organ is the Will" (Arendt, "Willing," 110). A perverse noir philosophy might posit murder as the form of spontaneity that exemplifies freedom of the will.

anxiety." Describing his own mode of action, Tom Ripley draws upon a theological lineage, alluding to Kierkegaard's (implicitly Augustinian) motif of the "leap."[52] Having impersonated a famous artist and killed a man in order to cover it up, Tom thinks, "Would Bernard [a hesitant partner in crime] take the leap into faith as Kierkegaard put it? Tom smiled as the phrase crossed his mind. But he had taken a leap when he had dashed to London to impersonate Derwatt. That leap had succeeded. He had taken another leap in killing Murchison. To hell with it. Nothing ventured, nothing gained" (*Ripley Under Ground* 126). For both Augustine and Highsmith, then, a leap is required in order to overcome the inertia of inactive existence.

If Augustine's *Confessions* marks a pivotal point in the philosophical history of the will, it is because he argues that knowledge and conscious reflection are insufficient conditions for a leap to a converted state. As Jean-Luc Marion puts it in his study of the *Confessions*, "There no longer subsists any direct connection between the evidence of the understanding and the actualization of the will, between the knowledge of the true and the resolution to enact it" (156).[53] From knowledge to resolution—a severance. This severance, a painful disconnect between knowledge and will, is felt as irresolution within the will itself, which Augustine qualifies as "a will half-wounded" (147), "turning and twisting first this way, then that" (146-147). On Marion's interpretation, this wound cannot be healed by will itself, but only by a proper reception of God's grace: "It is necessary that the will let itself be relieved and lifted up by a gift that precedes it […]" (174). The prospect of a leap to action undercuts the pretenses of the

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[52] While Kierkegaard, unlike Augustine, develops a concept (or multiple concepts) of the "leap" across his philosophical writings, it seems to me that both thinkers use the word in a strikingly similar sense. Both Augustine and Kierkegaard mean to evoke a fundamental discontinuity constitutive of an act of faith which, by definition, supersedes the limits of rational knowledge. In any case, the context in which Tom Ripley's cites the Kierkegaardian term invites a juxtaposition with Augustine's use of the trope.

[53] Consider, by contrast, Aquinas, who follows the earlier thinkers of Greek Antiquity in granting primacy to the intellect over the will. On Marion's understanding, truth for Aquinas "demands no decision," and thus the will is reduced to a "practical consequence of theoretic evidence" (166). For Augustine, truth itself demands a decision, even as this decision can come neither from knowledge nor from the individual's own resources.

knowing subject, which must await and be prepared to receive the gift—that is, the event of willing. As Marion has it, "[t]he resolution that defines and decides the self in me belongs to me without, however, coming from me; it comes from elsewhere" (Marion 178-179).

This tense anticipation and preparation inherent in the problem of will reveals the proximity of Augustine's suspenseful account to Highsmith's fictional narratives. For both Augustine and Highsmith, the subject orients itself toward an event that is beyond its immediate control; this subject can only hope to transform itself by holding *itself* in suspense. In Augustine and Highsmith, self-suspension precipitates ontological states in which willed actions and impersonal events, far from being at odds, precisely coincide. As Bruno puts it while contemplating his imminent murderous act, "[…] somehow he was sure he would do it tonight. Something would happen that he could" (76). In the *Confessions*, this happening that enables action occurs at the climax of Book VIII. The hero is in a state of despair until hearing a child's voice singing, "Pick up and read!"; he interprets this as a divine command to pick up and open his bible. After reading a passage selected at random, the hero finds that his leap has been completed: "I neither wished nor needed to read further. At once, with the last words of this sentence, it was as if a light of relief from all anxiety flooded into my heart. All the shadows of doubt were dispelled" (153). Conversion, far from being unilaterally willed, is something that happens to the hero, as if behind his back, while he engages in what would ordinarily be a commonplace pious activity. If Christian conversion resists narrative continuity, it is because God's grace is fundamentally gratuitous and thus purely exceptional within the economy of experience. Instead of one action leading logically to another, there is a hiatus wherein the leap to conversion surreptitiously takes place. Similarly, in Highsmith's fiction, the leap is often signaled by a narrative cut, which halts the continuous progression to action. Consider, for

instance, a crucial turning point in *Ripley's Game*: Jonathan Trevanny, an innocent whom Ripley and a co-conspirator have persuaded to commit a murder, completes his conversion to the life of crime. In this scene, Jonathan is preparing to shoot a mobster in a train station:

> Jonathan had the gun in his right hand, out of his jacket pocket. He removed the safety. Jonathan pushed his coat aside and aimed at the center of the man's topcoat.
>
> The gun made a raucous "Ka-boom!" (80)

What Tom Ripley in *Ripley Under Ground* describes as the "leap into faith" necessary to commit murder is structured as a narrative leap: the paragraph shift conspicuously absents the act of pulling the trigger. Because this moment is ensconced within sequences that channel Jonathan's perspective via free indirect discourse, the discontinuity within the narrative conveys a gap in Jonathan's consciousness.[54] To act here is to hold one's consciousness in suspense.

To be sure, Highsmith does not always render the performance of murder as a textual caesura or deny the agent any consciousness of his act. The novels do, however, represent violent acts in terms of an uneven temporality, which unfolds through delays and accelerations and thus introduces a multiplicity of "leaps" within a single ongoing action. In *Strangers*, as Bruno moves in on his target, Guy's wife Miriam, the time of the novel's action slows ("Bruno inched closer" (80)), then speeds up with his leap: "He sprang with such concentrated aim, the wrists of his spread hands touched" (81). Here, it is as though the delayed temporality itself produces the swiftness of the subsequent attack. Like a coiled metal spring—or alternatively, like a stretched

[54] The space of volitional discontinuity has been acknowledged by the analytic philosopher Simon Blackburn, who argues that "we need to recognize the inevitable existence, not of a perspective of free or rational agency, but of an absence that can easily be mistaken for it. We have here the necessary existence of a 'blindspot', or aspect of ourselves that cannot be seen, by ourselves, at the same time as we deliberate" (260). One can view Highsmith's oeuvre as, among other things, a series of formal experiments that embed this "blindspot" constitutive of decision within discrepant rhythms of suspense.

rubber band, which Kenneth Burke uses as a metaphor to evoke the suspenseful temporality of delay and suddenness—Bruno has accumulated potential energy in order to discharge his terrible power.[55] Moreover, Highsmith's manipulation of syntactical structure generates leaps that evoke moments of heightened intensity within action. In this scene, Highsmith explicitly links this heightened intensity to Bruno's will:

> With a leg behind her, he wrenched her backward, and they fell to the ground together with no sound but of a brush of leaves. He sunk his fingers deeper, enduring the distasteful pressure of her body under his so her writhing would not get them both up. Her throat felt hotter and fatter. Stop, stop, stop! He willed it! And the head stopped turning. (81)

Bruno's sub-actions are initially situated within relatively long sentences that convey the continuous temporality of such gestures as wrenching a body, causing this body to fall, and sinking hands into flesh. As the suspense in this passage builds, the sentences shorten, culminating in an exclamatory command or plea—"Stop, stop, stop!"—coupled with an evocation of strenuous volitional exertion—"He willed it!" The accelerating movement of commanding and willing registers a leap spanning the victim's life ("Her throat felt hotter and fatter") and death ("And the head stopped turning."). The sense of commanding and willing permeates the entire space of action: "He willed it!" synecdochally compresses what has been happening within the extended time of the murder.

In the case of Guy Haines, who eventually decides to reciprocate by killing Bruno's father in accordance with the "no-motivation scheme," the enactment of will is complicated by the presence of conscience, which in noir fiction often functions perversely, as an inhibition to be

[55] Burke roughly defines "formal suspense" as "the suspense of certain forces gathering to produce a certain result. It is a suspense of a rubber band which we see being tautened" (*Counter-Statement* 145).

overcome. If Guy is to follow through on his murder, he must suspend the moral-psychological sentiments that make him hesitant to act. As with Bruno, as well as Jonathan from *Ripley's Game*, the moment when Guy finally commits the murder will take shape as a structurally inscribed suspension or leap.

> No, don't think! You do it for Anne, remember? For Anne and for yourself! It is like killing in war, like killing—
>
> He pulled the trigger. It made a click. He pulled again and it clicked. It was a trick! It was all false and didn't even exist! Not even his standing here! He pulled the trigger again.
>
> The room tore up with a roar. His fingers tightened in terror. The roar came again, as if the crust of the world had burst. (152-153)

Guy's conscious thought takes a strange turn whereby it finally answers its own exclamatory imperative, negating itself in its passage to action. His last thought—"*It is like killing in war, like killing—*"—is interrupted by his pulling of the trigger. The leap recalls Augustine's short-circuiting of understanding and resolution. Guy tries to *understand* the act he is almost but not quite ready to perform by subsuming it within a larger category. The *resolution* to kill, however, can only be enacted as an event, a leap, which surpasses the faculty of the understanding. The leap here is indexed grammatically by the dash, which separates "*like killing*" from the trigger-pulling. Guy's effort to adduce rationalizations for action is exhausted precisely at the commencement of action.

This particular point of suspension, however, is not at all arbitrary: the novel's recurrent use of the word "like"—in the sense of both resemblance and fondness—resonates clearly in this

fragment, "*like killing*—".[56] On the train, Bruno and Guy have each said that they "like" one another, in a way that depersonalizes the conventional romantic exchange ("I love you"; "I love you, too"). Furthermore, at the very moment Guy fortifies his confidence in his ability to carry out the murder, he invokes the word "like" repeatedly:

> He was like Bruno. Hadn't he sensed it time and time again, and like a coward never admitted it? Hadn't he known Bruno was like himself? Or why had he liked Bruno? He loved Bruno. Bruno had prepared every inch of the way for him, and everything would go well because everything always went well for Bruno. The world was geared for people like Bruno. (148)

If Guy has embodied a general personality trait insofar as he has acted "like a coward," it is because he has not acknowledged a deeper, singular likeness—his affinity for Bruno. (Affinity in both senses: Guy suggests here that he had liked Bruno because he is like Bruno.) Because the world is geared for people like Bruno—which is also to say, for people like Guy—Guy is able to get into gear at the moment "*like killing*—" crosses his mind. The sense of "like" shifts here: no longer a means of referring a particular action to a generalizable, quasi-ethical principle ("like killing in war"), "*like killing*—" here stands autonomously, thereby recalling Bruno's act of killing out of likeness itself. Instead of thinking through this particular likeness, Guy acts it out.[57] As he later realizes, "[H]e had not wanted to do it, he [Guy] thought. It had not been his will. It had been Bruno's will, working through him" (158).

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[56] In a personal conversation about *Strangers*, Nathan Brown pointed out the recurrent uses of the word "like." This analysis is indebted to his observation and subsequent insights.

[57] In his preface to the *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel defines the will as "a special way of thinking; it is thought translating itself into reality" (xxx). In the philosophy of Augustine and in the fiction of Highsmith, this translation must take place, but is necessarily riven by a gap over which one must leap.

Between wanting and willing: the will of the stranger on a train. That Bruno's will has "work[ed] through" Guy suggests that however abruptly or dramatically the leap is be made, it is far from constituting an act *ex nihilo*. Rather, the leap is always conditioned, at the very least, by a social infringement on point of view which unsettles the ontological boundaries of the individual character *qua* agent. Thus, the impetus for the leap can no longer be unequivocally assigned to an individual agent. While the case of one will working through another's act offers an especially overt instance of the sociality of the leap, I want to argue that, in Highsmith's work, this form of sociality imbues the problem of the will at every turn. In the next section, I will examine the subtle mechanisms through which social relations suspend the will over time yet *in this manner* inform concrete actions.

II. Stranger-Sociality and the Suspense of the Will in *Strangers on a Train* and *Ripley's Game*

Thus far, I have argued that in Highsmith's fiction will achieves its exemplary form as a kind of leap to action—most sensationally, a leap to murder. Through Highsmith's novels, I have conceptualized the willed act in terms of a formally inscribed conversion from indecision to decision. In this section, I will complicate this apparent opposition between indecision and decision by bringing out an ever-present dialectic between the *suspense* of indecision and the *suspension* that a leap to action entails. This dialectical dynamism first of all recalls the potentialities of suspense evoked in Augustine's *Confessions*. Even while the hero is "in a state of suspense" prior to his conversion, he advances toward his goal; suspense, far from being incompatible with progression toward a more decisive moment, is its indispensable temporal condition: "Inwardly I said to myself: Let it be now, let it be now. And by this phrase I was

already moving towards a decision; I had almost taken it, and then I did not do so. Yet I did not relapse into my original condition, but stood my ground very close to the point of deciding and recovered my breath" (150). Here, Augustine subverts any dichotomy between sinful stasis and graceful leap: the leap to conversion presupposes the silent importuning and faithful endurance that have taken place within his suspended state. Viewing Highsmith's fiction in terms of Augustine's conversion narrative, we become attuned to the ways in which will is constituted not simply in the "leap," but in the charged temporality of suspense which informs every decision.[58]

In Highsmith's cold and ungodly worlds, however, the autonomous I-Thou relation that structures Augustine's experience and narrative is evacuated. In its stead, the modern phenomenon of *stranger-sociality* (to recall Mark Seltzer's term) complicates the structuration of will at every point. Stranger-sociality, according to Seltzer, is predicated on modernity's "media a priori" which at once guarantees the omnipresence of techniques of observation and precludes the possibility of personal, face-to-face interaction (53). Seltzer astutely points out that Highsmith's stranger-sociality is not just represented on the level of content, but inheres within the formal strategies of her novels—in particular, within the manipulation of narrative perspective. For Seltzer, "Highsmith's narrative point of view is characteristically a strange impersonation of the third person: impersonation in the sense of a first-person singular in the third person, or the particularized view of no one in particular" (48-49). Insofar as this bizarre form of intimacy displaces the I-Thou relation, we are now at a distinct remove from Augustine's *Confessions*: in Highsmith, perspective is constantly "switching between self-reference and

[58] On this point, I disagree with Marion, who wants to disjoin conceptual structure from literary form: "What is at stake is not found in the literary form but in what structures the historic narrative conceptually: the paradox, the *monstrum* of a will that cannot will because it hates the truth to the very degree that it receives its evidence" (156-157). To the degree that, in Book VIII, the vexed conceptualization of will merges with a suspense narrative, it is difficult to argue that conceptualization can be sealed off from literary style and structure.

other-reference" (53); "[i]ntrospection is conceived as an externalized and perceptible event, and interior states look like self-interviews—albeit not very revealing ones" (54). Seltzer's notion of interiority as self-interview helps explain Highsmith's penchant for what Dorrit Cohn has called psycho-narration, whereby psychological markers (for instance, "he thought" or "he imagined") interrupt what might otherwise read as free indirect discourse (27-58). In the case of Highsmith, psycho-narration does not involve an intrusive narrator, but installs a strange third-personal observer *within* the first-person perspective.

In sum, Seltzer's analysis of point of view decisively demonstrates that Highsmith's imagination of stranger-sociality is inseparable from formal technique. But insofar as one wants to track Highsmith's investigation the question of the will in particular, one cannot follow Seltzer in marginalizing novelistic *character* as a formal category. His incisive commentary on novelistic point of view notwithstanding, Seltzer holds that the novel in late modernity eclipses character and point of view alike: "The novel—to the very extent that it yields character to system in terms of what Alex Woloch calls the 'character-system' may then continue to work as a sort of paramnesic symptom of the reality of ego-technic media irreducible to psychology or point of view" (227).[59] Seltzer's conceptual use of paramnesia not only facilitates a reduction of character to system, but also compresses strange-sociality into a single paradigm: "The stranger—'the stranger on the train who would listen, commiserate, and forget'—is the prototype of the second modernity's stranger-intimacy and stranger-sociality" (72). But in Highsmith's fiction, there is no single prototype for stranger-sociality, which permeates the third-person

[59] One should note here that Seltzer elides Woloch's pivotal concept of character-space, through which Woloch defines his concepts of character and character-system. For Woloch, character-space expands the notion of character beyond individual personality, redefining it at the intersection of structural positionality and implied personhood. One would have to abandon (or at least restructure) Woloch's own conceptual apparatus in order to "yield" character to system.

precisely insofar as it presupposes the singularity of characters, even as the relative discreteness of character is constantly (and generatively) imperiled. The stranger might listen, commiserate, and forget, but—and this decisive both formally and thematically—he might very well respond, antagonize, and remember. In my view, Highsmith's novels posit character as an irreducible site whereby strangerhood always already infiltrates point of view and thereby render the will itself suspenseful.

"It had not been his will": Idealism and Stranger-Sociality in *Strangers on a Train*

Charles Bruno makes his first leap, the secret decision to murder Miriam Haines, on behalf of both his "friend" Guy and guys everywhere: "Think of all the other good guys he would save from ever knowing her!" (67). That this decision is indeed a *leap*, and not merely a calculated move in a scheme, is underscored by the absence of contractual trust: when he commits to this deed, Bruno "didn't consider the possibility of Guy's murdering his father a motive, because he didn't count on it […] The point was, now was the time to act" (60). In other words, Bruno's leap is necessitated by the fact that his pure idea, the no-motivation scheme, cannot provide a sufficient reason for his action. While Bruno has long had an "amorphous desire to perform an act that would give [his life] meaning" (68), and while he has a boundless imagination for "ideas" for action, he cannot depend upon mutual understanding to bring this particular idea into reality. Neither an individual act of will nor the fulfillment of a contractual obligation, the leap from idea to action hyperbolically relays affective promptings drawn from the stranger on the train.

More specifically, Bruno's maniacal effort to track down and kill Miriam mobilizes and exaggerates Guy's hatred, conveyed so subtly that the latter himself only belatedly recognizes its implications: "It was hatred that had inspired him to say as much as he had […] Hatred was the very seed of evil" (132). Whose hatred is at the root of Bruno's act of murder? While Guy takes responsibility for his sinful passion, it is Bruno who bears the seed of evil, as figured in a simile through which his no-motivation "idea" is further specified: "Like an enormous walnut in feeble, jittery squirrel hands, an idea, bigger and closer than any idea he had ever known, had been revolving in his mind for several days. When his mother left town, he intended to crack open the idea and start thinking in earnest. His idea was to go and get Miriam" (59). Bruno translates idea into act by converting Guy's muted resentment into blatant misogyny. This conversion is registered through free indirect discourse, which blurs the line between his reconstruction of Guy attitude and the excitations it induces in him: "*She's going to have his child*, Guy's voice said. The little floozy!" (67); "He could see why Guy would loathe her. He loathed her too, with all his guts! Bitch!" (75). When Bruno finally acts, this volitional excitation is made explicit: "Stop, stop, stop! He willed it!" (81).

Implied in this analysis is that, although each character's perspective in some sense channels the other's, the formation of the *will* is irreducible to a "mimetic compulsion that bends reflexivity toward pathology" (Seltzer 73). As I have shown, Bruno does not mimetically relay Guy's pathological desires so much as insidiously elicit, reassemble, and mobilize them. Moreover, Guy's hatred, far from being mimicked, is itself incited by Bruno's relentless questioning, in a manner that dissociates the emergence of Guy's hateful intonation from either individual:

> "She start sleeping around right away?"

> Guy turned reflexively, as if to shoulder Miriam's guilt. "That's not the only thing women do, you know."
>
> "But she did, didn't she?"
>
> Guy look around, annoyed and fascinated at the same time. "Yes." How ugly the little word sounded, hissing in his ears! (25)

Guy's hatred does not simply preexist his dialogic exchange with Bruno in such a way that the latter could copy it; Guy's serpentine "yes" marks a suspension in his affective habitus, transmuting his defensive feminism into Luciferian resentment.

Similarly, the stranger-sociality mediating Guy's will cannot be understood as a compulsion to mimic Bruno. Guy's oblique consent to Bruno's act does not merely reaffirm Bruno's prior desires. If Guy's will entails a gradual and uneven endorsement of the no-motivation scheme, this development from its early stages is punctuated by moments in which Guy draws out the verbalized articulation of Bruno's "ideas." Guy asks,

> "What do you want?"
>
> "Something." Bruno's mouth turned down in an ugly grimace of unconcern. "Everything. I got a theory a person ought to do everything it's possible to do before he dies, and maybe die trying to do something that's really impossible."
>
> Something in Guy responded with a leap, then cautiously drew back. "Like what?" (21)

Guy's initial "leap" here seems suspended between affect and agency; not yet overt action, this de-dramatized, internal leap nonetheless exemplifies on a reduced scale the kind of sudden shifts and discontinuities that imbue the suspenseful will: "something that's really impossible" calls

forth a leaping *something*, an impersonal response that silently colludes with Bruno's ambitions. What is more, this silent leap opens onto a spoken question that raises the stakes of dialogic suspense. While Bruno answers with a litany of dangerous deeds that sound appealing to him, the question "Like what?"—the question of what Bruno feels he "ought to do" or try to do—suspends itself over the narrative's trajectory, as the "something" to be done will continue to inhere within Guy's will.

However passive Guy may seem, he does more than give Bruno a dialogic forum for externalizing ideas and fantasies. Throughout their conversation on the train, Guy obliquely *solicits* the first stage of the sequence of actions—that is, Bruno's murder of Miriam. Although Guy in his habitual conscientiousness manages to withhold any act of consent, his solicitation insinuates itself into Bruno's plan and subtly abets its realization. Thus, while Guy expresses annoyance and even disgust at Bruno, his behavior is punctuated by intermittent signs of his own willingness to conspire. For instance, in lieu of consenting to the exchange of murders, Guy does not turn away but instead proffers another exchange, an exchange of "ideas," which only at first glance seems unrelated to Bruno's specific proposition. Once Bruno has revealed that he has "a lot of ideas for perfect murders" (29), Guy not only continues to hear him out, but volunteers his own idea, a commissioned architectural design for a country club in Palm Beach.

> Guy drew a quick sketch of the buildings in the back of Bruno's address book and signed his name, as Bruno wanted […] He grew happy as he talked, and tears of excitement came in his eyes, though he kept his voice low. How could he talk so intimately to Bruno, he wondered, reveal the very best of himself? Who was less likely to understand than Bruno? (32)

Guy knows that his estranged wife may interfere with this project and that Bruno will soon understand this: it would be convenient to have Miriam out of the way. But beneath this instrumental consideration, Guy's solicitation takes form as a sharing of "ideas" that forges a complicity between these idealists. These ideas share a kind of Platonic form: like the perfect murder, the architectural blueprint is pure ideality.[60] The two questions Guy poses to himself in the above passage suspend the question of will—both Guy and the reader wonder *what* he is willing within this voluntary act. Because Guy is not trying to communicate his ideas to someone who will readily comprehend their import, our attention is directed toward the formal gesture of sharing ideas as such. We are encouraged to see this offering of the architectural plan not as a means of prideful self-expression, but as a kind of relayed commission—one ratified, moreover, with a signature, which displaces *and* conjures up a suspended mark of approbation.

But what prevents the stranger from being the one who merely listens, commiserates, and forgets? Beyond the space of the train, it is Bruno's letter-writing that facilitates volitional persistence, conditioning the possibility of what Nietzsche calls, in his account of the capacity to make promises, a "memory of the will." Epistolary exchange resists the ephemerality of chatter amongst strangers, and, moreover, fills the void left by the absent contract, the one Guy cannot explicitly sign off on. As Bruno's letters to Guy "[hammer] at his consciousness" (124), they compel Guy to open each envelope and thus reassume a suspended complicity: Guy repeatedly considers, and rejects, the option of throwing them away. In one of Bruno's letters, Guy encounters a subtle shift in the terms of their suspended conversation, writing, "I keep thinking

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[60] This sharing of Platonic ideas is redoubled and literalized at the end of the section, in which Guy "forgets" his volume of Plato, leaving it in the hands of Bruno. If no act is quite accidental in Highsmith, one can safely say that Guy is literally giving Bruno ideas through this act of apparent negligence.

about that idea we had for a couple murders. It could be done, I am sure" (47). Bruno's rhetorical jump from *my* idea to *our* idea is not simply evidence of a delusional mind, but suggests that an idealist "we" has permeated a criminal will suspended between them; tellingly, Guy does not dispute these new terms, but tacitly endorses them: "The letter pleased him somehow. It was pleasant to think of Bruno's freedom" (48).

The pleasure Guy takes in imagining Bruno's freedom (to kill) in turn redounds upon Guy's own sense of agency. Having read another letter from Bruno congratulating him on his Palm Beach commission—which Guy has imagined as the impetus of "his courage, his momentum, his will"—Guy recognizes that Bruno has enabled his freedom from Miriam's interference: "*Bruno had done it*. There was no mistaking Bruno's personal pride in his, Guy's, freedom now" (102, Highsmith's emphasis). The hitch in the syntax, the awkward qualification of the personal pronoun, blurs the line of demarcation between each character's "freedom." Furthermore, Guy's immediate certainty of Bruno's act is provoked by a look in a mirror wherein guilt is both registered and redoubled in his own visage: "In the mirror behind the bar, he saw himself glance at his sunburnt face, and it struck him that his eyes looked dishonest and furtive. *Bruno had done it*" (101, Highsmith's emphasis). In contrast to the specular ego in Lacan's mirror stage, the reflected visage does not produce an imaginary coherence, but a split whereby Guy sees himself shirking his complicity in the murder: he *catches himself in the act*—of avoidance and of murder.[61] Guy's certainty comes upon him "like a cataclysm that only a madman's unreason could have kept suspended all this while" (102). Just as Kenneth Burke's

[61] This scene, too, has a precedent in Book VIII of *The Confessions*. God turns the hero's guilt back upon himself: "And I looked and was appalled, but there was no way of escaping from myself. You thrust me before my own eyes so that I would discover my iniquity and hate it" (144). Of course, Guy's problem is not simply that he has seen his own guilt reflected back to him—in his case, his guilt filtered through the other—it is that the volitional ramifications of this guilt are suspended, offering no clear prescriptions on how to assume it.

metaphorical rubber band exercises sudden force because it has been stretched out, knowledge-in-suspense yields its concentrated power in the form of sudden imperative: "This was an instant—He could not say just what was happening, but he felt his entire life would be different, *must* be different, from now on" (102, my emphasis).

Given that the content of this imperative is empty, or held in suspense, how does Guy translate his conviction that his life "must be different" into a decision to murder Bruno's father? Here, we are brought back to the question of how Guy's sense of "likeness" within the field of stranger-sociality conditions the leap to action. We have seen that Bruno's leap from idea to deed hyperbolically relays Guy's intimated hatred. For Guy, the conversion to evil draws upon yet also perverts the philosophical idealism he shares with Bruno.[62] This transformation takes place as an affective reabsorption of "the idea," whereby his idealism turns his powers toward an irrevocable decision. Whereas Bruno commits to murder with the vigorous energy of transpersonal misogyny, Guy, by contrast, deadens his emotional inclinations so as to mechanically submit to Bruno's meticulously planned out "idea." Leading up to the murder to Miriam, Bruno's "energies that had been dissipated […] seemed gathered in a vortex whose point strove toward Metcalf like the aggressive thrust of the train" (67). Similarly, prior to murdering Bruno's father, Guy "felt he moved on certain definite tracks now" (146). But whereas Bruno feels teleologically driven toward a single act, Guy's own gathered force issues from a psychic exercise whereby he repeats the murder over and over again in thought, acting virtually, in the realm of the ideal: "In the nights when he could not sleep, he enacted the murder, and it soothed him like a drug" (140); "I have done this many times before, he thought, and this

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[62]In an interview with a French journalist, Highsmith herself reveals a penchant for philosophical idealism as it pertains to human action. An unprompted Highsmith suggests that every great action—for instance, a revolution or work of art—stems from "an idea" that must precede its materialization.

is only one of the times" (150). Whereas Bruno introjects a suspended affect to move from the idea to the concrete act, Guy, conversely, ejects all affect, as though transforming the prospect of the horrific act back into its ideal form, emblematized in Bruno's written blueprint and its infinite repeatability in thought.[63] If Guy sees a volitional force materialized in an object as material as his gun, which "looked inquisitive, willing, strong […]," he also imagines his own capacity to kill by dematerializing the gun in thought: "*It's not really a gun in my pocket. I've never really thought of it as a gun.* […] And immediately he felt easier, because he knew he was going to kill with it" (148).

If, in making the leap to action, Bruno concentrates his spiritual powers by amplifying a suspended affect, Guy does so by invoking the ideality of action on behalf of a suspended reality. These agential forms retain their shape even during the novel's climactic turns and reversals. Shortly before his fatal fall into the sea, Bruno "wanted to sing or shout or do *something*" (260, Highsmith's emphasis). If we sense this death coming, it may be because Bruno has exhausted his powers of action, as his actualized scheme represents for him the apex of his life. For his part, Guy has one thing left to do: make the "atonement" he has foreseen as part of his destiny (211). Unlike his closest literary kin, Dostoevsky's Raskolnikov, whose love for the saintly prostitute Sonia gives him a kind of surrogate conscience, Guy is left with an insubstantial and vague sense of guilt. What accounts, then, for Guy's second conversion, whereby his philosophical idealism turns him away from crime and toward the prospect of punishment?

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[63] With Guy's internalization of Bruno's plan and its constitutive repeatability, one might recall Captain Ahab's rejoinder to Starbuck in Highsmith's favorite novel: "This whole act's immutably decreed. 'Twas rehearsed by thee and me a billion years before this ocean rolled" (501). As Guy gets closer to Bruno's father, "He felt like a machine, beyond danger and invulnerable. He had been here many, many times before, had killed him many times before, and this was only one of the times" (151). Whereas Ahab's feeling of fatalism derives from his histrionic orientation and his embeddedness within the drama of call and response, Guy's feeling of infinite repetition derives not from dramatic structure but from a subtle appeal to the Platonist idealism that binds him to Bruno in the first place.

Following Bruno's death, Guy oscillates between the options of evasion and confession. While Guy seems determined to turn himself in toward the novel's end (273), he subsequently considers counter-reasons that hold his decision in suspense: "What, concretely, did he have on his conscience now? What human being would inform on him?" (278). Once again suspended on the brink, how does Guy end up taking his conclusive leap whereby he assumes the role of this absent informant and turns it against himself? After a bungled attempt to atone by confessing to Miriam's unresponsive lover, whose bulky shoes materialize for Guy the "massive stupidity" of humanity, Guy hears "the intelligent silence of a live wire" (280) and invites Gerard, the private investigator who is tracking him, into his room. Shortly thereafter, Guy gives himself up, thereby ending the novel: "Guy tried to speak, and said something entirely different from what he had intended. 'Take me.'" (281). I want suggest by way of conclusion that Guy's act of resignation stems less from moral guilt, which in his case is vague and abstract, than from a will to occupy a gap in the moral structure of Highsmith's world. In other words, the act of resignation is not so much a transparent sign of personal guilt as a desperate bid to make his atonement count in a world where murder itself has become a matter of indifference: "Everyone would leave it [the act of informing] for someone else, who would leave it for someone else, and no one would do it" (278). In giving himself up, then, Guy assumes the place of the Law's nonexistent informant—that ideal, hypothetical person who would care about the individual life of a Samuel Bruno or a Miriam Haines. This does not mean that Guy's act represents a plea for the significance of individual human lives; rather, it reveals the fate of the will in a world where stranger-intimacy has become the default mode of sociality, canceling the axiom that endows persons with intrinsic moral worth. We have seen that Guy commits his crime by rechanneling the suspended will of a specific stranger. He initiates his final attempt at atonement, on the other hand, by channeling a

different kind of will, not that of a novelistic character but of the "someone else" beyond the character-system: a "no one"; a nonexistent moral agent; a negative figment of Guy's amoral idealism.[64]

From Self-Projection to Self-Circulation: Becoming a Stranger in *Ripley's Game*

Whereas the plot of *Strangers* is set into motion by an encounter between two specific characters, that of *Ripley's Game* begins with the impersonal circulation of discourse—with a rumor. Having been slighted at a party by Jonathan Trevanny, Tom Ripley spreads word that Jonathan, a stranger with myeloid leukemia, is on the verge of death. Seeking amusement from Jonathan's panic, Tom also hopes Jonathan will be gullible and desperate enough to do some dirty work for him and his partner Reeves: two murders in exchange for a large sum of money, which Jonathan would hypothetically be able to leave to his wife and son. While Jonathan begins the novel believing he has some time left, his prognosis itself is grimly indeterminate, and when he hears the rumor—corroborated by the cryptic Reeves, who is acting as a liaison under the pseudonym "Wister"—he begrudgingly lends it credence. Trying to convince Reeves that the rumor is unfounded, he seems unable to convince himself: "'It's true I have a blood disease, but—I'm in no worse a state now—' Jonathan broke off" (41). Even Jonathan's body seems to register the effects of the rumor, as though its groundless circulation has suffused his vascular system: upon hearing Reeves reiterate that he is "not going to live more than a few weeks," and that he should accept the hit job, "Jonathan felt the blood drain from his face" (41). To the degree

[64] In this sense, the ending of *Strangers* diverges from the confession in *Crime and Punishment*, which Sartre in *Being and Nothingness* (476) holds up as a paradigm of a radically free act. To give oneself up in Highsmith's novel is to act as a surrogate for an ideal stranger who exists in thought alone.

that Jonathan believes the rumor and even embodies its claim, Ripley's circulating word functions as a kind of *de facto* death sentence; as propagated by Reeves and processed by Jonathan, hearsay takes on the status of the Law's fatal sovereignty.[65]

Instead of inducing a paralyzing fatalism, however, Jonathan's credulity leads him toward a bold decision made under the assumption that his biological life is spent. Paradoxically, Jonathan at times seems to paradoxically both acknowledge the rumor as a fiction and takes its claim seriously: after accepting Reeves' offer to pay for a second diagnosis in Hamburg, Jonathan is at once "terrified of the what the report" would say and thoroughly anticipating a "phony report" (67).[66] Abetted by Jonathan's own cognitively dissonant absorption of dubious discourses, the artificial circulation of rumor permeates what Reeves calls Jonathan's "own free choice": "He [...] felt the blood rise to his cheeks, and held a quiet debate with himself. He would try the shooting" (76). And yet Jonathan's credulous absorption of the rumor cannot account for this radical decision and its practical ramifications. Just as Augustine's hero's knowledge of the true and the good cannot yield a good will, Jonathan's investment in the power of the false (to use Deleuze's term) embedded in rumor cannot itself generate a leap to action.[67] To account for this radical conversion, I want to suggest that a dynamic process of imaginative self-estrangement, rendered through Highsmith's manipulation of the third-person perspective, mediates between Jonathan's tentative belief in the rumor and his decision to become a killer. Within this process, we will see a self-transformative conversion that, unlike Guy Haines', cannot be enfolded in a dialectic of crime and atonement. Whereas Guy inserts himself first within the place of evil, and later, in the empty place of the nonexistent good, Jonathan takes up

[65] I owe this particular insight to Frances Ferguson.
[66] I am again indebted to Frances Ferguson for reminding me of this passage.
[67] Cf. Deleuze's *The Logic of Sense* (262-263).

an agential position whose moral implications will shift as he progressively enacts his self-transformation. Initiated by the self-estranging rumor, Jonathan's process of becoming a stranger to himself and others—namely, to his wife, Simone—opens up a new mode of social volition, which both suspends practical judgment rooted in personal identity and transvalues the impersonal dynamics of circulation in which he finds himself embedded.

Jonathan's conversion begins with a subtle shift in perspective, from a practical to an aesthetic standpoint. His eventual decision to accept Reeves's offer does not emerge from practical reasoning, but instead, from a subtle destabilization of point of view enabled by fantasy. Before the offer can become even close to viable, it must become newly visible. Jonathan's way of imagining Reeves' offer transforms what seems like an impossible hypothetical into an aesthetically pleasurable "idea." While at first Jonathan considers the offer well beyond his moral limits—"Thanks, I'm not a killer," he tells Reeves (42)—his imagination literally *idealizes* Reeves' offer, suspending it as an "exciting" object held up to observation: "He had no intention of getting in touch with Wister, though the idea was curiously exciting and disturbing, a bolt from the blue, a shaft of color in his uneventful existence, and Jonathan wanted to observe it, to enjoy it in a sense" (51). Though the intention is consciously rejected, it covertly persists within a pleasurable tension which will intensify even as Jonathan holds fast to his familiar self-image. Much like Augustine's hero, Jonathan is suspended on a threshold, imaginatively projecting a volitional mode that seems practically remote.

But whereas Augustine's hero envisions positive exemplars of the good, "the numerous good examples for me to follow" (151), Jonathan's self-projections are shot through with negativity, with gaps and impossibilities. In contrast to Augustine, Jonathan paradoxically includes himself within his projections *by* excluding himself. It is on the threshold of this

impossible inclusion that Jonathan paradoxically posits himself as a certain kind of agent by denying his capacity to imagine himself as such: “What Jonathan was incapable of imagining […] was himself pulling the trigger” (51).[68] To appreciate the syntactically precise rendering of Jonathan’s point of view, one might consider a couple counterfactual formulations. Were Highsmith to use free indirect discourse, she might write, “Jonathan wouldn’t be able to pull the trigger.” Instead, Highsmith opts for psycho-narration (in Cohn’s sense), which turns the verb form, “pull the trigger,” into a gerund, “pulling the trigger.” This grammatical move transforms the act into an object of imaginative observation, like Wister’s “idea,” the “bolt from the blue.” But psycho-narration too might have taken a more conventional form: for instance, “Jonathon could not imagine pulling the trigger.” Instead, Highsmith writes, “*What* Jonathan was incapable of imagining […] was *himself* pulling the trigger” (51, my emphasis). In other words, Highsmith’s syntax includes Jonathan as a pronominal object and agent within the very image from which he excludes himself. Jonathan’s self-inclusion, in other words, cannot complete itself; he becomes, within imagination, an *unimaginable agent*.

By the same token, however, Jonathan’s projected self-exclusion remains incomplete as well. As Jonathan mentally includes himself through exclusion, this paradoxical negativity takes on a power not unlike that which Augustine accords to the positive exemplars of successful conversion. For Augustine, in the unconverted state, “there are two wills. Neither of them is complete, and what is present to one is lacking to the other” (147). Likewise, in Jonathan’s case, two incomplete wills seem to vie for primacy within the space of imagination. For instance, consider a scene in which Jonathan experiences an amoralized version of Augustine’s “will half-wounded, struggling with one part rising and the other part falling down” (146). While he has

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[68] Jonathan’s occupation as a picture-framer takes on its full meaning here. In his fantasy life as well as in reality, he is constitutively external to the frames that he himself constitutes.

“gardened with a will” (51) during the day, Jonathan’s earthly will is “falling down” that night: “Jonathan felt a sudden depression, as if his legs, his whole body had sunk into something viscous […]” (53). This viscous, sinking sensation is countered by an image of elevation from which he is, as it were, included out:

> He thought of Stephen Wister (or was that his real name?) maybe flying eastward now, his thin figure stretched out on an airplane seat. Jonathan imagined Wister’s face with the pinkish scar, puzzled, tense, but Wister would no longer be thinking of Jonathan Trevanny. He’d be thinking of someone else. He must have two or three more prospects, Jonathan thought. (53-54)

Here, the image of the plane seems to lift Jonathan’s mind in response to his sinking sensation; like Augustine’s “truth,” Wister’s offer is calling him elsewhere. And yet, in Jonathan’s imagination, Wister *himself* has already forgotten him: Jonathan invokes his own proper name in order to vicariously project self-devaluation. From an impossible perspective, belonging neither to Jonathan nor Wister per se, “Jonathan Trevanny” becomes just another rejected and forgotten prospect. Whereas Augustine’s hero seeks to “make the leap to where I was being called” (150), Jonathan imagines the call of criminal contracting in thoroughly impersonal terms, which would leave “Jonathan Trevanny” behind in favor of “someone else.”

When Jonathan flies to Hamburg, where Reeves has promised to pay for a medical prognosis, he in effect reenacts his fantasy of Wister, but inserts himself as a *subject* of self-erasure. Prior to his boarding, the very thought of Hamburg suspends Jonathan between the “reality” of his domestic existence and a “break” or “lark” that suggests a departure from the self (56). This “break” is already dialogically initiated when he calls Reeves/Wister to confirm his trip:

"…Yes, this is Wister," Wister said in his light, tense voice.

"I had your letter this morning," Jonathan began. "The idea of going to Hamburg—"

"Yes, why not?" said Wister casually.

"But I mean the idea of seeing a specialist—"

"I'll cable you the money right away […]"

"That's—that's kind of you. Once I'm there, I can—"

"Can you come today? This evening? There's room for you here to stay." (56-57)

As the repetition of dashes indicates, Jonathan does not converse here so much as take up the position of a subject of suspense. In an exchange that will cause Jonathan's heart to "beat a little fast" (57), Reeves' repeated rejoinders suspend his articulated plans, nudging the "idea" away from its medical rationale toward the prospect of a payout. Jonathan's effort to measure out his intention—"I can—" is interrupted by Reeves' call for urgency, which Jonathan seems to affectively internalize: "He would have to hurry, he realized, and he liked that, because it precluded thinking, hesitating" (57). By taking flight, thereby assuming the position from which he had been absent in fantasy, Jonathan does not reassert his identity, but expedites the abandonment of his proper name: "He was imagining being another person. The rush of the plane seemed to be rushing this new person away from the man left behind in the dark gray house in the Rue St. Merry" (59). Just as Jonathan had imagined Reeves forgetting "Jonathan Trevanny" in favor of an anonymous "someone else," he now internalizes and projects this displacement, as "this new person" takes leave of "the man left behind."[69]

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[69] According to Bakhtin, the *threshold* is the chronotope conducive to a moment of decision (*Problems* 169). One might say that the *airplane* in *Ripley's Game* stretches the threshold, portending a suspension and transformation of volitional orientation within the interim between take-off and touchdown. During a subsequent flight after his first killing, Jonathan seems ready to double down on Reeves' contract: "Jonathan's optimism had risen on the plane: if

Highsmith figures Jonathan's conversion, his becoming "this new person," as a reversal of his real-life vocational history. Whereas the young Jonathan attended drama school and harbored ambitions of being a stage actor (25), he ends up becoming a self-employed picture-framer. In Jonathan's trajectory, the picture-framer, who literally frames images from which he himself is excluded, belatedly becomes the professional actor. Jonathan's very real task is in fact bound up with pretending: he is supposed to make the killing appear as though a rival gang is responsible. But even though the murder involves playing a role, Jonathan's conversion demands a negation of theatrical self-deception: "[H]e could pretend to be acting, in someone else's clothes, pretend the gun was a blank in a play. But Jonathan knew exactly what he was doing. Toward the Mafioso he was going to kill (he hoped) he felt no mercy" (78). If Jonathan initially considers his fantastical thoughts, those disturbing bolts from the blue, unreal—flights from which he needs to "[come] back to reality"—he now repeats his return to reality, but lands on the other side. A decisive transition from feigned to real action occurs when Jonathan, at Reeves' request, dons a coat especially designed for the contract killer. In this case, Jonathan literally takes the place of the stranger, as though outfitting himself for a strange new will.

> Jonathan didn't want to try it on, but he got up and put the coat on. The sleeves were longish. Jonathan put his hands into the pockets, and found, as Reeves was now informing him, that the right-hand pocket was cut through. He was to carry the gun in his jacket pocket, and reach for it through the pocket of the coat, fire the gun preferably once and drop the gun. (72)

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he'd come well through the first episode, he might make it through the second" (87). Here, the "new person" rushed away from his dark gray house becomes once again suspended; agency is figured on the level of the episodic rather than the biographical or personal.

If the free indirect discourse here overtly channels Reeves' instructions, it also permeates Jonathan's own perspective: free indirect discourse mediates between a hypothetical directive—which, with its mechanical repetition of the word "gun," still somehow sounds like a stage director's instructions—and a determinate intention. Here, the gesture of trying something on, or trying something out, anticipates Jonathan's leap from habitual hesitancy to intended action: Jonathan's decision to "try it on" anticipates the more consequential decision to "try the shooting" (76). *Trying*, self-experimentation within the ill-fitting space of the anonymous killer, is reenacted within the real. As he acknowledges after a later criminal endeavor, he has acted his way beyond the safe distance of the actor: "He wished he could erase the last few hours, cut them out of his memory. Yet he had been there, he had acted, he had helped" (227).

And yet, far from decisively consummating his conversion to the criminal life, Jonathan encounters an impasse that reveals both the limits and possibilities of his vexed self-transformation. Jonathan's performance of self-belief—the type Pascal believed could turn kneelers into converts—falters; the embracing of being-toward-death that enables him to decide and act in the first place becomes a source of debilitating performance anxiety: "He had to remember to even breathe. Today was going to be a day of failure, he thought. He wanted to plunge into the river and possibly drown, or become a fish [...] Jonathan felt that he was not going to kill anyone today, not by the string in his pocket, not by the gun either" (113). Thus, on the verge of committing his second leap to action—another, more difficult murder for Reeves and Tom, to be carried out on a train—Jonathan's imaginative self-projection turns against him: his potential leap is imagined as a plunge. If Tom, like a kind of Pascalian guru, "believed in the positive thinking" (129), Jonathan succumbs to the failure already postulated in his self-projection. Likewise, the material supplements to his flagging will seem set up for failure: unlike

Guy Haines' gun, the "willing" weapon ready at hand, the garrote becomes a mere "string," a sort of useless material excess. Jonathan occupies a suspended space, as his criminal commitments are compromised by his inability to *fully* inhabit the role. He boards the train, but wonders, "what was he doing standing here?" (119).

If Jonathan's decision to kill the first target represents self-negating conversion, his anticipation of abject failure would seem to negate this negation. But Jonathan's second self-negation does not return him to his initial condition. Here, one might recall Augustine's misgivings concerning his conversion: experiencing "horror" at the prospect of "becom[ing] different," "[this horror] did not thrust me back nor turn me away, but left me in a state of suspense" (150). Jonathan, too, eventually exploits the dynamic potential within a "state of suspense." Rather than throwing him back to his initial condition as a mild-mannered and risk-averse family man, Jonathan's very failure seems to propel him toward a new assumption of criminality. Significantly, Jonathan's "state of suspense" is open to the effects of stranger-sociality, which he takes advantage of my accepting Ripley's unanticipated help on the train, in spite of his confusion ("Whose side was Tom Ripley on?" (119)). Having entrusted himself to Ripley's salutary intervention, Jonathan is eventually able to *articulate* his will, to explicitly avow and self-consciously register his criminal complicity. Here, instead of redoubling through self-estranging fantasy Highsmith's third-personal perspective, Jonathan comes to voice his will from the first-person. Rather than working to recover his wife Simone's trust and love, Jonathan doubles down on Ripley's game. When Tom asks help in the disposal of two Mafioso corpses, Jonathan affirms the plan without his habitual stutter: "I am willing, yes" (218).

And yet Jonathan's first-personal avowal, far from representing a progression toward sovereign agency, is of a piece with his *incapacity* to act the part. Jonathan's own willingness to

help Tom mirrors the prior scene in which Tom comes to Jonathan's aid: Tom's plan to "lend a hand" is literalized as a handoff of volition itself, as Jonathan "pulled his hand out and gave the garrote into Tom's willing hand" (120). Tom redoubles and supplements Jonathan not so much in his person, but within an impersonal volitional circuit: hand, garrote, mobster, payout. Much like Guy Haines' "willing" gun—which Guy, incidentally, imagines as "the third hand that had done the murder […] Like him, he thought now, in its power to kill" (178)—Tom's willing hand augments not just Jonathan's instrumental capacities but, eventually, his volitional resolve.

Jonathan's avowal of willingness stems neither from a spontaneous exercise of sovereign will nor from an affirmation immune from the nihilism of circulating rumors, garrotes, and money. His indebtedness to Tom, first of all, is not existential—for "his own life had lost value" (79)—but monetary: "[I]t was Tom Ripley who had—at least tried to help him collect that money, even if it had been Tom's idea from the start, this deadly game" (250). And yet, since his wife Simone will not accept blood money, Ripley has proved rather useless to him. But in *Ripley's Game*, currency asserts its transformational value in its very self-cancellation; even in its failure to circulate, money constitutes the novel's vanishing mediator.[70] *It was Tom Ripley who had—at least tried to help him collect*: money occupies the hiatus of this dash, the suspended space between Tom's willing hand and Jonathan's willingness to dispose of his own life, articulated when he tells Tom, "If I can be of service, even suicidal, I'm at your disposal" (251). If strangers can generate money, then money can generate strangers. "*Why* are you being paid for this, Jon?" Simone asks. "You—a killer! [...] You are a stranger to me" (243). The dash

[70] For the early Marx, money both binds and separates, and thus generates a paradoxically antisocial sociality: "If money is the bond binding me to human life, binding society to me, connecting me with nature and man, is not money the bond of all bonds? Can it not dissolve and bind all ties? Is it not, therefore, also the universal agent of separation?" ("The Power of Money"). In *Ripley's Game*, I would suggest, this ontological function of money sustains the narrative suspense that Jonathan internalizes.

between “You—a killer!” condenses the empty space of the conversion Jonathan fails to complete yet nonetheless *affirms*. In between, like the holding of a breath (as Auerbach might put it), is the protracted space of self-suspension whereby Jonathan comes to assume the subtraction of the personal “You” and the first-personal affirmation of an impersonal willingness.

Ripley’s Game takes up the question of how the possibilities inherent in a self-suspending orientation—one worthless in itself, or absurd, as Jonathan suggests in his last living moment (262)—can enable a new, socially responsive negotiation of the end of possibility as such. By the end of the novel, the suspense of the will comes to displace the comforts of marital love, which for Jonathan “had taken the terror out of death” (26). But if Jonathan’s love initially inclines him to view death with affective neutrality, he later imagines death as a seductive force, sweeping away a proverbial swimmer who has strayed too far and “lost his will to struggle.” But if Jonathan has lost a will to survive, he also *wills the seduction* of Ripley’s game and, moreover, proffers a concluding move, a self-sacrifice. If to love is to give what one does not have, to will death, in this case, is to offer one’s worthless blood:

> “Can I be of any service? As a decoy, perhaps? A sacrifice?” Jonathan laughed.
>
> “I don’t want any decoys,” Tom said.
>
> “Didn’t you once say the Mafia might want a certain amount of blood, as revenge?”
>
> Tom had certainly thought it, but he wasn’t sure if he had said it. (251)

Jonathan offers to prolong Ripley’s life through a kind of transubstantiation and recirculation of his diseased blood. If Jonathan finds his own gesture laughable, it is because the noir world has cast doubt on any values—life, love, friendship, or self-sacrifice—that might render such a

commitment noble. When Jonathan makes good on his pledge, his dying thoughts register Sisyphean futility: "[W]hat he had done, misdone, accomplished, striven for—all seemed absurdity" (262). Such is the outcome of a conversion that gives a decisive social meaning to being-toward-death yet also suspends the very categories through which ethical sociality can be made meaningful. Jonathan circulates his agency on behalf of a friendship[71] held in suspense, a friendship that cannot disavow the fact that the two characters are fundamentally strangers to one another and to themselves—acting, however wholeheartedly, in the third-person: "Could it be that Trevanny was one of *us*? But us to Tom was only Tom Ripley" (97).

III. From Conversion to Aversion: Willing on the Brink in *Ripley Under Ground* and *Those Who Walk Away*

We have seen that characters such as Guy Haines (in *Strangers on a Train*) and Jonathan Trevanny (in *Ripley's Game*), occupying worlds in which stranger-sociality challenges agential sovereignty at every point, cannot immediately will in the form of a leap to action. Instead, their agential self-constitution passes through a suspenseful relation to the disorienting avatars of strangerhood. If concrete action is always in some sense a leap, this leap is only propelled by the endurance of the extended temporality of stranger-sociality. In this section, focused on *Ripley Under Ground* and *Those Who Walk Away*, I will ask what happens when a character not only suspends a given orientation toward action, but encounters an impasse that makes a leap to action impossible. Whereas, thus far, I have examined disoriented agents who find themselves on a

[71] While filming his 1976 adaptation of *Ripley's Game*, Wim Wenders initially planned to shoot with a mostly still camera, deliberately eschewing tracking and panning. Wenders later decided not only that camera movement was necessary, but that his original retitling, *Framed*, should be replaced by the title which the film now bears, *The American Friend*. These two revisions seem like two aspects of a single socio-formal decision: in *The American Friend*, the creeping camera movement enhances the toned-down suspense inherent in the unstable, ironic "friendship."

threshold to be leaped over, I will now turn to characters who, unable or unwilling to take a leap that might change a state of affairs, find themselves *following* action from a distance—in the sense of both attending to and literally tailing agents. These characters opt to tarry on the outer limits of a scene of action, like private eyes without employ.[72] In these novels, the act of following responds to the impossibility of conversion as such—whether to good, to evil, or to a social stance that renders ethical categories difficult to parse out. In other words, following responds to a scenario in which a self-transformative resolution fails to register as a possibility on the narrative horizon.[73]

In *Ripley Under Ground* and *Those Who Walk Away*, however, the suspension of conversion does not imply agential stasis. However neurotically struck these characters might seem, something happens to the will which must confront the ramifications of a fundamental impediment. Put more emphatically, it is through this very impasse, and the concomitant reduction of action to the formal gesture of tracking, that a different form of willing can emerge. This will manifests itself belatedly as a trace within a scene of action; paradoxically, the follower leaves his volitional mark precisely by withdrawing from the *vita activa*. The act of following entails neither a leap in the sense I have discussed, nor an abdication of the will, but rather, an Auerbachian turning of spiritual powers that takes form as willed aversion. The unconditional imperative issued to the subject of suspense which demands an attentiveness *to* action yields a

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[72] I have drawn the concept of "tarrying" as a mode of agency from Andrew Cutrofello's *All for Nothing: Hamlet's Negativity*, which, through an ingenious reading of Shakespeare's play, compelling distinguishes "tarrying" from "delaying" (85-112). Whereas *delaying* implies a deficiency in the agent, *tarrying* involves a sensitivity to timing and takes shape as purposeful waiting. Whereas Cutrofello views tarrying as one possible response to a situation in which a specific action is necessary—for instance, Hamlet's revenge—I will be interested in modes of tarrying that either already include or open the way for willed inaction.

[73] One might note here that Highsmith's followers also differ from the conventional detective figure, whose telos is always a vital fact or truth. Furthermore, we can distinguish Highsmith's novels from detective narratives that thematize a follower's ironic conversion, that is, his process of becoming the very figure he is tailing. *Oedipus Rex* is of course the foundational text. In Highsmith's own era, Alain Robbe-Grillet's *The Erasers* (1953) redeploys Sophocles' structure to narrate the undoing of the detective/criminal distinction.

turning *away* from it—namely, from both a face-to-face confrontation and the acts of violence that, in late modern "wound culture," tend to displace it. In contrast to Seltzer's argument, I want to claim that this kind of aversive sociality is not merely the default condition of Highsmith's late modern world, but very often a latent *possibility* within this world, which as such must be willed into being through deliberate inaction.

"A Curious Murder": *Ripley Under Ground* and the Perversion of Empathy

In fact, Bernard was going to kill himself, and Tom sensed this in the way he might have sensed a murder, because suicide was after all a form of murder.

Highsmith, *Ripley Under Ground*

In *Ripley Under Ground*, we are introduced to Bernard Tufts, a kind of Ripley doppelganger who has been forging the work of a famous dead painter, Derwatt.[74] Tom Ripley, Bernard, and their associates are running a scam that depends upon the illusion that Derwatt is still alive and producing profit-generating works. The trouble is, unlike Ripley, Bernard feels guilty for forging a series of invaluable "Derwatts" and thus represents a danger to the enterprise. Tom has already offed one art aficionado, Murchison, who had been privy to his scheme, and realizes his forger might have to be eliminated: "It had occurred to him that if Bernard balked tonight, Bernard would have to be disposed of, too. Killed. It was a sickening thought. Tom did not want to kill Bernard. Perhaps he would not even be able to" (127). Thus, while Tom has just taken pride in his two "leap[s] into faith"—first, impersonating the deceased Derwatt at a public relations event, and second, killing Murchison—he cannot make this particular leap. Tom, who admires

[74] While unlike Bernard, Tom specializes in more logistical matters, forging such documents as checks and letters, I will suggest that he can empathize with the forger-artist insofar as he considers forgery as such to have its own kind of vocational dignity.

Bernard as a fellow forger and even a kind of "saint," must induce Bernard's elimination without this outcome being traceable back to him—legally or morally, by way of Law or conscience. Bernard's fatal jump (or fall—the event is ambiguous) from a cliff seems to secure Tom's success: while admitting "he had willed or wished Bernard's suicide," Tom also believes that he "could hardly accuse himself of forcing suicide upon Bernard" (266).

The novel itself, however, casts doubt on Tom's verdict: as Highsmith puts it in an eerily isolated paragraph immediately following the event, "It had been a curious murder" (265). This is, of course, a truly "unspeakable sentence" for one declaring himself innocent.[75] The novel, unlike Tom himself, tracks not only the possibly suicidal Bernard but also the complex mode of willing inherent in his somewhat illegible death. While Tom repeatedly describes this death as a suicide, Bernard's plunge actually takes place beyond the limits of narrative focalization, leaving an epistemic lacuna not only for Tom (who anxiously fills it in) but for the reader (who is more skeptical). If the novel leaves the immediate cause of Bernard's death mysterious, it also thoroughly investigates the transpersonal dynamics of volition registered in this "curious murder." One "curious" fact is that while Tom follows Bernard to his death, he also distances himself—physically and affectively—from the event, refusing not only to act in any decisive sense but also to bear witness to the violence. Instantiated through the novel's modulating third-personal point of view, this ongoing dynamic interplay between tracking and turning away figures Tom's will itself, which, paradoxically, appears murderous precisely insofar as it implies a deliberate self-distancing from the *vita activa*.

While the majority of *Ripley Under Ground* privileges Tom's point of view, this narrative orientation is often filtered through, and distorted by, his projection of Bernard's beliefs, desires,

[75] Cf. Ann Banfield's seminal account of free-indirect discourse, *Unspeakable Sentences*.

and intentions. In other words, Tom's point of view is redoubled, at once the novel's primary mode of focalization and an effect of his way of inhabiting his double's perspective. Consider Tom's pivotal epiphany: "In one strange instant, while he was not even thinking, Tom realized that Bernard was going to kill himself, was going to be a suicide somewhere" (191). Tom's identification of the agent of this future act is complicated by the *form* of his epistemic claim: while his "realization" seems depersonalized, like the fruits of a detective's keen intuition, his utter certainty of Bernard's intention seems less like a reasoned judgment than stipulation by fiat, unjustified by observation or inference.[76] Shortly thereafter, Tom more overtly compromises the neutrality of his prophesy: after a maddened Bernard, stricken with a guilty conscience for which he blames Tom, attempts (and unwittingly fails) to bury Tom alive, Tom hints at his own complicity in the very suicide he foresees. Once again thinking that Bernard will kill himself, Tom now recognizes that his apparent clairvoyance presupposes his own agency: "And in order for Bernard to go through, or carry out, whatever it was that he intended, Tom knew that he himself had to continue to be dead" (196-197). Highsmith's language is precise here: what Tom knows is not that he must *pretend* to be dead, but that "he himself had to continue to *be* dead" (emphasis added). While Tom in one sense avows his complicity in the "suicide" to come, he suspends his own prospective self-becoming, figuring this suspension as an effect of Bernard's point of view on *him*.

Notwithstanding the sinister vagueness of these intuitions, Tom's ability to imagine and project himself into Bernard's point of view manifests itself throughout the novel as a kind of empathy. Tom is empathetic in the precise etymological sense: he relates to Bernard with a kind

[76] One might argue that Tom's certainty is rooted in a series of inductive inferences based on his observations of Bernard's suicidal tendencies. But this certainty does not quite square with his belief that "Bernard was so deranged at the moment as to be really unpredictable by any standards" (196). Tom certainly cannot claim the objective foreknowledge of an oracle.

of em-pathy, an *in-feeling*. This empathy is most overtly put into action during the climactic sequence in which Tom quite literally tracks down Bernard, tailing him around Salzburg and eventually encountering him face to face:

> Bernard's expression had been one of disbelief, and after a split-second fear, as if Bernard had seen a ghost.
>
> Tom realized that that was exactly what Bernard had thought he had seen: a ghost. A ghost of Tom Ripley, the man he had killed. (256)

Far from maintaining a private eye's neutrality toward Bernard's impression, Tom spontaneously begins to *feel* like a ghost: "He was not tired or out of breath after all his fast walking. He felt odd. Only the pleasant coolness of the wind on his forehead reminded him that he was among the living" (262). Moreover, Tom's self-ghosting via Bernard's vantage is redoubled through Tom's perspective on the now ghostlike Bernard: "It was curious, Tom thought, that he felt Bernard was as much a kind of ghost as Bernard apparently thought he was" (262). But the empathic point of view, far from implying an unambiguously beneficent affect, actually contains within itself the possibility of perversion. "Each glimpse of Bernard sent a weird pain through Tom: it was as if he were seeing someone already in the throes of death, yet walking about" (260). Here, Tom's empathic pain is indistinguishable from a perception that will insinuate itself into his perverse will: to see Bernard dead.

Thus, Tom's practical orientation in *Ripley Under Ground* emerges not from cold calculation or a lack of feeling, but from an empathy for Bernard that suspends its own moral implications. Tom's own nascent intentions develop from this suspension, and come to inhere within his manner of tracking and projecting himself into the other. Suspending any explicit decision to either exploit his self-ghosting for a particular end *or* disabuse Bernard of his illusion,

Tom finds himself intentionally enacting ghostlike gestures: “That had been rather deliberate on his part,” he realizes after making one such maneuver (263). Thus, it is from Bernard’s viewpoint that Tom further specifies his hitherto inchoate intention to “be dead.” Tom becomes a kind of object-agent to himself, a belated observer of his own intentions. Empathy functions perversely here insofar as it produces intentions that deviate from the expected moral aims of fellow-feeling. Within an amoralized perspective suspended between the third and first person, Tom further develops the ramifications of playing dead: rather than simply absenting himself by hiding out, Tom renders *conspicuous* his very withdrawal from living interaction. Tom’s performance, his becoming-ghost to Bernard and thus to himself, takes shape not so much in a sequence of positive acts but in a pattern of flagrant omissions, which he himself internalizes. While following Bernard, Tom frequently considers trying to get in touch with him: he wonders if he should “hail” him (256), or “talk to” him, or “slap him on the sleeve” (262). Tom thinks he should “[*p*]*ull Bernard out of it*,” but “doubted that he could” (259). By turns suddenly appearing and disappearing from Bernard’s purview, Tom physically enacts and flaunts this reluctance. Rather than leap into a particular role—say, the consoling friend or the calculating murderer—Tom tarries ghostlike on the threshold of action, as though affirming and performing *in*decision.

What Tom engenders here is not the duplication of a persona, but an affective experience projected from within Bernard.[77] It is as though Tom acts outside himself, from a position *within* a vicarious sense of abandonment. The affective experience of abandonment stemming from aversive sociality has an important precedent within the novel itself. We learn early on that the suicidal Derwatt had been particularly disappointed by his friends’ unwillingness to keep him

[77] Here, I have deliberately avoided the diagnostic locution, “projected onto”: I do not mean to suggest a psychological imposition upon, and displacement of, alterity, but rather, a projection made from within Bernard’s psyche as Tom understands it. And not withstanding an understandable tendency to reduce Ripley to a kind of psychopath, Tom often evinces an acute sensitivity toward Bernard’s point of view.

company in his most dire hours. Later on, Tom listens as a deeply moved Bernard reads a passage from Derwatt's journal that further explains the implications of this unwillingness:

> "And friends? In the moment of grappling with the enemy, Death, the potential suicide calls upon them. One by one, they are not at home, the telephone doesn't answer, or if it does, they are busy tonight—something quite important that they can't get away from—and one is too proud to break down and say, 'I've got to see you tonight or else!' This is the last effort to make contact. How pitiable, how human, how noble—for what is more godlike than communication? The suicide knows it has magical powers." (149)

Tom's manner of self-ghosting, his way of presenting himself only to distance himself, recalls Derwatt's negligent friends, who withhold "human" contact and cut off the "magical" communication that promises to cure the suicidal subject. One might say that Tom adopts and adapts the role of the negligent friend. But in this case, playing a role does not mean reproducing the specific qualities of a persona or ego; negligence in its pure form, as total absence, cannot be mimicked. So, instead of impersonating this absent friend, Tom in effect *wills* negligence, transmuting absent-minded indifference into palpable inaction. During the climactic sequence of *Ripley Under Ground*, a novel that begins and ends with Tom picking up a telephone, Tom ostentatiously short-circuits communication at every turn. If Derwatt's absent friends can be said to exemplify what Seltzer calls (following Goffman) civil disattention, Tom wills a kind of sinister aversion. This aversive effect is exacerbated by the fact that Bernard has previously seen the deceased Derwatt in a "vision." While Bernard himself feels guilty for being one of the negligent friends, the ghost of Derwatt comforts him by assuring him that all is well, and

insinuating that Bernard should "just go on living" (181). Approaching Bernard only to remain eerily aloof, Tom returns as a kind of diabolical variation of this vision.

I have been suggesting that we understand Tom Ripley in this novel not so much as a master manipulator, instrumentally anticipating or dictating every move, but rather, as an improvisatory perverter of his own empathy. One might wonder, however, whether I have not underestimated the scope of Ripley's self-deceptions: is his empathy not another sham, concealed from himself? If Ripley stalks Bernard to his death—ultimately mutilating his corpse to forge evidence of Derwatt's suicide—is his circumvention of straightforward murder not simply a clever way of soothing what is left of his conscience?

While one is right to be skeptical of his occasional pretenses to probity, the terms in which the talented Mr. Ripley describes Bernard—a "man of talent" (66) who has approached "the edge of greatness by virtue of his talent—though he signed his work with another name" (181)—testify, at the very least, to his ability to identify with his partner in forgery. I would suggest that Ripley's empathy is genuine insofar as it is not primarily a moral attitude, but an effect of an aesthetic kinship with his double.[78] Tom appreciates Bernard not only for his utilitarian role in the con scheme, but for the ethos he exemplifies, which for Tom involves "[struggle]" and "genuine achievement" (66). When Tom speaks of Bernard, he rues the tragedy of the con artist, whose very talent precludes the possibility of recognition: "A pity, Tom thought, that [words of praise] couldn't be engraved upon Bernard Tufts' own tomb, wherever that might be finally. Tom was reminded of 'Here lies one whose name was writ in water', a line that had made Tom's eyes fill with tears […]" (97). It is precisely because he so intimately inhabits Bernard's perspective that Tom can pervert his own empathy. One should also note that

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[78] This is not to say that this empathy cannot have moral effects. For instance, Tom, the consummate liar, finds himself "uncomfortable" telling lies to Bernard (117), and eventually confesses to him that he has killed Murchison.

Bernard can be seen as complicit in this very perversion. It is Bernard, after all, who has passionately argued to Tom that it is absurd to prolong an artist's lifespan beyond his period of productivity. Bernard by his own lights seems past his prime: while trying retrain himself to paint originals, Bernard has the strange sense that he is forging his *own* work; he also suggests in a diary entry that he has reached an ontological dead end: "I never was Derwatt. But now am I really Bernard Tufts?" (277). In projecting Bernard's end, Tom is in one sense simply deducing this conclusion from Bernard's own principles.[79] Tom's willing of Bernard's "suicide," then, manifests not a lack of empathy, but rather, the amorally aversive potentialities suspended within fellow-feeling.

I would like to conclude by returning to the epigraph to *Ripley Under Ground*. Taken from Oscar Wilde's letters, the epigraph frames the novel in terms of a single paradox, that is, the true commitment to falsity. Highsmith quotes Wilde as follows: "I think I would more readily die for what I do not believe in than for what I hold to be true…Sometimes I think the artistic life is a long and lovely suicide, and I am not sorry that it is so." This citation of course reminds one of Ripley, who considers forgery a high art, indeed, a "genuine achievement." At an extreme point, however, the commitment to forgery must expunge any residue of romantic sincerity we might detect in the epigraph. In a novel that undermines the very idea of dying on behalf of a purely aesthetic cause, Tom "dies" for what he does not believe in—he thinks "R.I.P. Tom Ripley […]" (197) *after* climbing out from under ground. In other words, the novel imagines a situation in which what Seltzer might call the act of violence that stands in for the impossible

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[79]This is not the only evidence that Bernard's perspective is at least ambiguous, and possibly incoherent. Shortly before unexpectedly disappearing, Bernard commits a sort of symbolic suicide by leaving a dummy dressed in his own clothing hanging in Tom's home. While he claims in an accompanying note that he wants to "try to do my work honestly in what is left of my life" (169), this inscription occurs in the context of a prank that, of course, undercuts any pretense to honesty.

face-to-face encounter has *itself* become impossible. Or in any case, what has become impossible is an act of violence taking the form of decisive and direct action. Within this space of impossibility, wherein Tom can neither kill nor die for what he does not believe in—that is, the sham of Derwatt Inc.—Tom "dies" without giving up the ghost. We have seen that, in *Ripley's Game*, Jonathan's vexed conversion enables him to will the game and its end, and turn his being-toward-death toward a positive, if "absurd," act. By contrast, in *Ripley Under Ground*, Tom, simultaneously following *and* turning away from direct worldly action, catalyzes the "curious murder," which he can only track its conclusion by not committing. If it can be said that Tom wills murder, he goes up to the threshold but not over it; he wills a murder without a murderer.

Tarrying Between Word and Deed: *Those Who Walk Away* the Ethics of Aversion

I do not want to accuse; I do not even want to accuse those who accuse. Looking away *shall be my only negation.*

Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*

At the opening of *Those Who Walk Away*, Ray Garrett, whose wife Peggy has recently committed suicide, is walking down a dark street with his father-in-law, Edward Coleman. The first words Ray speaks indicate the direction, or lack thereof, the novel will take: "You know where we're going?" (1). But whereas Coleman, who blames Ray for his daughter's death, is single-mindedly bent on killing him, Ray, though also seeking closure, finds himself bereft of any determinate plan of action. While does seem to have an overarching aim—to "tarr[y] for a word" with Coleman so as to make the case for his innocence—he scarcely believes in the necessity of his goal: "If he could make Coleman believe that, instead of believing that he, Ray,

was keeping some vital fact or secret from him, then—Then what? Ray's mind refused to tackle the problem any longer. He fell asleep" (6). When he does get an opportunity to explain himself to Coleman, Ray is again unable or unwilling to complete his thought: "'I wanted to talk to you,' Ray began, 'because I feel you don't quite understand still that—' He hesitated only a second, but Coleman interrupted quickly" (40). If Coleman has as it were already taken the leap to action, Ray, by contrast, tarries within the time of hesitation, suspending his initiative just as the em dash suspends his thoughts and utterances.

Unlike Coleman's murder attempts, which are thwarted in large part because of his carelessness, Ray's plan to exonerate himself seems always already compromised from within. In other words, Ray's failed endeavor registers a will that is eroding itself. While we might initially think that Ray falters because he is intimidated by his father-in-law and shaken by the latter's violent intentions, it becomes clear that Ray does not unequivocally believe in the grounds of his self-exculpation. Far from possessing a good conscience that might help him formulate his claim, Ray is overwhelmed with guilt, which he belatedly recognizes as a "vast, grey, cyclonic form that he had been unable to deal with [...]" (213). Ray anxiously fills up dead time, making "plans" that seem almost parodic insofar as they largely entail self-withdrawal and aimless observation: "Ray forced himself to think what he had to do next. Pay the bill here. He didn't want to go back to Seguso. That was it. Play dead for a few days. See what Coleman would do. The thought brought curious relief. It was a kind of plan" (55). Ray's suspended plan morphs into a plan to suspend; his practical faculties yield nothing but manageable instrumental actions (paying the bill) and deferred intentions that shift the burden of agency onto another (seeing what Coleman would do). Whereas the father-in-law Coleman occupies the structural position of Ray's own deceased father, "whose word was law and who did what he wanted to do,

or what needed to be done […]" (60), Ray figures a Hitchcockian subject of suspense, a spectator who, unable to intervene in a state of affairs, tensely awaits the actions of others: "A light, fixed on the corner of a house so it would illuminate four streets, seemed to burn with patience, waiting for persons not yet arrived, persons who would carry out some action below it" (76).

But the apparent opposition which would pit Ray the spectator against Coleman the perpetrator is complicated by our suspicion that Ray himself is somehow *willing* the threat of violent action (to recall Highsmith's description of the suspense genre). Like Tom in *Ripley Under Ground*, Ray withdraws from the realm of action but also divines his own participation in the very outcomes he projects. In one instance, Ray has a vision that closely resembles his earlier perception of the illuminated streets, except here roles have been filled in. The person "who would carry out some action" is Coleman, and he himself is the victim:

> [Ray] stood at the bar, sipping the coffee, and an image came to his mind: himself walking in a dark alley in Venice, over a small curved bridge that spanned a canal, under a street-lamp that projected from a house corner—and from the shadow of the house across from the light, Coleman stepped and hit him a fatal blow on the back of the head. Was that what he wanted? A blow with a rock-in-hand, with an iron pipe? Or was the image, like a dream, preparing him for something that was going to happen, most likely going to happen, anyway? (133)

Ray's vision here is structurally homologous with Ripley's in *Ripley Under Ground*: the specter of Tom's "curious" act of murder haunts his postulation of Bernard's suicide; similarly, Ray's *de facto* suicide inheres within his imagination of Coleman's fatal blow.[80] But in contrast to Tom's

[80] Ray's imagined fate recalls the doomed reader in Julio Cortázar's metafictional story "Continuity of Parks," who ends up being the target of the very murder plot he is following on the page. Unlike Cortázar's metafictionally entangled victim, however, Ray can anticipate this potential outcome because he occupies the same ontological

invocation of absolute necessity, Ray's rhetorical question opens the will to multiple possibilities, including the limit point at which it volition is supplanted fatalistically by something "that was going to happen, anyway," due to Coleman's action. Unlike Tom's prophesy, Ray's premonition remains incomplete: the question mark as well as the probabilistic qualification ("most likely going to") portend the other's action and Ray's complicity without thereby invoking fatalistic resignation. In *Ripley Under Ground*, suicide is after all a form of murder; at this point in *Those Who Walk Away*, murder may be after all a form of suicide, but this possibility remains hypothetical.[81] The modal suspension inherent in this vision suggests that Ray Garrett is poised on a threshold between conciliatory action on the one hand and absolutized self-negation on the other. Ray can neither explain himself and "walk away" nor wholeheartedly embrace the volitional position of his late wife, who in committing suicide has manifested a "will to give up life utterly, with a bang" (32).

This suspended will is not simply evinced in crisis moments and tantalizingly indeterminate epiphanies.[82] It structures what seem to be the novel's most ordinary actions and decisions. For instance, the titular act of *walking*—very often an act held in suspense, thoroughly intentional yet without a specific goal—figures the indecision of the will throughout the novel. We have seen that the narrative begins with Ray deferring his ambulatory direction to Coleman—*You know where we're going?*—thereby rendering himself vulnerable to the

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plane as his attacker; Ray's murderer might materialize from a shadow but not from ink on a page. Thus, it is more plausible to imagine that Ray is volitionally implicated in the scenario he is imaginatively tracking.

[81] The specter of Ray's murder exemplifies what Gary Saul Morson calls "sideshadowing"—that is, a narrative's evocation of a possible action or event that will not necessarily come to pass (Morson 117-172). Morson's claim is that narrative, in spite of its structural closure, can think genuine contingency—or more specifically, the modal *reality* of volitional possibility. Highsmith's creation of a suspenseful will frequently deploys this device. (117-172)

[82] Here, Highsmith departs from her primary novelistic forebear, Dostoevsky. If Dostoevsky, as Bakhtin persuasively argues, tends to represent "the person *on the threshold* of a final decision, at a moment of *crisis*" (61, Bakhtin's emphasis), Highsmith very often expands this threshold, enfolding crisis moments within the de-dramatized (yet often tense) time of ordinary life.

imminent gunshot. In the scene leading up to the third attempt on his life, Ray reenacts this deferral of direction, as though deliberately—or in any case, not accidentally[83]—putting himself in harm's way. Upon leaving a restaurant and realizing he does not know where he is, Ray opts to walk aimlessly in the dark "until he saw something recognizable" (172). Of course, the first recognizable something is Coleman himself, and this encounter leads to the violent confrontation. Walking here seems to bear within itself a latent contraction: Ray's stroll into the night is somehow both an act of *walking away* from and an act of *walking into*. In contrast to *Ripley Under Ground*, the follower and the followed repeatedly exchange places, to the point of being, at times, indistinguishable. This indistinction is internal to the will itself: Ray's mode of following incurs his own being-followed; his being-followed demands that he himself follow.

It would be misleading to suggest that Ray embodies *mere* indecisiveness, in the manner of, say, Buridan's ass, which starves because it cannot choose between two identical bales of hay. Ray's suspended will is better described as paradoxical. Unlike the donkey's stagnated volition, the paradoxical will bears a dynamic potentiality even as it seems rather inert. If Ray, in his habitual hesitation, appears indecisive, it is because he repeatedly attempts to enact two irreconcilable commitments. For instance, Ray repeatedly resists the very existential negativity he simultaneously solicits, summoning a counter-will to deflect the threat of self-loss.[84] After Coleman attempts a second murder, pushing him off a boat into a canal, Ray struggles toward a buoy, which externalizes his own suspension between suicidal grief and worldly reemergence:

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[83] A blurb from the *New York Times Book Review* adorning Highsmith's Norton paperbacks aptly notes that Highsmith's world is that of "the not quite accidental." Given that Highsmith eschews any metaphysical force such as fate that would dictate events, the "not quite accidental" can only be a dimension of the characters' agency.

[84] For this reason, I disagree with Žižek's notion—as put forth in his *London Review of Books* article, "Not a desire to have him, but to be like him"—that Ray is guided by a "death wish." While Ray does flirt with death in his dalliance with Coleman—and moreover takes comfort in deadening his psychic life through sleep or thoughtlessness, an "agreeable mental fog" (171)—Žižek's diagnosis implies what is in my view an untenable dichotomy between conscious intent (Ray's plan to verbally reconcile with Coleman) and unconscious drive (Ray's underlying desire to die at Coleman's hands).

“The buoy rose like a smooth teardrop that had half fallen into the water” (47). Highsmith’s bizarre simile embodies the paradox of the will: Ray’s buoyancy comes into being as an immanent suspending force the counters its *own* tear-like dropping; in pursuing the buoy, Ray seeks out an external manifestation of himself. When in the novel’s second half Coleman strikes him yet again, Ray, “struggling not to pass out, felt that he struggled also against dying” (173); he later recalls how “he had won out over unconsciousness by sheer will-power, it seemed to him” (179). Just as the buoy rises like a fallen tear, Ray only musters “will-power” while on the verge of submitting to unconsciousness and death. Although he preempts an imminent push into the canal and fights back against Coleman, he only does so once catching sight of the “rock-in-hand” from his earlier suicidal premonition: “Ray saw Coleman’s hand, with a rock in it, drawn back for another blow, and dived for Coleman’s ankles, or rather lurched against them, striking them with his shoulder” (173). While the use of the comma endows the physical gestures with a degree of discreteness, creating enough separation to suspend Coleman’s “drawn back” hand, it also gives us the sense that Ray’s perception of the impending blow is one and the same act as his spontaneous lurch. In one continuous movement, Ray encounters his earlier vision of the “blow with a rock-in-hand” and materializes its suspension.

Like Tom in *Ripley Under Ground*, Ray finds himself exercising will not over but *on* the brink of decisive action. But whereas Tom envisions a specific endpoint, Bernard’s elimination, that could stand in for an impossible decision, Ray tarries without plot coordinates, as though he cannot sense what a desirable resolution to his dilemma might look like. Still, Ray’s tarrying on the threshold of action is not mere evasion or wayward self-distraction. On the contrary, his tarrying forces him to reposition himself *within* the space of hesitation, between the opposed outcomes of social reconciliation and self-annihilation, which appear either impossible or

unacceptable. Between the word he never gets in and the deed to which he will not submit, Ray can only transvalue agential omission itself. In this transvaluation, *Everyone would rather walk away* becomes not merely a diagnosis of late modern civil disattention, but a kind of guiding thought conducive to a specific mode of aversive willing, one which appears in stark contrast to Ripley's sinister non-action.

If Ray does not exactly solve his problem, or induce a solution à la Tom Ripley, he nonetheless adjusts his mode of response *within* this suspended state. The suspended will reveals a modulating sensitivity to practical deadlocks which enables a merciful stance toward the merciless Coleman that any rigid plan would preclude. If Ray evades introspection regarding his personal complicity, he also externalizes this self-opacity by turning volitional suspension into an improvisatory ethos. From the perspective of the novel's end, one can retroactively reevaluate the ramifications of this ethos. While one might initially take the view that Ray is passive or cowardly, one might also note that he has allowed Coleman space to exhaust his grief-inspired rage and thereby enacted his professed "sympathy" for his father-in-law's condition. Likewise, while one might initially see Ray's self-defense as a kind of pathetic attachment to his mortal life, one also senses a willed refusal to absolutize his own guilt through a submission to murder. If *Those Who Walk Away* investigates the emotional ramifications of an epistemic aporia—that is, the undecidable question of the degree to which Ray is complicit in his wife's suicide—it also imagines how a bereaved subject might negotiate this obscure sense of guilt through an oblique penance that, however masochistic it becomes, holds open the possibility of walking away. Ray's decision not to press charges against his murderous nemesis extends this improvisatory ethos into the realm of concrete action; that is, the decision raises this ethos to the level of a plot-ending power. In lieu of late modernity's impossible face-to-face encounter, Ray reenters the

social by *refraining* from action, by turning away from the standard procedure of formal accusation.[85] This suspended will becomes a will to suspend, which in turn catalyzes Ray's conclusive decision to leave Venice. As a singular, freely decided termination, Ray's act of leaving cannot be folded into the action-reaction pattern that Seltzer's analysis tracks.[86] Unlike the structure of a game, the endpoint of which is either inscribed in its rules or dictated by external factors, the plot of Highsmith's novel can only conclude because Ray buys a ticket to Paris rather than remain in Venice to take legal action. Here, we might recall Auerbach: Highsmith's novel can only end because Ray, orienting himself as a subject of suspense, deprived of emotional freedom, becomes adequate to the spiritual powers enabled within suspense—even as these powers manifest themselves in terms of the most modest negation, a final decision to walk away.

V: Strangerhood, Point of View, and the Structure of Suspenseful Willing: A Recapitulation

I would like to conclude, first, by situating my argument in relation to a couple of significant accounts of novelistic character; and second, by reconstructing the progression of my reading of Highsmith's novels and offering some synthesizing thoughts on the nexus of character, stranger-sociality, novelistic point of view, and will.

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[85] However modest such an act might seem, it remains remarkable enough to baffle the novel's private detective, who is confused not only by the laxness of Italian law but also by Ray's act of mercy (247).

[86] I would also distinguish my approach from Žižek's. Žižek sums up the novel thus: "*Those Who Walk Away* is a crime novel with no actual murder, merely a failed attempt at one: there is no clear resolution—except, perhaps, Ray and Ed's resigned acceptance that they are condemned to haunt each other for the rest of their lives." But Ray decides to leave not with a sense of resignation, but with the expectation that Coleman's passion has been spent: "[…] Ray felt that Coleman would never make another attempt on him. Coleman had given his all on this last one" (246). Coleman's attitude less clear, in part because Ray's will to suspend the mutual haunting becomes the focal point of the novel's conclusion.

I have argued that if the philosophical question of the will is to be recognized as a problem in Highsmith's novels, one must take the formal category of character seriously. Insofar as I have been concerned with novelistic character, have my readings smuggled in humanist assumptions that critics such as Seltzer have been at pains to dismantle? I don't believe so. While I do not follow Seltzer in reducing character to system, I also believe that Highsmith's fiction resists humanist recuperations of character. For instance, an analysis of Highsmith would be ill-served if it took as its point of departure the question that Alex Woloch claims undergirds his entire study: "How can a human being enter into a narrative world and *not* disrupt the distribution of attention?" (*The One and the Many* 26). While such a question may be germane for an account of character in 19th-century realist novels, it is guided by an assumption that Highsmith's fiction undermines—that is, that character presupposes something like an "implied person" (25). By situating Highsmith's work in relation to both Augustine's *Confessions* and Auerbach's account of suspense, I have sought to show that her characters are always already constrained by their generic status as subjects of suspense. In other words, characters not only always already inhabit a specific plot—in such a way that nullifies the idea of a human being *entering* a narrative—they also introject the affects Auerbach attributes to the suspense reader and, consequently, suffer a considerable loss of freedom as the price of self-transformation. Following Seltzer in emphasizing the ubiquity of stranger-sociality in Highsmith's work, I have tried to demonstrate that characters are exposed from the outset to what I have called strangerhood, which, on the one hand, threatens the coherence of a character's habitus and point of view, and on the other, demands that the character reassume a volitional stance.

On the question of what it *means* to inhabit a point of view or assume a stance within the field of stranger-sociality, I part ways with Seltzer. Whereas Seltzer suggests that, in Highsmith,

point of view is an effect of game-like structures and the more or less pathological action-reaction patterns played out therein, I hold that point of view already registers a minimal form of *willing* that is almost invariably cashed out in the form of decisive action (conversion) or purposeful inaction (aversion). To further elucidate my contrasting position, I would like to consider Seltzer's argument about the logic of fungible personhood in Highsmith's Ripley novels. Seltzer rightly suggests that Tom Ripley "can take the place of" Dickie Greenleaf (an envied friend he kills and impersonates in *The Talented Mr. Ripley*), or "take" or "posit" the place of a fictional IRS agent (32), but concludes somewhat hastily that "the Ripley novels are nothing but the possibility of that interchangeability—and the cultural techniques that enable it […]" (32).[87] Instead of jumping to this conclusion, I would dwell on the question of *how* one takes up a position or posits one. To take a position—or in the terms I have used, to orient oneself toward the prospect or threat of action—is not merely to switch places through impersonation or mimetic behavior. Rather, it already constitutes a creative act that can only be thought within the formal parameters of third person narration and its modulating registration of the force and demands of stranger-mediated agency.

In conclusion, I would like to summarize my argument by reconstructing the sequential logic undergirding my readings of these four paradigmatic Highsmith novels. In my section on *Strangers*, I reject the notion that Bruno and Guy imitate one another, or act primarily *by* fulfilling a contract. Instead, I argue that the encounter on the train yields two interlocked yet non-communicative points of views and wills: Bruno acts by taking up a hyperbolic variation of Guy's affective stance; Guy mutes his emotional intensity and thereby prepares himself to carry

[87] One should note that Seltzer's rhetorical strategies often border on deliberate hyperbolic abstraction; this brazen mode of conceptualization makes him one of the most exhilarating and provocative of all contemporary literary critics. While I do not oppose this rhetorical strategy as such, I believe that this formulation, while unqualified, reveals a great deal about his sense of how character works across Highsmith's oeuvre.

out Bruno's precisely arranged, almost machine-like plan. In this instance, an encounter between two strangers, prolonged by epistolary exchange, yields two converted agents who accomplish a form of collusion grounded in neither imitation nor cooperation. Guy's re-conversion, whereby he "atones" by assuming the place of the impossible moral agent and becoming his own informant, brings a nonexistent character—the anonymous "someone else" to whom responsibility would be infinitely deferred—into being.

Whereas the bulk of *Strangers* imagines the will as mediated by the titular strangers who are of course actual characters, *Ripley's Game* can be understood as an extrapolation and extension of Guy's final act of conversion, which is mediated, by contrast, by a non-character—a hypothetical agent conjured out of, and excluded by, the amoral conventions of late modernity. In other words, just as Guy assumes the status of the nonexistent informant he has mentally summoned, Jonathan Trevanny converts into a violent criminal by virtue of a sequence of imaginative projections induced under the pressure of strangerhood, which takes the form of unfamiliar processes of circulation. In *Ripley's Game*, these projections into the strange realm of anonymous gangsters and shady transactions both usher Jonathan into the life of crime and leave him suspended in the interstices between an estranged family and a still unfamiliar set of operations. And yet far from vitiating his *agency*, Jonathan's vexed process of conversion prompts him to decisively articulate his intention to die for Ripley, to reduce himself to an anonymous "amount of blood" in a mob shootout.

If *Ripley's Game* centers thematically on a suspended yet consequential conversion, *Ripley Under Ground* and *Those Who Walk Away* unveil the consequences of suspended conversion in its most radical form. In these novels, conversion is suspended in the sense that it is rendered impossible; this impossibility precipitates a form of negative agency: willed aversion,

which manifests itself as active inactivity (in the case of *Ripley Under Ground*) and inactive activity (in the case *Those Who Walk Away*). The deadlock that prevents conversion from taking place forces characters to reorient themselves by granting primacy to other agents. But again, becoming an effect of another agent must be contrasted with compulsion or mimicry: intentions are not derivative or programmatic, but creative responses to maximal constraints. Whether the consequences are eerily menacing, as in *Ripley Under Ground*, or arguably admirable, as in *Those Who Walk Away*, the mediation of strangerhood as an encompassing form of life reaches a limit point whereby stranger-sociality is intensified through negative acts of will.

In Highsmith's fiction, Auerbach's postulated recuperation of freedom—the turning and concentration of spiritual powers of activity—is dynamically mobilized within point of view and concretized through novelistic action. In Highsmith's work, point of view is neither a mere generic *a priori* nor an extra-textual reality that fiction would mimetically reproduce. Novelistic point of view *is* the orientation toward the threat of violent action (to recall Highsmith's generic formula), whether that threat comes from within or without: that is, the disturbances within point of view already gesture toward the exercise of suspenseful volition.

CHAPTER 3

THE POSSESSED WILL AND THE GOTHIC MODE IN "LIGEIA," *AS I LAY DYING*, AND *BELOVED*

At first glance, Gothic fiction seems to open up universes that are utterly hostile to any form of willing. Is the Gothic mode not devoted to "humiliating the will"[88]; to exposing the empty humanist pretenses to volitional sovereignty; to showing how autonomy is a sham, how objective forces undercut the capacity to act at every turn? If the will is a future-oriented concept—inasmuch as will seeks to transform the world rather than simply fall in line with its rhythms—how could one square it with conventions associated with the Gothic, with, for instance, the dominance of a repressed past or the omnipresence of worldly decay? If the willing ego[89] ambitiously pursues its agenda of altering a current state of affairs, then the Gothic subject, by contrast, seems to find itself confined to a range of affective states that preclude the possibility of action—unease, confusion, astonishment, or sheer terror. Even if the willing ego in a Gothic world staves off these paralyzing affects, it would seem to come up against a fundamental limit imposed by the Gothic mode—the sheer inertia of the past's presentness. Nietzsche's Zarathustra articulates this problem of the will encountering a quintessentially Gothic reality, the "it was": "Powerless against what has been done, he is an angry spectator of all that is past. The will cannot will backwards; and that he cannot break time and time's covetousness, that is the will's loneliest melancholy" (139). Thus, even if the Gothic agent is not entirely stunned by the strange and cryptic signs from the past, she might very well end up an "angry spectator," a frustrated victim of historical belatedness.

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[88] I borrow this phrase from Philip Fisher's *The Vehement Passions* (206).
[89] The "willing ego" is Hannah Arendt's term for the human considered in its capacity exert its will (*Life* 97).

But perhaps one could begin at a different point—not with a subject powerless before seemingly omnipresent forces, but with the nexus of forces itself. What one would need is an account of will that is less psychological than ontological—one dependent not on conscious reasoning or motivation, but on relationally constituted forces that can organize themselves in the form of action. In his seminal work on Nietzsche, Gilles Deleuze develops a concept of will that is apt for this purpose. Against philosophers of the will who have presupposed a "neutral subject endowed with free will" (*Nietzsche* 23)—an uncompelled subject capable of choosing one way or another at a given point in time—Nietzsche, on Deleuze's reading, argues that will is embedded *in* its own actions and expressions, which are not themselves freely chosen. The will, then, is not a transcendent faculty, but a power immanently related to itself and its effects. The will does not cause an action independent of itself, nor does it posit an end or objective separable from itself; rather, it creatively seeks its own *quality* as constituted in a differential relation with other forces. In a perspicuous reading of Nietzsche's concept of the will that builds upon Deleuze's, Elizabeth Grosz emphasizes that the will is incorporeal insofar as it indexes an "irreducibility to the forces composing materiality" (111). This irreducible will does not subsist independently of its material instantiations, however, but inheres as an "orientation or direction" within a wide range of phenomena—"any form of matter, any form of thought, any practice […]" (111).

In this chapter, I will draw upon this reconceptualized notion of will, yet also argue that a lineage of American Gothic fiction—comprised of Poe's "Ligeia," Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying*, and Morrison's *Beloved*—develops this concept in a manner that is only intelligible through fictional form. In the Gothic tradition I will be tracking, the will is not simply a directionality proper to a person or material entity, but an orientation that hauntingly disturbs and thus

*re*orients the agents that materialize it. Poe's tale sets the terms for an extended examination of the will within these works. "Ligeia" begins with an epigraph attributed (without archival warrant) to the English philosopher Joseph Glanvill:

> And the will therein lieth, which dieth not. Who knoweth the mysteries of the will, with its vigor? For God is but a great will pervading all things by nature of its intentness. Man doth not yield himself to the angels, not unto death utterly, save only through the weakness of his feeble will. (262)

As defined in this epigraph, Poe's idea of the will resonates with Deleuze and Grosz's notion of an impersonal yet oriented will: marked by *vigor* and *intentness*, and *pervading* the world by virtue of this intentness, the will is linked to quality of expression rather than a form of personhood. In this chapter, I will use Poe's tale to demonstrate how, in the Gothic mode, these qualities are intensified by the ghostly persistence of the past and its disruptive manifestation in the present.

The heart of my chapter will explore how Faulkner and Morrison deploy novelistic form to complicate the reanimating will found in "Ligeia." The work of Bakhtin will help transition between the Gothic invocation of will in Poe and the novelistic developments of Faulkner and Morrison. Bakhtin's concept of the character zone (discussed in my introduction), which *As I Lay Dying* and *Beloved* creatively extend. To recall, Bakhtin writes, "A character in a novel always has […] a zone of his own, his own sphere of influence on the authorial context surrounding him, a sphere that extends—and often quite far—beyond the boundaries of the direct discourse allotted to him" (320). In Bakhtin's analysis, the character zone seems to occupy a middle ground between the more familiar category of the chronotope—the concretization of space-time that undergirds actions and events—and character, the representation of person-like

beings. In these Gothic novels, however, character zones seem to displace the distinction between novelistic chronotope and character altogether. The proper name of the character becomes a metonymy for a *zone of volitional influence* wherein willing becomes possible. Moreover, I want to suggest that, in the Gothic novels of Faulkner and Morrison, the character zone is *possessed*, and that far from diminishing agency, this mode of possession makes novelistic volition maximally operable.

As I Lay Dying, like Poe's tale, centers on a figure positioned between life and death, a figure crucial to the unfolding of willed actions. In Faulkner's novel, however, the mark of will is not the overcoming of death per se, but the carrying out of an imperative that generates agonistic volitional zones. In *As I Lay Dying*, Addie Bundren, the dying and subsequently undead matriarch of a poor Mississippi family, distributes a strong will throughout the ensemble of characters, who can only act by reckoning with and transmuting this undead will. Faulkner's novel reveals the chasm between bodily persons and their capacities for action by displacing individuated characters with character zones that compete for primacy within a single collective action, the journey to bury the mother. *Beloved* deepens the problem of impersonal volition by asking what it might mean for a body to express a *collective* will embedded within specific racial and cultural histories. Morrison's novel excavates a history of the will—or more precisely, constructs the will *as* history. This will inheres not in novelistic individuals but in saturated spaces that gather past energies and convert them into practical capacities. Taken together, Faulkner and Morrison's novels put into question the assumption that the Gothic is limited to an exploration or irrational or repressed impulses.[90] Moreover, they also undermine the notion that

[90] M.H. Abrams' glossary entry on the "Gothic Novel" suggests that "the best [novels] opened up to fiction the realm of the irrational and perverse impulses and nightmarish terrors that lie beneath the orderly surface of the civilized mind" (111). On my account, the Gothic will displaces the opposition between the "irrational impulse" and the "orderly surface of civilized mind."

will itself must be construed in terms of rationality or individual personhood. Both authors imagine a Gothic and novelistic mode of willing that, far from being impeded by the dead weight of familial or cultural history, creatively mediates between the potentialities of the past and imperatives of the present. In so mediating, this mode of willing manifests a paradoxical relation to sociality: while thoroughly absorbed in sociality by virtue of Gothic possession, the will nonetheless aggressively—that is, willfully—seeks to redress the discontents of collective existence.

I. "Ligeia" and the Space of Revivification

After attempting to account for his late wife's strange beauty by clinically analyzing the features of her face, the narrator of "Ligeia" determines that this strangeness "must, after all, be referred to the *expression* [of Ligeia's eyes]. Ah, word of no meaning!" (264). Stymied by an expressive quality that yields no knowledge, the narrator proceeds to enumerate a list of worldly phenomena that induce the same nameless "sentiment" he feels when gazing into "those large, those shining, those divine orbs!" (264). The last phenomenon he mentions is the Glanvill passage that serves as the epigraph. He has discovered

> some remote connection between this passage in the English moralist and a portion of the character of Ligeia. An *intensity* in thought, action, or speech, was possibly, in her, a result, or at least an index, of that gigantic volition which, during our long intercourse, failed to give other and more immediate evidence of its existence. (265)

But such a provisional discovery is itself complicated by the narrator's subsequent implication that her volition is tied to her "stern passion," which far from leading him to conceptual knowledge of her will, reroutes him back to various aesthetic phenomena: "And of such passion I could form no estimate, save by the miraculous expansion of those eyes which at once so delighted and appalled me—by the almost magical melody, modulation, distinctness and placidity of her very low voice—and by the fierce energy […] of the wild words which she habitually uttered" (266). Thus, the endeavor to secure knowledge of Ligeia's mode of willing ends with a description of the unique quality of her style. The hint of volitional strength seems to occlude the effort to know alterity in terms of personhood, in terms that could reconcile the universality of conventional character traits with the singularity of a being.

During the course of the tale, following the narrator's admitted inability to "portray" in words Ligeia's "eager vehemence of desire for life" (268), Ligeia's will resists becoming an object of detached theoretical knowledge and instead reveals itself through the narrative form of a Gothic melodrama. No longer an object of contemplation, Ligeia is at this point a *presence* that is scarcely distinguishable from the scenery that the narrator establishes. Ligeia's eventual haunting its prepared by the space itself: "The phantasmagoric effect was vastly heightened by the artificial introduction of a strong continual current of wind behind the draperies—giving a hideous and uneasy animation to the whole" (271). It is as though Ligeia's nascent presence is called forth by a staging operation: the current of wind that "gives […] a[n] animation to the whole" is artificially generated. But the narrator fails to realize that this spacing might be the condition for reanimation—or, in accordance with the tale's logic, a condition for will. He proceeds to performatively illustrate the impotence of an individualist will that would operate by simple fiat: "[…] I would call aloud upon her name, […] as if, through the wild eagerness, the

solemn passion, the consuming ardor of my longing for the departed, I could restore her to the pathway she had abandoned—ah, *could* it be forever?—upon the earth" (272). Such a direct invocation fails: the narrator, even while mimicking the personal qualities he attributes to Ligeia (wildness, eagerness, passion, etc.), cannot simply bring her back from the dead through individual effort.

In "Ligeia," neither the titular lady nor the narrator can voluntaristically will any outcome, namely, that of reanimation. And yet, a will does seem to function in the form of a scaled-down version of Glanvill's God (as Poe revised that deity)—"a great will pervading all things by nature of its intentness" (262). Ligeia's encroaching presence on the room does indeed seem to pervade all things and seems intent on reanimation. But far from constituting sovereign agency, Ligeia's return is thoroughly immanent to the delimited space of the room. The "hideous drama of revivification" is first of all one that the narrator's detested second and current wife, Rowena, perceives: "She partly arose, and spoke, in an earnest low whisper, of sounds which she *then* heard, but which I could not hear—of motions which she *then* saw, but which I could not perceive" (273). Rowena then immediately grows ill. Is Ligeia intending to destroy her? Poe deflects attention away from intentions proper to individuated agents and toward *intentness*, a quality that narrows in on Rowena. Such intentness becomes palpable for the narrator, who has given the fainting Rowena a goblet of wine: "[A]s Rowena was in the act of raising the wine to her lips, I saw, or may have dreamed that I saw, fall within the goblet, as if from some invisible spring in the atmosphere of the room, three or four large drops of a brilliant and ruby colored fluid" (273). Once again, personal agency is here displaced by a seemingly intentional action that nonetheless has no identifiable source—not a hand, but an "invisible spring in the atmosphere of the room" pours the drops. While the narrator has just become "distinctly aware of a gentle foot-

fall upon the carpet" (273), he never identifies the foot-fall as Ligeia's. These movements, however, are perceived as non-accidental, thus making them instantiate the qualities attributed to the will: mysteriousness, intentness, and pervasiveness. The tale concludes with Ligeia's hair "stream[ing] forth, into the rushing atmosphere of the chamber" (277). She opens her eyes, shocking the narrator. The eyes, the focal points for the narrator's investment in Ligeia's volitional mode, reappear to consummate the drama.

Thus, at the tale's conclusion, the posited site of volition (the eyes) coincides with the moment in which a strong will affirms itself by transgressing the limits of mortality. The eyes here function not as windows to the soul but as empty signs of an impersonal will to life. Tzvetan Todorov has convincingly argued that "Poe is the author of the extreme, the excessive, the superlative; he pushes everything to its limits—and beyond, where possible"; Poe's fiction, for Todorov, homes in on "the point where a quality achieves its highest degree […]" (95). In "Ligeia," of course, the will is intimately tied to a particular limit—namely, the limit of death, to which only the feeble will of the mortal succumbs. The tale offers a concise dramatization of how the will—considered as a vigorous, intent, and pervasive affirmation of a quality that exceeds a limit—becomes dislodged from the mortal body, imbuing the atmosphere itself with the power of a resurgent past.

"Ligeia" is a drama of self-overcoming which, as a short tale, possesses its own limits. The tale imagines volition strictly as the stubborn persistence of life itself, which the narrator aptly explains in terms of Ligeia's "eager vehemence of desire for life—*but* for life […]" (268, Poe's emphasis).[91] Thus, while "Ligeia" is concerned with the biological past on a formal level,

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[91] This motif of life's bare persistence is fitting for the short tale as a genre; in the short story, Lukács argues, "meaninglessness *as meaninglessness* becomes form; it becomes eternal becomes it is affirmed, transcended and redeemed by form" (*Theory of the Novel* 51-52). Poe's short tale can only take form within the repetition of a process life as such, shorn of meaning, willing itself back into being again and again.

it does not open the problem of the will onto the complex terrain of history. As I shall show, *As I Lay Dying* and *Beloved* expand the investigation of the Gothic will by introducing a fraught and haunting past that complicates the dynamics informing revivification and gives willed action social significance. No longer simply a means of pushing life as such beyond a limit, the will in these Gothic novels responds to ghostly imperatives and competing haunted forces, thus implicating volition in the agon inherent in social space.

II. Getting Ready to Stay Dead: Will as Possessed Affirmation in *As I Lay Dying*

Like "Ligeia," *As I Lay Dying* centers on an undead woman who manifests a will that extends well beyond her person. Both a haunting and haunted figure, Addie Bundren, remembers "hearing the dark land talking of God's love and His beauty and His sin; hearing the dark voicelessness in which the words are deeds, and the other words are that are not deeds, are just gaps in other people's lacks […]" (174). Out of this voiceless speech of the land comes an idiosyncratic moral injunction: previously viewing her "duty" as merely to leave her husband Anse alone in his existential vacuity ("I would be I; I would let him be the shape and echo of his word" (174)), Addie at this point affirms a "duty to the alive, to the terrible blood, the red bitter flooding boiling through the land" (174). Addie's sense of "duty" does not stem from an insistence on amoral autonomy, but from the silent speech of the land. While less explicit than, say, the ghost of Hamlet's father, the land's voiceless voice expresses a latent will that captures Addie's restless mind. Heeding the imperative to transform word into deed, Addie enacts this duty to the alive by committing an exemplary "sin," an extramarital affair with a local minster—"the sin the more utter and terrible since he was the instrument ordained by God […]" (174).

Thus, Addie breaks her marriage bond not so much because she is prideful by nature, but because she is haunted by an incorporeal will that inspires her anomalous sense of duty.

Addie's stated intention, to "shape and coerce the terrible blood to the forlorn echo of the dead word high in the air" (175), registers a fidelity to the spectral potentiality imbued in the atmosphere. Indeed, the atmosphere of *As I Lay Dying* is endowed with unsettling signs of volitional activity. The Bundren family doctor, Peabody, portrays the world of *As I Lay Dying* as an uncanny double of the narcissistic will of the Judeo-Christian God: "That's the one trouble with this country: everything, weather, all, hangs on too long. Like our rivers, our land: opaque, slow, violent; shaping and creating the life of man in its implacable and brooding image" (45). It is no accident that Peabody's meditation on the atmosphere is inspired by Addie's dying body, which seems to be holding on and recreating the life of her family in her implacable and brooding image. Peabody's pronouns "everything" and "all" evoke both the world of the Southern Gothic and Addie's specifically palpable violence—the doctor can "feel her eyes": "It's like she was shoving me with them" (45). Just as the living Addie has acted on the dictates of a ghostly will inhabiting the dark land, where words become deeds, the living figures in the novel act by inheriting and negotiating Addie's excessive undead will, which permeates the world.

This properly Gothic problem, that of transmuting the partial will of a dead or silent presence into material action, organizes the entire trajectory of *As I Lay Dying*. Just as Ligeia's will creeps into the living quarters of Poe's narrator, Addie's undead will suffuses the novel's protracted action, the journey to Jefferson to bury her body. Throughout *As I Lay Dying* Addie's will insists as a partial, unstable force that demands agential supplements in order to consummate itself. This partial will works first of all through possession: it possess those actors who are bound to it, who feel charged with the task of consummating this will in the form of determinate

action. But because this mode of possession affects the family members in very different ways, the undead will is retroactively transformed and split in the very process of its materialization. That is, because the Bundrens are an internally contradictory plurality and not a monolithic collective, Addie's possessive will is determined not as a univocal directive or single plan to be realized, but as a virtual field wherein novelistic figures become willing agents. Addie embodies a grotesquely Gothic variation on that other will of the deceased, the last will and testament central to the traditional novelistic inheritance plot. Unlike a written document, Addie's presence continues to haunt the world and saturate it with willful forces. Even as Addie's will possesses the agents in the novel, however, she is herself dispossessed of her own will, which cannot retain the consistency of a determinate inscription or interpretation.

A further consequence of this differential mode of possession, within the context of the Gothic ensemble novel, is that agents are not simply haunted, but confronted agonistically with the haunted wills of *others*. That is, while a single collective action organizes the novel, this action is undergirded by complex volitional structure that knots together Addie's undead persistence and the haunted agents competing for primacy within the collective endeavor. Because possession takes hold in a differential manner throughout the family, each living agent finds itself with a double-constraint on the will: the actualizing will is constrained, on the one hand, by the presence that possesses it and, on the other, by the haunted will that encroaches on its efforts. Faulkner thus construes the will as profoundly relational: the complications inherent in willed action suggest that volition cannot finally be grounded in a single faculty, power, or form of personhood. If there is a problem of volition in *As I Lay Dying*, it is not that there is a single domineering personal will of the kind often attributed to Addie; rather, it is that there are too many wills, each in the process of reasserting itself.

Promising and Getting Ready: Willing as a Transpersonal Process

The Bundrens' endeavor is first of all put in motion by the living Addie's stipulation: she has compelled Anse to promise that he will bury her with her relatives in Jefferson. Thus, even prior to her death, Anse's promise already exemplifies a dislocated, distributed will, which can continue insisting even after the body associated with it has become a corpse. The judgment of a pious neighbor, Cora, testifies to the manner in which a heretical will has outlived Addie's person: "[S]he was not cold in the coffin before they were carting her forty miles away to bury her, flouting the will of God to do it. Refusing to let her lie in the same earth with those Bundrens" (22-23). Even more overtly than Addie's affair, the exaction of the promise demonstrates the power of a partial will, which will transform the echo of a word, "promise," into a material deed.

Insofar as Anse is possessed by the echo of an (un)dead word, he is less a substantial character than a vessel that mediates between language and action. If Anse's neighbor characterizes him correctly in saying, "His mind is set on taking her to Jefferson" (86), then this commitment could be considered a relay of Addie's undead mindset: "'She's a-going,' [Anse] says. 'Her mind is set on it.'" (30). The power to articulate and enact a commitment stems from a trafficking with the undead word that has become, through the extension of speech beyond death, a reanimated will. By embodying his commitment to the promise, Anse inaugurates the quest and endows it with a sense of moral necessity (even if this moral necessity is not unequivocally affirmed by any single character). "She's counted on it," Anse tells his family. "She'll want to start right away. I know her. I promised her I'd keep the team here and ready, and she's counting

on it" (17). The duty to the (un)dead functions as a Gothic variation on Addie's "duty to the alive." Like Addie's sin, the fulfillment of the promise gives "blood" to a "dead" word, transforming it into an earthly deed that gains a kind of autonomous momentum.

If the undead will takes shape as a promise, the prospect of fulfilling the promise is complicated by its source—that is, Addie's fidelity to her father's maxim: "[T]he reason for living was to get ready to stay dead a long time" (169). As Addie points out, this reason determines her exaction of the promise in the first place: "[…] I asked Anse to promise to take me back to Jefferson when I died, because I knew that father had been right" (173). Anse, likewise, seems to understand the promise in terms of Addie's fundamental (and gnomic) motive—to get ready to stay dead. Anse says, "I promised my word me and the boys would get her there quick as mules would walk it, so she could rest quiet" (19); "[…] she will rest quieter for knowing […] that it was her own blood sawed out the boards and drove the nails. She was ever one to clean up after herself" (19). Addie later corroborates Anse's perspective: she views "getting ready to clean my house" as integral to the ultimate goal, "get[ting] ready to die" (176). Thus, if the promise haunts the journey, the imperative to get Addie ready to stay dead in turn haunts the promise.

Like Anse, Cash—Addie's oldest son, a carpenter who is building Addie coffin outside her window at the outset of the novel—is responsive to the maternal imperative: the coffin-building overtly materializes and extends the imperative to get ready to stay dead. This imperative is not made explicit but permeates the spaces of the novel, in this instance, the space of construction. As Cora contemptuously observes, the dying Addie positions herself so that she can preside over Cash's labor: "Lying there with her head propped up so she could watch Cash building the coffin, having to watch him so he would not skimp on it […]" (23-24). Cash's

constructive endeavor and Addie's will feed into one another: even as Addie's "failing life appears to drain into her eyes, urgent, irremediable" (47), "she raises herself, who has not moved in ten days" (48) in order to watch "Cash stooping steadily at the board in the failing light, laboring on toward darkness and into it as though the stroking of the saw illumined its own motion […]" (48). By way of Cash's visible and audible labor, failing light is rekindled and failing life revived. She then summons the strength to yell, "You, Cash!" (48). In response to Addie's "harsh, strong, and unimpaired" address (48), a kind of injunction without content, Cash pauses and "looks up at the gaunt face framed by the window in the twilight. It is a composite picture of all of time since he was a child" (48). As though memorializing the still-living Addie, Cash suspends his work in order to display it her, thus dispelling any suspicion that he might be unaffected by his mother's point of view. When Addie finally dies (that is, "dies"), Cash walks into her room, ignoring all but his mother's face: "Cash is not listening [to Anse]. He is looking down at her peaceful, rigid face fading into the dusk as though darkness were a precursor of the ultimate earth […]" (50). Mediating between a haunting filial past ("all the time since he was a child") and the elemental future ("the ultimate earth"), Cash, in the mode of *homo faber*, fosters the readiness that Addie seeks through the fraught collective agency of her family.

This particular manifestation of "getting ready," however, opens up the possibility of internal antagonisms generated by Addie's proximity. If Anse's promise and the ongoing act of Cash's coffin-building externalize a maternal will to readiness, they also incite the very agonistic conflict through which the undead will, as reanimated via other agents, veers from the straightforward path implicit in the promise as a conventional speech-act. As taken up and expressed by her family, the substance of the imperative to "get ready to stay dead" becomes fractured, redistributed, and contested.

For instance, Jewel, the illegitimate son of Addie and the minister, calls into question the ethical terms of the burial rites, resenting his family for “burning hell to get here there” (19). During his only narrated section, Jewel bemoans the ongoing construction of the coffin, excoriating Cash for building it so close to Addie’s window: “It’s because he stays out there, right under the window, hammering and sawing on that goddamn box” (14). The opening impersonal pronoun throws Jewel immediately into the action at hand; he is already caught up in an action he conceives of as premature and untactful. While a more conventional introduction might begin with the *I*, *it* registers total absorption within an action that becomes a focal point of affective and volitional conflict. The *it*, functioning as the opening of an implicit rejoinder to an absent question about Jewel’s state of mind (perhaps, “What is the reason for your distress, Jewel?”), suggests that an external action, rather than some *a priori* dimension of character, is orienting his perspective. The very sound of a saw provokes Jewel’s assertion of a maternal counter-will. His enraged response to the noise of Cash’s “sawing and knocking,” which in his view prevents Addie from being at rest, reanimates the maternal counter-will that subsequently informs his vengeful, aversive agency.

This agonism inherent in the ostensibly collective endeavor is intensified during a scene immediately prior to the journey, in which Addie’s corpse, in an initial movement and subsequent “passionate reversal,” seems to successively exert two contradictory wills. This moment of volitional splitting is crucial insofar as it foreshadows the manner in which discrepant wills will be delineated throughout the novel:

> [Jewel] heaves, lifting one whole side so suddenly that we all spring into the lift to catch and balance it before he hurls it completely over. For an instant it resists, as though volitional, as though within it her pole-thin body clings furiously, even

> though dead, to a sort of modesty, as she would have tried to conceal a soiled garment that she could not prevent her body soiling. Then it breaks free, rising suddenly as though the emaciation of her body had added buoyancy to the planks or as though, seeing that the garment was about to be torn from her, she rushes suddenly after it in a passionate reversal that flouts its own desire and need. Jewel's face goes completely green and I can hear teeth in his breath. (97-98)

The first moment in this scene expresses a will to concealment: the seemingly volitional corpse resists the jarring movement of the coffin in order to avoid the shame of abject exposure. The second moment, signaled by the passionate reversal seemingly performed by the corpse itself, expresses a counter-movement of the will, whereby the corpse denudes itself even as it continues to bear a "desire and need" for modesty and concealment, which the "soiled garment" would undermine. Importantly, both actions are framed in hypothetical terms: Darl is hesitant to unequivocally assign volition to any single agent or object, even as actions appear in sudden movements and reversals. Moreover, Darl uses the word "furiously" to describe both Jewel's lifting and Addie's own clinging, thus figuring multiple bodies in terms of a quality of expression that cuts across them. Throughout *As I Lay Dying*, Faulkner further undercuts our ability to allocate will and distribute it within a character system. Instead, will emerges out of contested zones that produce both cooperative and agonistic actions within a single ongoing process.

From Haunted Chronotope to Volitional Zone

I have shown how an undead, partial will—considered as a dynamic force rather than a self-consisting substance or faculty—possesses Anse, Cash, Jewel, and Darl, in such a way that renders the will radically transpersonal. Importantly, however, the undead will also creeps into the material environment of the novel, generating the volitional excess that both interrupts and informs the course of the quest. During the course of the journey, the material elements in the novel—inanimate objects and environmental settings—seem to become character-like. And yet, it would be a mistake to chalk this up to either a Faulknerian penchant for an animistic metaphysics or the superstitions of the novel's narrators. As I argue in reading the epigraph of "Ligeia," the will is pervasive but not, like the divine will that would serve as a limit-case, *all*-pervasive: within the strictures of the novelistic world, pervasiveness must be given form and thus constraint. This phenomenon of constrained pervasiveness is precisely what the concept of the character zone can help clarify. In *As I Lay Dying*, however, character zones do not simply exist fully formed from the outset; rather, they take shape in selective interactions with the haunted chronotopes that constitute the novelistic world.

While Addie's undead presence seems to haunt the entire world, her influence is particularly concentrated within specific chronotopes. Even after Addie dies, she is figured not merely as a corpse but as conduit of earthly contact and mobilization; her chronotopic haunting, one might say, outlives her character.[92] At the outset of their journey, Darl notes that "the red road lies ahead like a spoke of which Addie Bundren is the rim" (108). The very locomotive force that propels the journey comprises an assemblage of Addie's presence and the earthly road: in Darl's strange simile, the road as spoke structurally supports Addie as rim; and on a more literal level, the road lies ahead as the ground to which Addie clings. Furthermore, Darl likens

[92] Within the literary-formal terms I have deployed, I would argue that the dead Addie, by virtue of her unlimited pervasiveness, does not herself have a character zone.

the wagon to a "motionless hand lifted above the profound desolation of the ocean" (108), recalling the afterlife of Addie's hands, which still possess a "semblance of life […] a spent yet alert quality" (51) after her death, and also, like the "motionless hand," an "inertness." Through these two figures—Addie as rim and the hand as wagon—Darl suggests that Addie's being has insinuated itself into the ostensibly mechanical vehicle. As haunted material entities, the road, the wheel, and the wagon become impossible to separate. They all take on the slow, implacable quality that Peabody attributes to "everything" in "this country": "[…] the unscarred road wheels on […] The wagon creaks on" (108). In this instance, Addie's possession of the earth jibes with her flouting of the will of God, as defined by Anse: Anse conceptualizes the will of God as an allocation of structural capacities for movement and rest: "When He aims for something to be always a-moving, He makes it long ways, like a road or a horse or a wagon, but when He aims for something to stay put, He makes it up-and-down ways, like a tree or a man" (36). Within this schema, Addie could be said to transform the vertical figure of the living human into the possessed figures of horizontal mobility.

But because Addie's imperative occupies a volatile field of action, it also tends to invite resistance and internal division. During the course of *As I Lay Dying*, the undead will's provisional affirmation of earthy mobility reaches a crisis point, during which the volitional split within the coffin (discussed above) is reenacted on an epic scale. Darl evokes "the floorless road shaped vaguely high in the air by the position of the lopped and felled trees, as if the road too had been soaked free of the earth and floated upward [...]" (143). Splitting the novel in half, the perilous river-crossing also threatens the entire quest; the coffin is perched precariously on a wagon that is perpetually on the verge of toppling over and rushing away with the current. The river antagonizes both the novelistic chronotope of the road and the undead earthly will that

clings to it. Northrop Frye has suggested that because nature in the romance genre is colored through and through by the imagination, it easily takes on the quality of an alien will: "We naturally think of the other as nature, or man's actual environment, and in the divided world of work and ego-control it is nature. But for the imagination it is rather some kind of force or power or will that is not ourselves, an otherness of spirit" (*Secular Scripture* 60). The Bundrens' neighbor, Vernon Tull, in accordance with Frye's assessment, treats the will as a kind of antagonistic character: "The water was cold. It was thick, like slush ice. Only it kind of lived […] when them logs would come spewing up outen it, you were not surprised, like they was a part of water, of the waiting and the threat" (138).

And yet, the novel thwarts any reading of this scene as a rugged standoff between Addie's strong, undead will and an alien will of nature. Rather, the counter-force of the river seems to carry a trace of Addie's presence with its violent current. From Darl's perspective, the river is not only alive but manifests the combination of concentrated power and exhaustion that recalls Addie on her death bed: it is "as though just beneath the surface something huge and alive awaked for a moment of lazy alertness out of and into light slumber again" (141). Moreover, according to Darl, the animated river has not only life but a voice as well: "Before us the thick dark current runs. It talks up to us in a murmur become ceaseless and myriad" (141); "Through the undergrowth it goes with a plaintive sound, a musing sound […] Above the surface they stand—trees, cane, vines—rootless, severed from the earth, spectral above a scene of immense yet circumscribed desolation filled with the voice of the waste and mournful water" (142). Notably, the natural environment here does not only resist certain actions, but takes the form of spectral residue, as though indexing the presence of the undead and redoubling it in the form of natural excess. It also assumes the act of mourning—that is, a ritualistic mode of getting

(another) ready to stay dead—which is remarkably muted (or perhaps displaced) in a story about, among other things, an arduous commitment to death rites.[93] Darl intensifies the scene of haunting by linking mourning to the "voice of the waste," which slyly evokes the voice of the putrefying corpse. Thus, far from being a hostile, indifferent setting *within* which an action, the crossing, takes place, the river complicates the problem of the will's directionality, raising the prospect that the consummation of the journey to Jefferson would not unequivocally manifest the will of the dead.

If *As I Lay Dying* opens up an animistic world, in which everything is potentially living, or hanging on beyond death, this world does not merely symbolically parallel the lives of characters. Nor does such a world unilaterally determine the fate of characters, as do (arguably) the gods of the Greek epic or the historically situated environments of naturalist fiction. The haunted world of Faulkner's novel is infused into the site of character itself; the confusion between undead being and the novelistic world is not limited to Addie as a character, but bears upon the synthetic wills of living agents. I will now turn to the question of how the volitional zone is linked to Faulkner's use of stylized repetition. Such a relation will allow us to understand the precise way in which willing constitutes a mode of affirmation that bears a paradoxical relation to the sociality of collective action—a paradoxical relation that helps clarify precisely what is *novelistic* about the Gothic will.

Volitional Zones and the Ethics of Affirmation

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[93] Dewey Dell's sentiment captures the occluded grief that seems to condition affect in the novel: "I dont know how to cry. I tried, but I cant" (60).

As I have suggested, volitional zones can be seen as sites of conversion, whereby the haunted chronotopes are refigured and further determined in the form of willed action. The primary agents in *As I Lay Dying* are not conscious deciders, making choices at discrete moments in time; rather, they will through stylized forms of repetition and affirmation. In another reading of Nietzsche, Deleuze suggests, "Affirmation is the highest power of the will" (*Immanence*, 83). He proceeds to ask, "But what is affirmed? The earth, life…But what form do the earth and life assume when they are objects of affirmation?" (83-84). Faulkner poses a variation on this question: What form does the haunted quest take when it is an object of affirmation? How do the elements of the haunted quest recreate character zones that become sites of affirmation or resistance?

Darl's subtle metamorphosis during the river-crossing exemplifies the manner in which the haunted world delimits zones of willing. Here Darl, hitherto relatively uninterested in the family odyssey, spectrally affirms the river's devastating yet potentially merciful course; he seems even more ghostly during the river-crossing, as though allowing the materiality of nature to displace his own potential intervention. Prior to this scene, the imperative to get to Jefferson in order to bury Addie's body implicitly takes priority over all other concerns. But Darl's selective attention during the river-crossing casts doubt on the moral authority of this imperative, for from his point of view, receptive as he is to signs of the undead, the river materializes an alternative expression of care. Unlike Jewel, Darl, without explicitly saying so, begins to view the quest in terms of its possible willed cessation; during this scene we see glimpses of his conspiracy with the corrosive forces of animated nature. Darl's expansion during this scene coincides with the novel's increasingly epic scope; here, he enhances his already formidable powers of cosmological penetration. Through his metaphysically attuned faculty of perception, Darl begins

to establish a volitional position he will come to more overtly occupy. He subtly encourages the reader to identify him with the log that "appears as if it had rocketed suddenly from the bottom of the river" (148), an undead remainder that seems bent on destroying the wagon. The log recalls Darl's evocation of spectral, uprooted detritus of nature, which figures his own spectral presence above the scene; both Darl and the log have been severed from their material grounds, persisting as floating fragments adrift in the stream that has become a site of contested agency. Furthermore, Darl compares the log to Christ (148), thus anticipating the role of the scapegoat that he will come to occupy. Darl, in other words, seems to sympathize—ontologically, if not psychologically—with the log *qua* will in a way that generates a new agential orientation out of itself.

Just as the living Addie had acted upon a directive intuited from the silent land, Darl channels the hint of will inherent in the log's movement in order to perform his fateful act of arson: as though channeling the log's destructive power, he burns down the barn wherein Addie's disintegrating corpse is being stored. Despite looking like an act of sabotage, however, Darl's will is not simply negative; he is not merely asserting a destructive desire from a position outside of the scope of collective action. On the contrary, his destruction reimagines what it might mean to "get ready to stay dead" and thereby bring out a dimension of Addie's as yet incomplete will—which, on Peabody's understanding, expresses a "furious desire to hide that abject nakedness" (46). Whether by flood or conflagration, Darl seeks a different sort of burial, one which acknowledges the "voice of the waste" as well as the possibility that "the waste" might deserve a more dignified fate—one befitting his mother's susceptibility to shame. Prior to his act of arson, Darl hears Addie's voice, which explicitly takes on the qualities of the river: "[…] now and then she talks in little trickling bursts of secret and murmurous bubbling" (212).

In the subsequent chapter, Darl tells his younger brother Vardaman that he has heard Addie "talking to God" (214) and that "[s]he wants Him to hide her away from the sight of man" (215). Darl explains that she wants to be hidden away so she can "lay down her life" (215).[94] Significantly, Addie herself is not granted the power to address here: it is Darl who must intuit the speech from the river-like quality of his mother's voice. As elementally mediated, the phrase Darl views as the expression of Addie's will both recalls the novel's title and shifts its sense vis-à-vis the question of agency. If Addie wants to "lay down her life," the transitive construction *lay down*, unlike the intransitive *lay dying*, implies an action rather than an experience undergone; the action of ceasing to live would interrupt the indefinite time of dying life.[95] Thus, Darl's act of arson can be viewed as an affirmation within the quest that extracts from Addie's will—via elemental mediation: trickling, murmuring, bubbling—an inclination toward dissolution that he converts into direct action.

If Darl assumes Addie's will through reenactments of the merciful violence of the log and the river, Jewel does so by way of the coffin, which, in its proximity to Jewel, becomes an aggressive co-agent as well as a functional object. If Darl's will takes its own form of affirmation, which appropriates the elements of water and fire, Jewel's will develops as an affirmation of material hardness, exemplified not only by the earth on which he moves but also by the wood he carries. During the course of the novel, Jewel, the coffin, and Addie's corpse enter into an assemblage wherein their modes of willing displace, complement, and penetrate one

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[94] One might be inclined to dismiss Darl's claims as a symptom of incipient madness, but this would be hasty and unwarranted. Darl's claim that Addie wants to "lay down her life" explicitly echoes a statement that Addie has made in an entirely different context (and presumably in Darl's absence). In Cora's account, Addie has told her, "Even though I have laid down my life, he [Jewel] will save me" (168). While Darl's version differs insofar as it projects the laying down of life into the future—an aspiration rather than a *fait accompli*—the persistent suggestions that Addie has *not* in fact completely laid down her life lend a certain credibility to Darl's account.

[95] As Sundquist has pointed out, the phrase "as I lay dying" can be read in the past tense, or in the present progressive, if one opts to understand "lay" as a colloquial corruption of "lie." In either case, however, the title evokes a passive experience of drawn-out death.

another. While early on he bemoans Cash's ostentatious carpentry, it is telling that Jewel twice falls silent when he is on the verge of articulating the word, "coffin" (19, 20). Silently embodying the absent word in his stuttering discourse, Jewel actually *becomes* coffin-like. Throughout the novel he takes on the carved, wooden qualities of the coffin: "[…] he looks at the back of pa's head, his eyes like pale wooden eyes" (18); "He sits lightly, poised, upright, wooden-faced in the saddle […]" (108); "Jewel sits on his horse like they were both made out of wood, looking straight ahead" (122); Jewel is later "staring straight ahead, motionless, lean, wooden-backed, as though carved squatting out of the lean wood" (231). Jewel's characteristic impassivity, the affective emblem of his willful orientation, is rendered not as an independent psychological trait but as a material transmutation of that literal carrier of the dead, the coffin, a kind of magnet for agonistic volitional energies.

If the function of the coffin is to preserve the integrity of the body, then Jewel redoubles and intensifies this operation, acting as an agent of corporeal transportation and protection. That this will gives form to a kind of maternal energy is evident in the dying Addie's gaze, in which Peabody detects "that pride, that furious desire to hide that abject nakedness which we bring here with us, *carry* with us into operating rooms, *carry* stubbornly and furiously with us into the earth again" (46, my emphasis). Over the course of the narrative, Jewel, through what one might call his coffin-becoming, enacts the pride and fury involved in carrying the deceased back into the earth; he brings these qualities to a higher point of decisive action. In the pivotal scene in which Jewel saves Addie's corpse and coffin from the burning barn, the two primary figures, Jewel-as-savior and the coffin itself, appear as interacting doubles. This doubling is most notable through the mediation of a third figure, the horse, which has throughout the novel linked Jewel to a maternal function (Darl repeats the refrain *Jewel's mother is a horse* throughout). Jewel is

initially described as "materialis[ing] out of darkness, lean as a race horse" (218). But by the end of the section it is the coffin that is likened to a horse, and the rearing coffin preserves Jewel just as he has preserved it: "Without stopping [the coffin] overends and rears again, pauses, then crashes slowly forward and through the curtain. This time Jewel is riding upon it, clinging to it, until it crashes down and flings him forward and clear [...]" (222). Jewel's own clinging reaches a kind of limit at which the coffin itself—once again, as though volitional—reclaims its agency, flinging him clear of the flames. If the earlier scene in which Jewel lifts the coffin into the wagon represents an agon of two mutually constitutive though combative wills, this later scene generates a doubling whereby the wooden coffin and Jewel open up zone that brings a radical action to fruition.

If the Bundrens' modes of affirmation resemble stubborn compulsions to repeat, it does not follow that their wills are mechanical or narrowly egoistic. While it is tempting to read the Bundrens as simply selfish, the infusion of the haunted world into the characters—the production of volitional zones—enables a severance from egoistic attachments, making surprisingly ethical action possible. For instance, when Anse trades Jewel's beloved horse in the interests of the journey, we might initially expect the stubborn son to interdict and recover his hard-earned possession. And yet, he refrains from doing so. This rather extraordinary act is never represented directly in the text: instead emerging from a conscious choice, Jewel's self-sacrificing act seems to stem from self-stylization, his annexation of horse-like qualities. In other words, he can part with his horse *qua* property because a degree of horse-ness has been absorbed into his character zone.[96] Similarly, Darl acts in such a way that would contradict his "character" if one treated

[96] One might argue that, since Jewel's motive for abandoning the horse is entirely omitted from the narrative, my claim here is unwarranted. After all, can we really know *why* Jewel is willing to give up his horse? But this omission of motive buttresses my point: Faulkner invites us to consider the grounds of action not in terms of discrete psychological motives, but in terms of the immanent logic of distributed character zones.

character in terms of egoistic interests. As the Bundrens enter Jefferson, Darl diffuses an altercation between Jewel and a passerby; the encounter threatens not only Jewel's life, but, by extension, the completion of the burial. Darl's active defense of Jewel might seem a bit puzzling were we to view him as a psychological subject who not only hates his brother, but also has a tendency to be passive amidst social conflict. But viewed in terms of stylized zoning rather than psychological determination, Darl's act becomes explicable: in the manner of the Christ-like log, he is intent on a merciful cessation of tension; like the river itself, he creates movement away from the "sight of man" and the exposure of the rotting corpse to public disgust (229): "Come on," Darl insists after seeing "the heads turn with that expression which we know" (231). "Let's get away from here" (231). Seen from the perspective of a volitional zone, what seem like behavioral aberrations become intelligible as creative reenactments.

If my analysis has allotted more attention to Jewel and Darl, it is because they most starkly demonstrate the distinct and even contradictory permutations of an undead will that finds expression in the novel's present. The other Bundrens, however, are no more immune from the self-differing undead will than Jewel and Darl, and in this sense, they too can be absolved from the charge of narrow egoism. Eric Sundquist has rightly noted that, even when ostensibly self-absorbed, the Bundrens are primarily working out the consequences of Addie's death; whatever they are doing, they are grieving. I would only shift the emphasis of Sundquist's argument: whatever seemingly peripheral activities the Bundrens engage in, they are determined to reanimate an undead will, even if this reanimation deviates from the common course. In concluding with an analysis of more peripheral character zones, I do not mean to simply cover my bases. Rather, I want to show how these peripheral zones bring my analysis to a climax: even wills that appear to be effects of petty egoism obliquely respond to the haunting imperative to get

ready to stay dead; these modes of willing illustrate the degree to which the character zone is involved in possessed, and thus minimally social, affirmation, even as character seems restricted to the narrow concerns of the present.

For instance, Vardaman, the youngest sibling, is intent on allowing his mother to breathe even after he has imagined that Peabody has killed her, and organizes his limited agency around the endeavor to prevent her suffocation. He eventually is satisfied by the idea that his mother is a fish, which, once consumed by the family, will be outside the coffin, "so she can breathe" (67). While Vardaman's identification of Addie with the dead fish can certainly be seen as a comical instance of a child's misrecognition, it is also consistent with the novel's construction of the Gothic will, which can only affirm action through the sense of an undead presence.

Likewise, Dewey Dell, the only Bundren daughter, responds to Addie's insistent presence in a way that might seem unrelated to the burial quest but is in fact a re-zoning of Addie's imperative to get ready to stay dead. If Jewel and Darl become immanent to those zones in which they sense the undead, Dewey Dell becomes a kind of microcosm of the haunted world as a whole. Speaking of the corpulent Peabody, from whom she wants an abortion, Dewey Dell begins to view the world itself and the bodies therein as containers of undifferentiated bodily matter: "He could do so much for me if he just would. He could do everything for me. It's like everything in the world for me is inside a tub full of guts, so that you wonder how there can be any room in it for anything else very important. He is a big tub of guts and I am a little tub of guts […]" (58). Dewey Dell models the world and her own fetus-containing body on the image of a container which holds formless bodily matter—in other words, the coffin that bears Addie's corpse. In a later section that she narrates, she more explicitly grafts the image of the womb onto that of the coffin. Faulkner italicizes the passage, as though to indicate that Dewey Dell's

thought is somehow essential to her own subjective orientation yet also beyond her own capacity to consciously express it: "*That's what they mean by the womb of time: the agony and the despair of spreading bones, the hard girdle in which lie the outraged entrails of events*" (121). The spreading bones register the sense in which Addie's corpse continues to permeate the world; "outraged entrails," which "lie" (dying), give the sense that Addie's corpse possesses both the worldly events that constituted Dewey Dell's life as well as her own being. As with her siblings, Dewey Dell's pursuits are not informed by particular psychological motives, but rather, by stylized modes of possession: she persists in her desire to get an abortion because Addie's corpse has displaced her fetus; the undead which must get ready to stay dead has possessed the body bearing the potentially alive. Through the rendering undead of metonymy itself, that is, through possessed style, Dewey Dell determines her variation on the burial quest.

Lastly, one must reconsider the figure of Anse Bundren, whose mode of willing is both complicated and exhausted by the structural passage from character and chronotope to character zone. I have suggested that Anse functions as the undead carrier of a word, "promise," which inaugurates the quest. And yet, viewed in terms of a volitional zone that powerfully insists throughout the narrative, Anse's will appears as much more dynamic—a power comparable to Ahab's, or perhaps, stretching back to the origins of the American Gothic mode, to Charles Brockden Brown's Carwin, the ventriloquist who wreaks havoc on a family through his depersonalized, spatially displaced imperatives. Anse does not simply mechanically reiterate a word; like Ahab and Carwin, Anse deploys language indirectly, in such a way that words pass into powerfully efficacious deeds. One neighbor aptly compares him to a conjure artist; Addie herself resents precisely this form of agency in her husband: "It was as though he had tricked me, hidden within a word like within a paper screen and struck me in the back through it" (172). But

Anse's efficacy, through which he comes to appear as a sort of double both supporting and competing with Addie for agential primacy, does not fundamentally express egoistic desires, but rather, reinflects the imperative to "get ready to stay dead." While Anse's desire to get a new set of teeth—a desire he fulfills at the end of the narrative—might seem to be an ulterior motive unrelated to the burial quest, it must be viewed in terms of this quest itself: a true consummation of the burial involves not only a literal placing of the corpse underground but, for him and perhaps for the family, a remarriage to a new "Mrs. Bundren," whom he evidently seduces with the aid of his refashioned appearance.

Insofar as Anse helps Addie to get ready to stay dead, he also supplants her as the central object of concern: by the end, Anse and his new wife are "carrying a grip" (260), but the object they are carrying is not a coffin but a graphophone, the new object around which the family gathers (261). Anse Bundren both carries out his wife's will and buries that will; to get ready to stay dead is, finally, to undermine the idea that a will can rest easy with any single character. Instead, getting ready to stay dead means closing the book on the dead itself, an act that no single character can claim as its own.

III. *Beloved* and the Constitution of the Collective Will

Not without reason, *Beloved*'s critics have tended to situate the Gothic and magical realist modes in the context of Morrison's interest in the problem of identity—that is, the problem of how to delimit the boundaries of the self. Indeed, *Beloved*'s thematic and structural investment in the fragile construction of the self—the self shaped by language, culture, history, and material embodiment—is one of the more salient aspects of the novel. But an exclusive focus on the

question of selfhood risks obscuring the exigent question of the will—bluntly put, the question not of what the self is, but what it can do and how it can do it. Even if selfhood is shown to be porous—insofar as it remains open to disavowed histories of both violence and solidarity that fracture the individual yet also harbor utopian potential—the problem of the will in relation to the past remains exigent. One could even argue that the exploration of identity itself is incomplete or misleading if it does not account for the will. Morrison, everywhere concerned with the persistence of the past into the present, has also maintained that many of her characters express an "effort of the will" or a "freedom of the will."[97] With these two concerns in mind, one might pose the following question in relations to *Beloved*: How and why does history return in the form of *collective will*? How and why does history figure not just as a return of the repressed but also as a positive form of collective volitional exertion? By addressing these questions, I hope to demonstrate that *Beloved*'s formal techniques for figuring the Gothic will, as a power that emerges within historically charged zones rather than within human individuals, allow us to rethink the entanglement of African American history, agency, and creativity.

One might balk at my insistence that the concept of the will offers a productive means for thinking through this nexus. Within the historical setting of *Beloved*, which takes place both before and after Emancipation, a will that is not a gift (that is, a curse) of the master would seem

[97] In an interview with Claudia Tate from 1983, Toni Morrison responds to a question about "the dangerously free people" (164) that populate her novels—namely, her characters Cholly (*The Bluest Eye*), Ajax and Sula (*Sula*), and Guitar (*The Song of Solomon*). For Morrison, these fictional figures "express either an effort of the will or a freedom of the will." (164-165). Were Tate to have conducted this interview after the appearance of *Beloved*, she could have plausibly included several more characters from what is now Morrison's most renowned novel—for instance, Baby Suggs, the matriarch who has established a reputation as a powerful sermonizer and spiritual authority; Sethe, a former slave and Baby Suggs' daughter-in-law, who makes the "rough choice" (207) to murder her daughter rather than give her up to a life of bondage and humiliation; Beloved, the slain daughter who returns, first as a spectral agent and then in the flesh, to seek love and retribution, to fill the house at 124 with "spite" and "baby's venom" (9); and finally, the women of the town who overcome their initial hesitation and save Sethe from interminable persecution at the hands of her revenant daughter. All these figures demonstrate initiative in action and thereby overcome various forms of resistance.

difficult to imagine. One problem, which Saidiya Hartman's work elucidates, is that, historically, common notions associated with the will—for example, liberal ideals including freedom and autonomy— were commandeered in order to further subjugate black subjects, even after Emancipation. Thus, during the period in which Morrison sets her novel, the liberal model of agency had already functioned as a conduit for white supremacy. As Hartman points out, post-emancipation techniques of subjection more and more relied on ideologies associated with the will's freedom: "Prized designations like 'independence,' 'autonomy,' and 'free will' are the lures of liberalism, yet the tantalizing suggestion of the individual as potentate and sovereign is drastically undermined by the forms of repression and terror that accompanied the advent of freedom […]" (122). Thus, the problem Morrison's novel faces—a problem at once literary-formal, philosophical, and historical—is to imagine how will might function without being absorbed by the mechanisms of power that prop up "will" as the ideological tool of oppression *par excellence*.

While *Beloved* is clearly intent on imagining forms of freedom and their limits, the novel, published a decade prior to Hartman's study, also anticipates Hartman's contention that subjugation insidiously passes itself off as freedom of the will. Morrison's portrayal of Paul D, a former slave and the protagonist Sethe's romantic partner, stages this problem directly: even during his tenure as a slave, Paul D imagines that his owner's apparent benevolence has allowed him to achieve a manly status inseparable from a notion of will. But in retrospect, Paul D questions the status of this putative agency: "Oh, he did manly things, but was that Garner's gift or his own will?" (255). For Paul D, this "gift" is precisely what has offered the illusion that he has a will of his own. He has been interpellated rather than freed: "Garner called and announced them men—but only on Sweet Home and by his leave. Was he naming what he saw or creating

what he did not?" (255). Morrison's novel uses Paul D's "naming" or "creating" as a foil for imagining what a will might look like if not the gift of a master.

But how might we understand this alternative form of will? The argument of this section will draw from and build upon Neil Roberts' account of black agency in his recent study, *Freedom as Marronage*. Roberts's project tracks forms of "struggle and assertion" (20) that trouble liberal conceptions of freedom (including those of the sort Hartman bracingly critiques), which presuppose sovereign individuality and ignore "interstitial acts of flight"—*transitional* modes of agency that subvert any rigid dichotomy between freedom and slavery. For Roberts, enslaved subjectivity is defined by a "zone of nonbeing" (a term he borrows from Fanon); thus, slave agency must negate the zone of nonbeing through an act of "marronage," of movement and flight. Within the Gothic mode, *Beloved* imagines highly specific forms of transitional agency: the volitional zone becomes a transitional site whereby culturally and historically embedded potentialities actualize themselves as willful acts.

In *Beloved*, the volitional zones not only accumulate undead presences internal to a family history, as they do in *As I Lay Dying*. The volitional zones in Morrison's novel synthesize energies that are scattered throughout vast stretches of history. One can picture the scope of the will in the three fictional works at issue in this chapter as expanding concentric circles. If "Ligeia" depersonalizes the will but restricts it to the form of a specter bent on surviving beyond death; and if *As I Lay Dying* transposes character into a volitional zone that is capable of intervention by virtue of maternal possession; then *Beloved* reanimates anonymous historical *multitudes* in the form of will, so as to dramatize historically protracted forms of freedom that re-collect past energies and vigorously deploy them in modes of confrontation and struggle.

Sethe's "Rough Choice" as Reanimation of a Collective Suicidal Will

The form of the Gothic novel, insofar as it permits uncanny hauntings and reanimations to interrupt linear temporality and homogenous spatiality, allows us to reassess the conditions and ramifications of Sethe's "rough choice"—the decision to murder her daughter rather than surrender her to a life of bondage and degradation. Critics have most often read Sethe's choice as either an autonomous moral decision or a forced choice imposed on her by unbearably unjust historical conditions—or something in between. The Gothic dimension of the novel, however, allows us to reconsider the manner in which radical action might be informed by presences that will not leave history behind. In an insightful piece exploring "revolutionary suicide" in Morrison's novels, Katy Ryan attends to this dimension, scrutinizing the formal resonance of Sethe's act with an attempted suicide described in the fragmented section narrated by Beloved, the revenant daughter whom Sethe has killed. Ryan writes, "The narrative merger of the African woman's decision to kill herself with Sethe's decision to kill her children creates a Bakhtinian intersection of novelistic planes, a time/space of simultaneity and disjunction" (395). This is no doubt true, but one must also remember that Sethe's "decision to kill her children" is inseparable from a decision to kill *herself*. As Sethe puts it, "My plan was to take us all to the other side where my own ma'am is. They stopped me from getting us there [...]" (234). Moreover, Sethe seems to view her children as part of herself: as she runs to the shed, she "[c]ollected every bit of life she had made, all the *parts of her* that were precious and fine and beautiful [...]" (190, emphasis added). Thus, Sethe's suicidal will is effectuated on both of the novelistic planes that Ryan alludes to: she is not only identified as the woman deliberately jumping overboard in Beloved's account (as Ryan notes); she also intends to kill herself during the scene in the shed.

This doubling of the suicidal will is significant, because it suggests that far from being an autonomous act of killing, or a desperate reaction to a unique socio-juridical context, Sethe's attempted action bears an impersonal suicidal will that revives an anonymous collective.

Sethe's will does not simply express her character as an individual, but reactivates the will nameless slaves who are trying to kill themselves on the slave ship. The will here does not take form as an effort to act for personal reasons. Rather, will is a form of volition that stems from the slave ship's unbearable confinement of the body as such; an incorporeal will develops out of a sense of the limitations of the generic body—the *any*-body. As Beloved puts it, "we are all trying to leave our bodies behind […] it is hard to make yourself die forever" (243). While Beloved eventually identifies Sethe by name, her own representation of the suicidal will begins with the anonymous occupants of the ship: "someone is trembling   I can feel it over here   he is fighting hard to leave his body which is a small bird trembling" (244). Before Sethe's name is mentioned, Beloved describes the attempted suicide of an anonymous woman: "[…] she goes in they do not push her   she goes in […]" (245). By the time Beloved invokes Sethe's proper name ("Sethe went into the sea" (248)), she has already located Sethe at the scene in the garden ("Sethe is the one that picked flowers […]" (248)). This sequence invites us to consider Sethe's leap into the sea not as an act rooted in, say, that peculiar excess of pride or love that so irks her neighbors, but as a kind of narrative grafting: in Beloved's account, the attempted murder-suicide in the garden scene prompts the palimpsestic displacement of the anonymous woman with Sethe. Thus, when one attends to the Gothic dislocation of the will, Sethe's leap into the sea appears as a mediation, a narrative hinge, between two acts: the attempted suicide of the anonymous woman, one among a collective, and Sethe's own murder (and concomitant abandonment) of Beloved.

Moreover, the will here has a mythical dimension that further implicates it within a space collective agency. The description of Sethe's "rough choice," in which an act of *flight* supplants psychological interiority ("And if she thought anything, it was No. No. Nono. Nonono. Simple. She just flew" (190)), not only resonates with the initial glimpse of the suicidal will—the trembling man whose body is a bird—but recalls a myth that Morrison had drawn upon more explicitly in *Song of Solomon* (1977), that is, the myth of the "flying African." The flying African myth celebrated those slaves who, too proud to be bound to servitude, chose to commit suicide instead. The myth has it that the slaves flew back to Africa to dwell with their ancestors. Insofar as Sethe's flight registers an intention to "take us all to the other side where my own ma'am is" (234), she uncannily revivifies the will of the flying Africans. As though drawing attention to the interruptive mythical mode, the description of Sethe's flight immediately follows a snag in the chapter's psychological realism: Sethe acknowledges that neither personal narrative nor psychological motivation can explain what prompted her to act, "[b]ecause the truth was simple, not a long-drawn-out record […]" (190). In this narrative hiatus, a gap wherein one might expect an explication of personal motive or perhaps a thought-process preceding her act, a sudden act of flight appears—one that reanimates yet also transforms a thoroughly impersonal form of volition. Fittingly, Sethe's friend Stamp Paid's rumination on her flight resonates with will to leave the body behind—in this case, the limitations of the human body: he thinks of "how she flew, snatching up her children like a hawk on the wing; how her face beaked, how her hands worked like claws, how she collected them every which way […]" (183). In this instance, to leave the body behind is not to die or become disembodied, but to metamorphosize in pursuit of radical action.

The implicit association of Sethe's bird-becoming with the flying African myth elucidates the positive dimension of Sethe's impersonal will: the suicidal will here does not simply seek to terminate life, but, on the contrary, to establish a space on the "other side" where kinship relations are possible. Thus, Sethe's killing of her baby morphs into the positive gesture of summoning her back into being. Sethe's belief that (in her daughter Denver's words) "nothing ever dies" (47) inflects her manner of mourning; her "outrageous claim," that killing her baby was the right thing to do because it ensured safety, marks willing as a kind of effort toward hospitality: Sethe's actions after the murder are devoted to creating and sustaining for her children what she perceives to be a safe haven. Fittingly, she warns Denver against going back to the site of historical violence (presumably, the plantation): "So, Denver, you can't never go there. Never. Because even though it's all over—over and done with—it's going to always be there waiting for you. That's how come I had to get all my children out" (47). Out, but also in. Paul D emphasizes the volitional element in Sethe's inexplicable hospitality at 124: at first believing that Sethe never exorcised the ghost because she lacked his masculine power, he comes to realize that Sethe's life with the ghost is more than mere apprehensive toleration.

> [B]ecause he had not done it before he got there his own self, he thought it was because she could not do it. That she lived with 124 in helpless, apologetic resignation because she had no choice; that minus husband, sons, mother-in-law, she and her slow-witted daughter had to live there all alone making do […] He was wrong. This here Sethe was new. The ghost in her house didn't bother her for the very same reason a room-and-board witch with new shoes was welcome […] This here Sethe talked about safety with a handsaw. (191)

What initially appears as helplessness turns out to be an act of will. As Paul D recognizes with the phrase “safety with a handsaw,” Sethe’s action in the shed is entirely continuous with her welcoming of both the ghost and its embodied instantiation, Beloved.

Just as the Gothic mode produces a homology between the attempted suicide of the woman on the slave ship and Sethe’s flight to the shed, it also yokes together two ostensibly opposed gestures—Sethe’s erection of a marked grave for Beloved and her act of summoning the abandoned child with a whisper. Sethe’s whisper, in Beloved’s narrative, seems to revive Beloved’s moribund being by offering her a “place to be”: “[…] I need to find a place to be   the air is heavy   I am not dead   I am not   there is a house   there is what she whispered to me   I am where she told me   I am not dead […]” (247). Just as Ligeia’s will to life seems to depend upon a space of revivification that Poe’s narrator opens up, Beloved’s own transition from a zone of nonbeing (“I am not”) back into life (“I am not dead”) is facilitated by a welcoming whisper, a whisper that somehow coincides with the place itself: “*there* is *what* she whispered to me” (my emphasis). The saturation of the whisper by the locale underscores the degree to which the agency of voice is bound up with the spatial relations that counter an act of abandonment, even if the traumatic impact of abandonment cannot be entirely ameliorated. I have already shown that Sethe’s act of flight is not an act of individual volition, but instead, a reconstitution of a generic capacity that her body assumes without conscious thought. Similarly, Sethe’s whisper cannot be construed as a purely individual speech-act; what makes the “whisper” (as Beloved perceives it) possible is not an individuated mind whose directive voice is a sign of sovereign agency. Rather, the whisper carries a trace of the act of inscription made possible by Sethe’s generative rehabilitation of the collective suicidal will.

The structure of the Gothic novel, in which acts are irreducible to their actualization at a single moment in space and time, allows us to sense just how pregnant this whisper is: the whisper condenses and redirects the agency Sethe exercises on another plane—the agency of mourning. At the silent site of inscription, that is, the space of the headstone, Sethe insists on partaking of deathly silence rather than ritualistic song and speech.

> The setting-up was held in the yard because nobody besides himself [Stamp Paid] would enter 124—an injury Sethe answered with another by refusing to attend the service Reverend Pike presided over. She went instead to the gravesite, whose silence she competed with as she stood there not joining in the hymns the others sang with all their hearts. (197)

Sethe's response comes in the form of silent refusal—a "not joining in" that generates an intimate encounter with the silence of the gravesite; rather than mourn with the living, Sethe immerses herself in the silence of the dead. Three months later, she has sex with an engraver in exchange for one word on a headstone, "Beloved," which she has pulled from the address she had heard at the funeral ("Dearly Beloved…"). This sexual act is not simply a means to a separate end—an unpleasant experience undergone in order to secure a service. Even considered independently of the economic context, the act in itself bears significance insofar as it reengages the suicidal will evident in the scene in the shed: "[T]hose ten minutes she spent pressed up against dawn-colored stone studded with star chips, her knees wide open as the grave, were longer than life, more alive, more pulsating than the baby blood that soaked her fingers like oil" (11). On a distinct narrative level, the sexual act resumes the suicide attempt that had been interrupted. Sethe willingly endures an experience that, like a murder-suicide in process, seems poised at the limit of life and death: while not yet dead, Sethe vicariously undergoes her baby's

passage beyond life into death. Later on, she explicitly associates this self-sacrifice with a kind of suicide: Speaking of Paul D's disapproval of her "rough choice," Sethe muses: "Who in the world is he willing to die for? Would he give his privates to a stranger in return for a carving?" (234). In her willingness to give up her body to crude violation, Sethe assumes the suicidal act that she was prevented from committing in the shed.

Sethe's aforementioned act of whispering, moreover, carries a trace of this sexual act with the engraver. It is as though Sethe's whisper, an intimate speech-act on the edge of silence, converts the preacher's ritual address into a communication between two beings situated on the border of life and death. Both the whisper and the inscription on the gravestone summon Beloved's presence into 124. "[A]s soon as I got the grave in place you made your presence known in the house and worried us all to distraction [...] you came back here to me and I was right all along: there is no world outside my door" (212).

In one sense, Sethe accomplishes her goal, that is, to bring Beloved and herself to "the other side." When Beloved appears in the flesh, Sethe sees her ambiguously suicidal aim as fulfilled: in terms that recall her experience on the intolerable slave ship and her subsequent leap into the sea, Sethe thinks, "I couldn't lay down nowhere in peace, back then. Now I can. I can sleep like the drowned, have mercy" (236). Of course, if Sethe's consummated act does not achieve a desired resolution, it is because she has inadequately accounted for *another will*, a will that violates the terms of the invitation that it nevertheless accepts. Sethe's will, as I have suggested, surpasses the spatiotemporal limits of the finite human person. Beloved, however, embodies a will that stylistically intensifies the spiritual collective through which it is constituted. Sethe rightly suggests that Beloved has returned "to me of her own free will [...]" (231), but perhaps erroneously assumes that her "free will" is bound to a strictly filial sense of

duty. As Beloved's sojourn—or more precisely, series of returns—suggests, this "free will" is not at all calculable in terms of kinship relations. By virtue of enacting a will, Beloved contests the terms of Sethe's regenerative suicide, thus demonstrating a form of paradoxical autonomy that is at once pridefully self-assertive and possessed by unbounded anonymous presences.

The Ghost, Dispersion, and the Self-Collective Will

Thus far, I have argued that Sethe's mode of willing is radically suprapersonal—that it creatively reenacts the historical and mythological collective suicidal will that is dramatized within the novel itself. Turning to the figure of Beloved, one sees that the problem of reanimated collective agency is greatly complicated. For unlike Sethe, who as a flesh-and-blood character has a relatively stable ontological status, Beloved introduces a new kind of anarchic threat into the text—the threat of an unmanageable excess. When asked after Beloved's final disappearance if the mysterious girl was in fact her sister, Denver responds, "At times. At times I think she was—more" (307). Denver's hesitant description here suggests that Beloved's presence indexes an excess internal to the ontology of characterization itself. *She was—more*. Perhaps one might detect Beloved's mode of being in the dash itself, the syntactical hiatus between characterization and unmeasured surplus. Denver's invocation of the "more" recalls *Beloved*'s dedication, which is addressed to the victims of the Middle Passage—"Sixty Million and more." Ostensibly a novelistic character, Beloved not only invokes a paradoxically named yet anonymous being, the uncanny return of a "crawling-already?" baby, but also reanimates the "Sixty Million," which is endowed with a proper noun as though referring to a specific person. If "Beloved" marks the many-in-one, "Sixty Million" marks the one-in-many. Within this ambiguous ontological status

one can situate a problem that Beloved poses for the question of volition: How do unmeasured historical collectives consolidate agency within Gothic mode? How does the form of the Gothic romance reconcile the anarchic energy of that *something more* with the criteria of narrative coherence, which promises to explain the logic underpinning a series of actions?

In spite of the disparate and chaotic multitudes she contains, Beloved's being finds expression in willed worldly acts. Both one and many, she generates actions that stem from the dispersed effects of historical trauma but amount to a powerful series of aggressive claims. Far from being an aimless or merely irrational force, Beloved from the outset manifests unambiguous intentionality: "Instead of sighs and accidents there was pointed and deliberate abuse" (122). Thus, Beloved is less an individuated character than the site of synthesis: she yokes together extreme heteronomy, the multitude of historical forces that congeal in her character, and autonomy, implied by the notion of *deliberateness*, which, since Thoreau's *Walden*, has indexed autonomous action in American literature and culture. But *Beloved* takes this ghostly will a step further, not simply by imbuing a disembodied force with the capacity of an autonomous agent, but by reanimating the entire domestic space. Foreshadowing Beloved's appearance in the flesh, Denver views the house "as a person rather than a structure"; she regards it as "someone dependent but proud" (39). And indeed, the fully embodied Beloved synthesizes these two characteristics: while dependent upon—or even constituted by—recognition, love, and in a larger sense, a historical collective, she nonetheless *appears* as the kind of prideful being normally associated with self-reliant personhood. In a display of willful pride, she warns Denver in unequivocal terms, "Don't tell me what to do. Don't you never never tell me what to do" (91). The pride ordinarily linked with the notion of a strong individual is not grounded in a robust

personal identity, but rather, in a re-collection of those nameless beings whose agency has been undermined by historical injustice.

Throughout the novel, the idea that the ghost/Beloved has a "plan," the word Sethe and Denver use to interpret the ghost's antagonism, is progressively undone: these ghostly forces organize themselves in unpredictable ways, as though insisting on their own autonomy against the conventions of both a domestic habitus and domestic fiction. The ghost initiates its course of action by haunting 124 and then quite literally displacing Baby Suggs' presence in the Clearing, a rustic space wherein the "unchurched preacher" had formerly "let her great heart beat" (103), thereby inaugurating the communal festivities. When Sethe returns to the Clearing and invokes Baby Suggs' soothing spirit, it is the ghost that seems to intervene, first by massaging Sethe's neck then by choking her (113). Choking here is continuous with massaging; it is massaging with too much force. The ghost thereby manifests the complexity of its claim on the living: beginning as a corporeal act of love, of healing, the gesture, like Sethe's murder, expresses a claim that deploys violence as an enactment of excessive love. By attacking the organ of speech ("the fingers moved slowly around toward her windpipe" (113)) and reducing Sethe to silence, the ghost, as it were, imposes the necessary silencing of the dead (for this ghost, unlike that in *Hamlet*, never speaks) on the space of the living. In this sense, the ghost's act of choking recalls the opening of the novel, wherein the ghost exercises a negative volition in its refusal to heed the summons of Denver and Sethe, who have called for a "conversation" and "exchange of views" (10). The corollary of the ghost's initial refusal to speak is its deliberate debilitation of Sethe's vocal chords. If speech is often taken to index individual agency, then at this point the ghost's disembodied denial of speech seems to bear within itself a multiplicity. After acknowledging that the "thumbs that pressed her nape" felt like "touches from the other side" (116), Sethe

speculates, "Maybe that was where it had gone to. After Paul D beat it out of 124, maybe it had collected itself in the Clearing. Reasonable, she thought" (116). Thus, Paul D's exorcism seems to provoke the ghost into "collect[ing] itself" somewhere else; the dispelling of the ghost produces not a dispersal but a self-gathering historical collective that registers an uninvited act of initiative.

Uninvited action: the form of the will, with its refusal to passively receive an invitation or summons, meets the Gothic mode, wherein a presence from the past interrupts a normative distribution of bodies and actions. The uninvited agent is neither a mere effect of psychological repression nor a sovereign, self-constituted individual. Insofar as ghosts return, they are always willful. And yet here what is uninvited is the willed reanimation of the historical violence that Paul D hopes to keep at bay. While it is tempting to view Beloved in terms of an asocial, homogenous drive to recover maternal love, the sheer excess and diversity of her actions, as well as their source in (self-)collective life, repel this interpretation. To the degree that Beloved's acts are uncalled for, they also carry an improvisatory, darkly playful quality that is not easily assimilated into a narrative of a unified agent with a single aim in view.

For instance, when Beloved seduces Paul D and forces herself upon him, she acts not simply in her role as abandoned daughter, but as a vengeful victim of sexual abuse, seeking erotic and symbolic redress. Indeed, it is suggested at various times that Beloved may not actually be Sethe's daughter, but instead, a traumatized victim of a white man who had kept her as a sex slave. But here again, the will she materializes in bodily form still retains the impersonal multiplicity of an incorporeal collective. Even while Beloved plays the role of the excessively loving daughter, her will veers off in other directions. When she confronts Paul D, she seems to have other interests in mind:

> "She don't love me like I love her. I don't love nobody but her."
>
> "Then what you come in here for?"
>
> "I want you to touch me on the inside part."
>
> "Go on back in that house and get to bed."
>
> "You have to touch me. On the inside part. And you have to call me my name." (137)

Beloved embodies incongruous characteristics throughout the novel, as though the very multiplicity she organizes has formed a kind of self-overcoming embodied subject. Earlier in the novel, Paul D sees her pick up a rocking chair with one hand (67), revealing a capacity at odds with that of a convalescent young woman. Similarly, Beloved's seductive power here reveals a capacity incongruous with her childlike, rudimentary understanding of her own anatomy. Beloved marks the site of a volitional passage whereby her status as passive victim becomes a form of will—here, one that combines an erotic demand with demand for nominal recognition. Rather than wait for someone to call out for her by name, as she previously has, she forcefully and decisively commands Paul D to say her name aloud. If Beloved has been the passive recipient of nomination, of Sethe's rather accidental act of naming, she actively assumes her nameless name here, ventriloquizing the anonymous multitude through a character who would rather forget it. Insofar as Beloved's improvisatory "plan extends in many directions that exceed a given *telos*, her strength of will manifests a kind of volition that history has foreclosed.

Thus, in the figure of Beloved, the ghostly return of a historical struggle for recognition becomes visible. This struggle takes on a spectacular form of self-showing: the dark past, as though exposed to a spotlight, brightens up within the domestic space. "Beloved was shining and Paul D didn't like it" (78). This "shining" is not simply an accidental feature of her appearance,

but stems from a deliberate act of theft: Beloved has stolen shiny shoes and a dress under mysterious circumstances. Morrison's pun on "shining"—meaning both a glowing appearance and revenant *re*appearance—underscores the notion that Beloved has in some sense willed her own return. The act of theft allows the darkness of history, allegorized in the memory of invisible bodies piled atop one another on a slave ship, to take form as an insistence on visibility as such. In a rejoinder to Paul D's questioning, Beloved figures this theft in the present tense, as though her act of appropriation is ongoing: "I take the shoes! I take the dress!" (79). This appropriation of radiance is repeated in various forms throughout the novel. Beloved demands that Sethe "tell me your diamonds." During her domestic standoff with Sethe, Beloved once again insists on a radiant visibility, this time by reenacting the scene of her (that is, the baby's) own death. "Sometimes she screamed, 'Rain! Rain!' and clawed her throat until rubies of blood opened there, made brighter by her midnight skin. Then Sethe shouted, 'No!' and knocked over chairs to get up and wipe the jewels away" (288). Just as Beloved's shoes, "black as oil" recall the oily texture of her blood after Sethe cuts her, the bright jewels of blood recreate the earlier scene in the form of an aesthetic display of beauty. Finally, this mode of self-revelation is consummated when the townsfolk see Beloved in her final form: "The devil-child was clever, they thought. And beautiful […] Thunder-black and glistening, she stood on long straight legs, her belly big and tight. Vines of hair twisted all over her head. Jesus. Her smile was dazzling" (301). Beloved's will, then, has willful self-manifestation as its final horizon; while no content could be adequate to her claim, its force is apparent in her repeated enactments of disruptive ostentation.

Stepping Back to the Sound: Collective Will and Collective Action

Thus far, I have argued that Sethe's will, or what she calls her "plan," is not embodied as a personal project but as the resurgence of a collective will that, far from being confined to history and myth, is creatively interpolated into the novel's most consequential actions. Furthermore, I have argued that Beloved's presence exacerbates the problem of the collective will: insofar as Beloved's presence is not rooted in a particular practice, ethos or myth, she poses the question of how more anarchic, scattered energies from the buried past can reemerge in the form of willful self-assertion. The climax of *Beloved*, to which I will now turn, further complicates the problem of the collective: here, the multitudes of the past do not just possess particular novelistic figures in the present; rather, they haunt *another plurality*, posing the question of how culturally and historically established forms of life can transmogrify in the form of collective will. Collective action at this point in the novel is not simply prescribed through forms of communal habit and ritual, but demands a collective act of confrontation that, without any viable plan that could organize strategies and goals, seeks to reconcile the claims of the past and those of the present.

Denver is the first figure to recognize the necessity of collective action. Acknowledging the need to save her mother from Beloved's increasingly brutalizing presence, she finds herself stuck in 124, viewing a potential departure from her house as "step[ping] off the edge of the world" (280); "She didn't even know which way to go" (280). In a sense, Denver's position closely resembles that of the Invisible Man during the Epilogue of Ralph Ellison's novel. Ellison's narrator is eager to engage in meaningful sociopolitical action, but has been driven into a hole underground. But whereas the Invisible Man, as though exemplifying Ellison's liberal ideals, emerges from underground out of a sense of individual responsibility, Morrison's Denver can only cross the threshold of the house once she is animated by the vocalized confidence of Baby Suggs, the novel's touchstone for collective spirit:

> Denver stood on the porch in the sun and couldn't leave it. Her throat itched; her heart kicked—and then Baby Suggs laughed, clear as anything. "You mean I never told you about Carolina? […] I never told you all that? Is that why you can't walk down the steps? My Jesus my."
>
> But you said there was no defense.
>
> "There ain't."
>
> Then what do I do?
>
> "Know it, and go on out the yard. Go on." (281)

While inhabiting a position of social isolation within the town, Denver is able to mobilize the community in response to an imperative from Baby Suggs, whose presence and voice spontaneously manifest themselves. Baby Suggs functions as a kind of beneficent undead presence: like Lady Ligeia, she is summoned from the dead; unlike Poe's titular lady, however, Baby Suggs arrives to revivify the will of another character who is unable to act on her own.

Laughter is essential to this scene, for it facilitates a passage from isolated subjectivity to communal life. Laughter here does not suppress the realities of danger and suffering, but offers an invitation to view them differently—that is, as necessary risks inherent to any crossing over into the public sphere. Unlike advice offered in purely discursive form, laughter enables a volitional self-overcoming predicated on communicated courage. One might contrast this perspective with that of one prominent critic, Eddie Glaude Jr. Glaude Jr. emphasizes the content of Baby Suggs' advice and argues that her urging exemplifies what he calls, drawing upon the philosophy of John Dewey and William James, "the pragmatic view of tragedy": "Tragedy is understood […] as an ineliminable part of what it means to be a black agent in this world" (44). Glaude Jr. goes on to extrapolate a larger point that seems to accord with Baby Suggs' wisdom:

> In the end, I believe Morrison's novel brilliantly realizes what I have called the pragmatic view of tragedy: we must look the tragedy of our moral experiences squarely in the face and, with little certainty as to the outcomes, *humbly* act to make a better world for ourselves and our children. (44, Glaude's emphasis)

In cashing out Baby Suggs' advice in the form of a normative principle that any black agent ought to adopt, Glaude Jr. risks reducing this scene to the proffering of an isolable proverb. One should not forget that Baby Suggs is no "humble" character, but arguably the opposite: in "open[ing] her great heart to those who could use it" (103), she ends up embodying, for the community, an excess of prideful generosity (160). Glaude Jr.'s universalization of humble action reveals what is lost when Baby Suggs' mode of being is reduced to a body of portable wisdom. Rather than view Baby Suggs as a source of wise advice, one might recall her defining synecdochal feature: her perpetually beating heart, a concrete presence that mediates her social relations. In the above scene with Denver, she is conjured by Denver's heart: Denver's throat itches; her heart kicks; and *then* Baby Suggs appears, as though in sympathy with the heartbeat, laughing in response. Reanimated by Denver's own kicking heart, Baby Suggs arrives on the scene as a volitional supplement. Whereas Glaude Jr. sees Baby Suggs' statement as a kind of maxim adoptable by an individual (black) agent in any given situation, I want to suggest that Baby Suggs' reemergence here, and the forms of agency she engenders, are entirely inseparable from a *scene* of Gothic haunting, which offers a stimulating disturbance to the will in its orientation toward collective life.[98]

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[98] The moment in which Denver's heart kicks prior to Baby Suggs' reappearance seems to be based on a personal experience of Morrison's. In a retrospective preface published in the Vintage edition of *Beloved*, Morrison remembers a pivotal experience in which she suddenly felt an unaccountable "edginess": "I heard my heart […] stomping away in my chest like a colt. I went back to the house to examine this apprehension, even panic. I knew what fear felt like; this was different. Then it slapped me: I was happy, free in a way I had never been, ever." For both Denver and Morrison in her own autobiographical account, the palpably beating heart is figured as a harbinger

More than just a particular character, Baby Suggs constitutes an undead volitional zone that opens a scene of collective agency. The women in the town recall that the yard at 124 once functioned as a "way station," and at the climax of the novel, 124 becomes a literal and figurative conduit for an emergent collective will. The climactic scene with the thirty women at 124 vividly narrates the problem of collective action, which, far from spontaneously erupting at once, forms unevenly in accordance with the affective inducements of reanimated presences. Initially, the townswomen are lost. Just as Denver crosses the threshold without knowing which way to turn, the townswomen find themselves determined to act yet without any sense of how to collectively proceed. The women, while inclined toward assembly through a vaguely articulated collective psychology ("Maybe they were sorry for [Denver]. Or for Sethe. Maybe they were sorry for the years of their own disdain […] In any case, the personal pride, the arrogant claim staked out at 124 seemed to them to have run its course"), nonetheless must encounter Baby Suggs' reanimation of *space* in order to consummate their act of mercy.

Like a Greek chorus whose critical opinions have outlived their relevance, the women are situated in a limbo between bygone judgment and prospective action: "They had no idea what they would do once they got there. They just started out, walked down Bluestone Road and came together at the agreed-upon time" (296). Just as Denver is spurred by the laughing presence of a Baby Suggs, the townswomen seem moved by the return of a past scene of unity: "When they caught up with each other, all thirty, and arrived at 124, the first thing they saw was not Denver sitting on the steps, but themselves. Younger, stronger, even as little girls lying in the grass asleep […] Baby Suggs laughed and skipped among them, urging more" (297). What I

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of freedom. The generic difference between the Gothic novel and the autobiographical anecdote, however, is readily apparent here: whereas the meaning of Morrison's beating heart is belatedly accessible to individual introspection, Denver relies on Baby Suggs' resuscitated presence. The novelistic moment opens onto a social encounter, whereas Morrison's anecdote offers a purely internal and solitary revelation.

have been calling the undead will is not in this instance a sudden force emergent from death or dormancy, but first of all the revival of an entire *scene* that mobilizes the affects that will enable action. In this case, the transpersonal remembrance does not directly produce action but does open a space in which collective spontaneity becomes possible. Baby Suggs' presence does not elicit judgment in this case, but a newly clarified sense of solidarity.

It is during this scene that Morrison's novelistic revision of the tragic chorus-function takes on its full significance. In one sense, the townswomen's vision of themselves as children recalls Nietzsche's account of the origin of the tragic chorus.

> Dionysiac excitement is capable of communicating to a whole crowd of people the artistic gift of seeing itself surrounded by a host of spirits with which it knows itself to be profoundly united. This process is the primal dramatic phenomenon in the tragic chorus: seeing oneself transformed and acting as though one had truly entered another body, another character. (43)

Morrison, however, recasts this relation between the "host of spirits" and the collective body: far from being swept up in a paroxysm Dionysiac excitement, the townswomen can only proceed by encountering the specters of cultural history, which appear at the level of both the individual psyche and the collective. The chorus' traditional capacity for sympathetic response here operates first of all within a single haunted character. Ella, recalling upon the sight of Beloved the trauma of giving birth to a white baby after being raped her master, seemingly involuntarily hollers in response to this memory: "She had delivered, but would not nurse, a hairy white thing […] The idea of that pup coming back to whip her too set her jaw working, and then Ella hollered" (298). Thus, if Ella is able to initiate what eventually becomes a full-on song, it is because a Gothic sensibility recognizes a spectral history of maternal suffering returning in the

present scene. This individual physiological reaction in turn sets the music in motion: "Instantly the kneelers and the standers joined her. They stopped praying and took a step back to the beginning. In the beginning there were no words. In the beginning was the sound, and they all knew what that sound sounded like" (298). What begins as a subjective, haunted thought becomes something else altogether, as the spontaneous cry of pain eventually gets transposed into a collective claim on Sethe and her persecutor. Within the Gothic novel form, the chorus' sympathy for both the tragic protagonist as well its own members transforms into radical intervention: communal comportment, when confronted with the haunting presence of history, becomes collective action.

The climactic sequence in which the women begin singing both recalls and revises an earlier scene in which the community sings in response to Baby Suggs' preaching. Baby Suggs establishes this earlier scene by initiating a call and response that resembles God's commands at the opening of Genesis: creating her world with the word, Baby Suggs addresses the community with the generative style of the Christian divinity: "'Let the children come!' and they ran from the trees toward her" (104); "'Let your mothers hear you laugh!,' she told them, and the woods rang" (104-105); "Let the grown men come," […] They stepped out one by one from among the ringing trees"; "'Let your wives and your children see you dance,' […] and the ground life shuddered under their feet" (105). Baby Suggs proceeds to offer a sermon, which culminates in her dancing and spawns the community's singing: "[T]he others opened their mouths and gave her the music. Long notes held until the four-part harmony was perfect enough for their deeply loved flesh" (105). In Baby Suggs' absence, however, the women in the later scene lack an authoritative center. They now respond to Ella's hollering—not exactly an intentional call, but nonetheless one that puts the antiphonic dynamic in motion. In the beginning was the sound: as

though accessing a history not only older than that of Baby Suggs in the Clearing but also older than God's word, the women join Ella in her hollering, intuiting both the source of suffering and sound's transformative potential. If a sound is to become a *claim*, what is required is not the mediation of language, but the reactivation of practical knowledge, through which a shared history becomes a singular deed performed by a collective body. This scene complicates the relation between revived history and embodiment insofar as the sounded song contains historical multitudes that can only be expressed through an embodied *ensemble*: the festivity of ritual, the psychic pain of slavery, and the ancient knowledge of sound itself—all intoned in the song—can only be reanimated *as* will through improvisatory communication.

Conclusion

At the opening of this chapter, I suggested that Nietzsche's Zarathustra aptly frames a fundamental Gothic problematic: the ostensible structural incompatibility between the will and the past-ness of the past. I would like to briefly conclude by situating my account within the context of a few representative theories of the American Gothic, which foreground this Nietzschean problem of occluded agency. Taking a cue from D.H. Lawrence's *Studies in Classic American Literature*, this body of criticism has tended to see agency as a self-deluded attempt at escape—from either the practical exigencies of the worldly present or from the inexorable forces of a repressed past. In Fiedler's classic (if now unfashionable) work on the American novel, which for him is well-nigh synonymous with the Gothic, our fiction embodies a desperate desire for escape: the American novel represents "flight from the physical data of the actual world, in search of a (sexless and dim) Ideal" (29). In a more recent history of the rise of the American

Gothic, which emphasizes a self-consciously critical rather than merely symptomatic aspect, Eric Savoy has suggested that "Gothic texts have returned obsessively to the personal, the familial, and the national pasts to complicate rather than to clarify them, but mainly to implicate the individual in a deep morass of American desires and deeds that allow no final escape from or transcendence of them" (169). Whereas Fiedler sees in the American Gothic a desire to escape into an imaginary past in order to evade the demands of social life in the present, Savoy emphasizes thwarted or misguided attempts to freely transcend a repressed past. What these quite different assessments share, however, is a commitment to the idea that the Gothic thematizes agential failure—failure predicated on the irreconcilability of the weight of the past, on the one hand, and the presumption of freedom in the present, on the other. It is therefore no surprise that the question of will is muted: in focusing on various forms of self-deluded volition, these critics have elided the presence of more positive forms of agential assertion.

In drawing upon the work of Nietzsche and locating its problematics within the field of the American Gothic novel, I have sought to reopen the question of the will and thereby reimagine how agency might creatively mediate between a burdensome past and a troubled present. In Book Two of *Zarathustra*, the eponymous protagonist reaches an impasse when trying to explain how the will might not merely reconcile itself to the "it was," but rather, positively affirm itself in relation to this past and thereby transvalue it (112). In this chapter, I have demonstrated that a specific American Gothic lineage, consisting of "Ligeia," *As I Lay Dying*, and *Beloved*, constitutes a literary-formal response to this philosophical problem—a response that, through experiments with style and genre, dislocates and disperses the will in space and time, thus undermining the assumption that will is coextensive with individual freedom. In tracking Gothic agency in terms of the concept of will rather than freedom—or its

conceptual kin, “free will”—I have tried to displace the forced choice between a will that would freely transcend the past and an unfree will that would fail to overcome the “morass” of its historical or libidinal conditions. Finally, by developing the impersonal, collective dimension of the possessed will, I have shown how an opening onto sociality is the very condition of the will’s capacity to recuperate a haunting past in a manner that transforms and actualizes potentialities for action.

CONCLUSION: THE MIDDLE PASSAGES OF THE NOVELISTIC WILL

Oh, Ahab! what shall be grand in thee, it must needs be plucked at from the skies, and dived for in the deep, and featured in the unbodied air!

Ishmael in Melville's *Moby-Dick*

Published two years after *Beloved* and paying overt homage to *Moby-Dick*, Charles Johnson's jubilantly palimpsestic *Middle Passage* introduces us to former slave and longtime petty thief, Rutherford Calhoun. While some have argued that proper names in narrative invest characters with a "precious remainder" that confers individuality[99], the name "Rutherford Calhoun," like "Beloved," invokes not a precious possession but a mark of *dis*possession, an emblem of the black character's subjection to proprietary power and historical antagonisms. Indeed, Rutherford is quite literally dispossessed and disoriented: he runs away from an unpayable debt by stowing himself away on what is, unbeknownst to him, a slave ship on the verge of mutinous chaos. As an already precariously positioned African American, he will have to negotiate two mutinous schemes—one planned by the mates against a tyrannical captain, the second planned and carried out by the African slaves of the Allmuseri tribe. At one point, after the cataclysmic mutiny all but destroys the ship and many of its occupants, Rutherford attempts to offer comfort to his shipmates, through the "useful fiction" that they will get to safety.[100] And yet, Rutherford discovers that it is not the stipulated content of the fiction that proves useful to those he is comforting, but the *style* through which he communicates shards of his past that amount to neither "experience" nor factual truth.

[99] Cf. Chatman 130-131, which approvingly cites Barthes on the "precious remainder."

[100] While it is not entirely clear what the educated Rutherford is citing—perhaps, anachronistically, Hans Vaihinger's *The Philosophy of 'As If'*—he puts this phrase in square-quotes, thus redoubling the fictionality of the fiction.

> [T]o comfort the weary on the *Republic* I peered deep into memory and called forth all that had ever given me solace […] What I felt, plainly, was a transmission to those on deck of all I had pilfered, as though I was but a conduit or window through which my pillage and booty of "experience" passed. And momentarily the injured were calmed, not by the lie—they weren't naïve, you know—but by the urgent belief they heard in my voice, and soon enough I came to desperately believe in it myself, for them I believed we would reach home […] (161)

The argument I have been pursuing throughout this dissertation suggests that character is, as Rutherford identifies himself, a "conduit," an agent of "transmission," rather than an autonomous origin of action. Put otherwise, character is itself a dynamic *middle passage*—here, a mediation between the spare contents "called forth" in memory and the act of consolation. For instance, during this section, Rutherford tells us his interaction with his crewmates makes him feel "indebted." Thus, as mediated by Rutherford's conjuring act, the monetary debt we associate with his character becomes *indebtedness*, a practically efficacious feeling conducive to generous action. What comforts the wounded, however, is not any content he can offer, but his *stylization* of belief, a belief devoid of everything besides its *manner* of transmission. That is, the shipmates do not embrace the lie, but rather, the tonality of "urgent belief"; the wounded passengers, and ultimately Rutherford himself, are convinced by the immanent stylization of belief, its quality to immediately compel.

Within the terms of my argument, one might understand Rutherford Calhoun not as one character among others, but as a kind of allegorical figuration of the novelistic will. What I have tried to demonstrate in the three preceding chapters is that the novelistic agent is one who

alchemizes the stylization of alien forms into concrete deeds. In my opening chapter, I argued that Ahab's embeddedness within dramatic tropes and his stylization of the same render a form of will routed through theatrical call and response. In the dramatic chapter entitled "The Candles," for example, wherein Ahab addresses the flashes of lightning during a thunder storm, the captain accomplishes an act of will by channeling a theatricality that exceeds his status as an individual. Before Ahab even addresses the lightning in what he deems his defiant worship, the staging for call and response—which itself condenses the dramatic rituals of prior chapters—is set up: "At the base of the mainmast, full beneath the doubloon and the flame, the Parsee was kneeling in Ahab's front, but with his head bowed away from him […]." This virtual cuing which positions Ahab as respondent, catalyzes the complex chiasmus of rhetorical and material action. Initially performing deferential worship—"No fearless fool now fronts thee. I own thy speechless placeless power […]" (382)—Ahab reiterates the same phrase but inverts its meaning, now suggesting defiance: "I own thy speechless, placeless power; said I not so? Nor was it wrung from me; nor do I now drop these links" (383). After rhetorically modulating his mode of worship, he transfigures these rhetorical turns *into* material acts—first, intimidatingly brandishing the burning harpoon in an homage to fire; then, "blow[ing] out the last fear" with "one blast of his breath," simultaneously exerting physical control over fire's power and imposing a collective fearlessness. Thus, the materially consequential act of corralling his rebellious crew emerges as a ramification of a saturated ritualistic enactment.

Like Melville's *Moby-Dick*, Patricia Highsmith's novels deploy stylized forms through which conversion to an agential mode is rendered possible. Highsmith, however, is in one sense a much more traditional novelist than Melville, deploying the third-person perspective and thereby *de-dramatizing* the will to the degree that drama depends upon first-personal speech. The

social forms that mediate the will are secured less by congregation in a common physical space than by a paradoxical synthesis of alienation and congestion which need not deploy physical space. In a sense, Highsmith's method reenacts James' stylized use of free-indirect discourse, as epitomized in the example from *Wings of the Dove* I discussed in my introduction. For both James and Highsmith, the strangeness of stylization itself reconstitutes agents within the volatile zone between the first and third person, wherein characters seize upon practical opportunities without needing to directly experience or express a desire to do so. Whereas *Moby-Dick*'s characters tend toward stability even as they are relationally constituted, the characters in Highsmith and James are rendered more dynamic through strange encroachments within perspective.

In singularly nihilistic world of Highsmith, however, conversions to specific modes of action are more volatile and abrupt. Thus, through the medium of what I have called strangerhood, characters such as Guy Haines and Jonathan Trevanny, initially poised on the threshold between the dark romance of criminal activity and the staid realism of bourgeois life, find themselves becoming killers. Inflecting the agent's sense of what is possible by suspending his personal habitus, these novels reimagine Augustine's suspenseful narrative of conversion in Book VIII of the *Confessions*. As with Augustine's hero, the aspect of passivity involved in awaiting conversion can both terrify and galvanize, since it demands that one assume one's internal strangerhood. Highsmith's fiction recalls Augustine's famous formula, "I have become a question to myself." In Highsmith, however, stylization is rendered all the stranger insofar as it discards the phenomenology of the I-thou and its accompanying introspection, instead sustaining suspense via free-indirect discourse. This stylized channeling of perspective through the third person opens possible courses of action, but characters come to concretize action and assume its

consequences only by making a *leap* to conversion. In Highsmith's work, what I have called the hiatus of action—which at once interrupts agency and enables its realization—is the space whereby stranger-sociality both constrains and augments the will. Thus, however active or passive they might seem, these characters come to occupy a determinate position within the *vita activa* of the noir world. And yet, the very fact of being suspended, stylistically and existentially, can make conversion untenable. Instead of merely eliding the problem of the will in these cases, Highsmith imagines the potential conditions of willed aversion that occur on the threshold of positive action. Here, the space of positive action is vacated, but in a *determinate* way, in accordance with the stranger-mediated suspensions of the will to convert.

Lastly, Faulkner and Morrison give a profound temporal depth to the problem of the will, which Melville and Highsmith tend to treat within the confines of ongoing present and imminent future. What Nietzsche's Zarathustra calls the will's "loneliest melancholy"—its inability to alter the past—is tested out, as relationally bound wills link past and future in a tense zone between despair and redemption. In *As I Lay Dying* and *Beloved*, the Gothic mode stylizes the will by *saturating* it, infusing it with reanimated energies and shifting, inchoate imperatives that demand responsiveness in a novelistic present. In Faulkner's work, Addie Bundren, advocate of material concreteness against abstract words, figures a chiasmus between these two dimensions: at once a corpse insisting with signs of disturbing life, she also prompts the incorporeal demand—the disseminated promise—that reverberates throughout her family and their journey. As Addie is not in position to directly enact her will, this will is distributed throughout the Bundren family, who absorb and stylize Addie's imperative in their own manners. The actualization of a family journey encounters internal impasses—not so much through conflicting personal motivations, but through the agonistic ways in which the possession of the will manifests itself. As Addie's

virtual will haunts not only individual character but the “character zones” which bind them together and separate them, the philosophical problem of the will extends its spatiotemporal scope and poses the question of how transgenerational possession produces acts of will that are bound together precisely by the *impossibility* of reconciliation or consensus.

Morrison’s *Beloved* not only extends and complicates the Faulknerian motif of possessed volition, but harkens back to the primacy of call and response, the theatrical style explored in the work of Edwards and Melville. And yet, through disorienting shifts in stylized perspectives, Morrison on the one hand allows history to resound *through* silent voices and agents, and, on the other, resists the silencing of potentialities inherent in the African American oral tradition. One might recall three paradigmatic acts of stylized volition. First, in killing her baby girl to save her from a life of slavery, Sethe does not merely act as an individual agent with singular moral convictions. Rather, her act reanimates, on the one hand, the historical and mythological collective of the Flying Africans, who decided to commit suicide instead of submit to slavery, and, on the other, a collective evoked within the text that seeks suicidal transcendence on a slave ship: “he is trying to leave his body which is a small bird trembling”; “we are all trying to leave our bodies behind”). When Sethe runs to the shed intending to kill her daughter and herself, Morrison writes, “she just flew” (check cite). Thus, the stylization of her act is inseparable from the novelistic will that absorbs the anonymity of a historical, collective will within itself. In contrast to, say, Ahab’s theatrical willfulness, Sethe, when called upon to answer for infanticide, most often stays silent, refusing to try to articulate her reasons for action. In other words, while Ahab’s call-and-response mode forces him to vocalize his convictions, *Beloved* as a novel takes on the burden of accounting for her act, through stylistic repetitions and transposed motifs that disrupt the realist present. In the case of the reanimated Beloved, the problem of the possessed

will is multiplied to sublime proportions; her vengeance is carried out on behalf of "six million and more," the anonymous multitude that her common-noun nomination figures. If Beloved acts primarily through a vengeful resistance to the historical violence of abandonment, her style of acting transcends the baseness that Nietzsche attributes to the teeth-gnashing vengeful will impotently trying to alter the past. Beloved's manner of acting, of dancing, of silently resisting—in short, of "shining"—gives the collective reanimated will a kind of sublimity that refuses to submit to historical reconciliation.

Finally, the townswomen who come to Sethe's aid stylize the call-and-response ritual inaugurated by the novel's guardian spirit, Baby Suggs. Far from planning this intervention ahead of time, the women converge, much like the Bundrens, with a common task and a chaotic plurality of orientations. The townswomen exorcise the spirit by singing—not by imitating Baby Suggs' rituals, but by resurrecting the "sound," which Morrison polemically figures with the dictum: "In the beginning was the sound." And while the collective action channels this moment of primal inception, they do not express this primacy, which is spoken silently by Morrison's anonymous narrator. To borrow the terms Gerard Genette uses to conceptualize style, the townswomen *exemplify* the originating sound, precisely by spontaneously coordinating their voices and thereby rendering the sound *immanent*. In Kantian terms, they perform a free act by beginning a new sequence. But this is not a free act envisioned ahead of time, but one whose very initiating effect is channeled through a return to the beginning that wills a possession—in both the Gothic and proprietary sense—of resounding volition.

By concluding this dissertation with an evocation *Beloved*'s collective action, I am in another sense circling back to the beginning: insofar as the novelistic will proceeds through stylization, it is always virtually if not actually collective. While the character system

individuates action, the forces unleashed and organized in the novelistic will always supersede the scope of the individual. This notion of virtual collectivity, however, gestures not only to the novel's relation to political agency, but also to a certain historical impasse. In the novels I have read—all bleak if not downright nihilistic—willed action is thoroughly implicated in the pathologies of modernity: in fictional worlds wherein possibilities for action and creativity are so severely limited, the actualization of will tends toward violence, on the one hand; or remedial, mitigating, or preemptive efforts, on the other. It may be the case that the novel simply demonstrates that, to tweak Adorno's dictum, wrong life cannot be willed rightly. Even such an inspired and inspiring collective action such as the one performed by the townswomen in *Beloved* promises an ambivalent renewal at best. It not only also expels its title character and the historical agency she bears, but leaves Sethe herself in a broken state.

But even as this project does not invite optimistic conclusions, it nonetheless, I believe, reveals something significant about the status of agency under the conditions of globalized modernity. Even those novels beyond the scope of this dissertation—that is, novels without much decisive action, works we might call novels of abstract potentiality—cannot help but register the melancholy of the will's loss. And insofar as it seems impossible to imagine a radical political shift that would *not* involve impersonal, distributed acts of will, at least on some level, the novelistic imagination of the will can never be dismissed as apolitical; rather, to borrow Lauren Berlant's term, we might call the problem of the novelistic will "juxtapolitical" (*The Female Complaint* x). Adjacent to the political, the problem of the will bears an uncertain yet potentially significant relation to the politics of the future. I will close by invoking the words of Ralph Ellison's underground writer-protagonist. Perhaps, like the Invisible Man's "hibernation," the investigation of the novelistic will "is a covert preparation for a more overt action" (13).

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