NARRATIVE EMPATHY FOR "THE OTHER" IN AMERICAN LITERATURE, 1845-1945

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ABSTRACT

PATRICK E. HORN: Narrative Empathy for "the Other" in American Literature, 1845-1945
(Under the direction of Rebecka Rutledge Fisher)

"Empathy" is a relatively new word in the English language, dating back to the early twentieth century as a translation of the German term *Einfühlung* ("in-feeling" or "feeling into" a work of art or another being). Yet the interpersonal relations that "empathy" encompasses are as old as human history, and literary depictions of empathy are as old as human narratives. Narrative empathy is a central trope of American literature because in a nation of immigrants and enslaved subjects who became fully recognized citizens—not to mention the native peoples who had always lived here—imaginative identification with unfamiliar "Others" became a constant necessity. Narrative empathy encompasses both *diegetic empathy*, or empathic relations between narrators and characters (or between multiple characters), and *readerly empathy*, or empathic relations between readers and narrators or characters within the text. Readerly empathy results from a complicated interplay between formal qualities, personal factors, and authorial information. Considering literary narratives as rhetorical situations reveals that narratives are conceived and received as interactions between authors, texts, and readers. Narrative judgments about how characters think, feel, and behave within the context of their particular storyworlds become more influential than any categorical identifications that we forge—either with or against characters—based on personal similarities or differences. Whereas "the Other" is perceived through a lens of radical and/or categorical alterity, empathy works against the logic of Otherness as an imaginative *identification with* an/other.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Introduction

FEELING THEIR PAIN: NARRATIVE EMPATHY AND "OTHERS" IN

AMERICAN LITERATURE AND THE WESTERN PHILOSOPHICAL TRADITION

> Conversations across boundaries of identity—whether national, religious, or something else—begin with the sort of imaginative engagement you get when you read a novel or watch a movie or attend to a work of art that speaks from some place other than your own.
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> —K. Anthony Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers* (2006)

In the opening chapters of *Moby-Dick*, when the white, male, native-born, and ostensibly Christian protagonist submits to sharing a bed with a "head-peddling savage" named Queequeg and subsequently resolves to "try a pagan friend," Ishmael attempts to focus on the shared qualities of a fellow human, despite the radical and categorical differences between the two (34, 56). "The man's a human being just as I am," Ishmael considers. "Better [to] sleep with a sober cannibal than a drunken Christian" (36). This school of thought might be called narrative empathy for "the Other." Queequeg is a foreigner by birth; he speaks in heavily accented English (when he speaks the language at all); he practices a religion that Ishmael does not understand; his athletic prowess borders on the bestial, and his culinary preferences (raw meat, whenever possible) hint darkly toward cannibalism. Ishmael's attempts to overlook these differences—which his first-person narrative presents as noble and earnest gestures—allow him to praise Queequeg's unselfishness, courage, and tact, and to imagine their mutual fates tethered together, just as their bodies become linked by the eponymous "monkey-rope" of Chapter 72.

But Ishmael's imaginative identification with his strange bedfellow is not fully

sustained throughout his narrative; as he grows more confident aboard the *Pequod*, his need for

a "pagan friend" gradually diminishes (as do Queequeg's appearances in the text). Over the

course of the novel, Queequeg grows increasingly silent and removed, and his role in the

narrative grows increasingly symbolic—culminating in the wreck of the *Pequod*, when

Queequeg drowns and Ishmael is saved by the intended coffin of his former bedfellow. In the

final analysis, Queequeg becomes—as Toni Morrison once described a range of "Africanist"

characters in white-authored American fiction—a "surrogate and enabler" rather than a fully

developed character who remains central to the plot (*Playing* 51).[1] Melville's apparent

fascination with Queequeg and Ishmael's demonstrated benevolence toward him are ultimately

insufficient to rescue the harpooneer from the status of "the Other," an exotic figure of radical

or categorical difference who ultimately serves more as a foil for Ishmael than as a fellow

human or colleague. Melville's novel stages an earnest attempt at narrative empathy that

ultimately falls short, despite Ishmael's seemingly humanitarian and cosmopolitan intentions.

Melville's microcosm of a fraught-but-not-impossible universal human fraternity aboard a

doomed ship (published in 1851) not only presaged the social and political turmoil of the next

century of American history; it presents a primordial scene of American identity: *e pluribus

unum*—but at what cost? The possibility of narrative empathy for "the Other," as I will argue

in the pages that follow, animates American literature and distinguishes some of its most

sustaining literary works. But narrative empathy does not only function as a didactic model that

readers are (implicitly or explicitly) urged to follow; textual depictions of failed empathy can

be just as effective as scenes of empathic connection in eliciting readers' empathy for textual

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[1] Queequeg, who hails from the (mythical) island of Kokovoko—which is "not down on any map" (59)—is not necessarily of African descent, but his role in *Moby-Dick* nevertheless illustrates Morrison's critique.

"Others." Indeed, the relationships between literary narratives (including factors such as plots, characters, progressions, and formal qualities) and readerly attributes (including demographics, personal experiences, educational histories, and English-language literacy) produce reader responses that are fascinating, highly variable, and endlessly complex.

But what is empathy, exactly? References to "feeling the pain of others," "walking a mile in another man's shoes," and other forms of imagined (or imaginary) identification abound in American literature and culture, both historical and contemporary. This is neither a new phenomenon nor an exclusively American one. In 1759 the Scottish philosopher Adam Smith wrote that humans experience "pity or compassion, the emotion which we feel for the misery of others, when we either see it, or are made to conceive it in a very lively manner…. The greatest ruffian, the most hardened violator of the laws of society, is not altogether without it" (13). Modern neuroscience has revealed that the cognitive underpinnings of the interpersonal relation Smith called "sympathy" or "fellow-feeling" are not, in fact, universally shared by all human beings ("ruffian" or otherwise), though most evidence suggests that they are universally present in all human cultures.[2] And notions of fellow-feeling are likely as old as humanity itself. In the fourth century BCE, Aristotle described the cathartic pity (*eleos*) experienced by viewers of Greek tragedies as "a feeling of pain caused by the sight of some evil, destructive or painful, which befalls one who does not deserve it, and which we might expect to befall ourselves or some friend of ours" (*Rhetoric* 77). Aristotle did not share Smith's view that all humans would or could experience this vicarious suffering; rather, he believed

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[2] See, for example, Simon Baron-Cohen's *Mindblindness: An Essay on Autism and Theory of Mind* (New York: Oxford UP, 2003); Kevin Dutton's *The Wisdom of Psychopaths* (New York: Random House, 2012); Dutton's essay "The Wisdom of Psychopaths" in *Scientific American* 307.4 (Oct 2012): 76-79; Patrick Colm Hogan's "Literary Universals" in *Introduction to Cognitive Cultural Studies*, ed. Lisa Zunshine (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2010): 37-60; Jeremy Rifkin's *The Empathic Civilization: The Race to Global Consciousness in a World in Crisis* (New York: Tarcher P, 2009); and Frans de Waal, *The Age of Empathy: Nature's Lessons for a Kinder Society* (New York: Three Rivers P, 2009).

that "we feel pity whenever we are in the condition of remembering that similar misfortunes have happened to us, or are expecting them to happen in [the] future" (77). But the basic notion was the same: given the right circumstances, human beings imaginatively identify with the mental and physiological states of others.

A crucial but relatively recent development in our understanding of fellow-feeling is the distinction between sympathy and empathy, which emerged during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—not coincidentally, the same period during which Psychology was established as a modern academic discipline. I elaborate more upon this distinction (and why it matters) in my second chapter, but put simply, empathy is generally defined as an imaginative identification *with* another, while sympathy denotes a feeling *for* (or feeling *sorry for*) another, more synonymous with pity or compassion. This distinction can be overstated, for empathy often overlaps with sympathy, occurring simultaneously or containing a modicum of the corresponding sentiment. Yet the distinction is important because empathy implies and produces an acknowledgment of shared humanity, which sympathy (or pity) does not necessarily require. It is quite possible to feel sorry for a person (or a suffering, non-human creature) without identifying with that being, but the perceiving subject can "feel the pain" of empathy's object because s/he identifies the other as being fundamentally similar: *just like me*.[3] Empathy is therefore a potentially "humanizing" sentiment; it bridges the divides of difference, even when it is deployed for selfish or self-serving ends. The imaginative experience of empathy does not guarantee prosocial or altruistic behavior, as I will discuss later in this

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[3] It is, of course, possible to empathize with a non-human being or subject; this relation has inspired various terms and concepts, to include "personification," "apostrophe," and the "pathetic fallacy." Given the productive and illuminating discussions between primatologists and neuroscientists, as well as interesting recent work on "posthumanism" and the "posthumanities," it would seem short-sighted to presume that these cognitive functions are strictly limited to interactions between humans and other humans. Yet because I believe that this more limited subject is already endlessly complex, I have intentionally reduced the scope of my inquiry to include only human-to-human interactions, in literature and in "real life."

Introduction. But the waters remain muddied; even in contemporary discourse, "sympathy" and "empathy" are often used interchangeably, and the relatively recent appearance of the term "empathy" confounds historiographical discussions of the behavior that it describes, as well as philosophical discussion of the subject. The "fellow-feeling" that Adam Smith describes in his *Theory of Moral Sentiments* more accurately relates to "empathy," but because the word did not yet exist when he wrote it, he used the term "sympathy." The distinctions between these terms—and the distinct relations that they name—become all the more important in the historical context of the period that this dissertation addresses, as imaginative identification with "the Other" came to pertain ever more closely to questions of universal human equality, freedom, citizenship, and civil rights.

Our contemporary understanding of empathy's definition derives from a strange but interesting etymology. Most scholars credit the English psychologist Edward B. Titchener for coining the term in 1909, as a translation of the German word *Einfühlung* (literally "in-feeling" or "feeling into"). This German word was also a fairly recent invention; it first appeared in 1873, when Robert Vischer used it to describe a mode of aesthetic appreciation. The *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* explains that numerous eighteenth- and nineteenth-century philosophers, including Herder and Novalis, had posited the "ability to 'feel into' works of art and into nature… as a vital corrective against the modern scientific attitude of merely dissecting nature into its elements" ("Empathy" para. 2). Vischer named this ability *Einfühlung*, and the German philosopher Theodor Lipps reconceived it as a way to relate to other human beings, "transform[ing] empathy from a concept of philosophical aesthetics into a central category… of the social and human sciences" (para. 3). It was this notion of *Einfühlung* that Titchener translated as "empathy": "feeling into" the minds and bodies of other humans. The Greek roots *em-* and *pathos* also suggest the experience of being "put into" a state of

"suffering or emotion" (*OED*). Lipps's ideas significantly influenced the thought of Sigmund Freud, who approvingly cited two of his publications in *The Interpretation of Dreams* and wrote in a private 1898 letter, "I found the substance of my insights stated quite clearly in Lipps, perhaps rather more so than I would like" (qtd in Pigman 241). Meanwhile, the English novelist and theorist Vernon Lee had introduced her own notion of empathy "independently of Vischer and Lipps" but "subsequently enriched by her discovery of the German work" (Reed 7). Originally translating *Einfühlung* as "sympathy" and later as "empathy," Lee identified the primary purpose of art as "the awakening, intensifying, or maintaining of definite emotional states," and she insisted that empathy was not actually a new phenomenon, but had long been "part and parcel of our thinking" (qtd in Keen *Empathy* 55-56). As Lee astutely suggested, we should think of "empathy" as a relatively new word for a very old (and innate) form of human behavior.

The examples above demonstrate that although empathy and *Einfühlung* originated as terms for aesthetic appreciation and interpretation, they were quickly adapted to the study of interpersonal human relations. Yet their original applications remain ensconced in the words' definitions. For example, the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines empathy as "the power of projecting one's personality into (and so fully comprehending) the object of contemplation." This "object" could presumably be a human being, a work of art, or some aspect of the natural world. Herein lies a persistent critique of empathy: by "projecting one's personality" into another human, does one accurately perceive the mental state of the other, or merely imagine that person in one's own image? Likewise, the shared position of human "others" with inanimate works of art or other natural objects indeed suggests objectification: the opposite of

the purported process of humanizing and identifying with the Other.[4] Saidiya Hartman has

argued that the imaginative "projection of oneself into another in order to better understand the

other" actually serves to "obliterate otherness" because one's imagined experiences are

substituted for the other's actual suffering (19). In her illustrative discussion of John Rankin's

1837 *Letters on American Slavery*, Hartman describes how [the white American male]

Rankin's envisioning of his own family being torn apart and subjected to abuse becomes a self-

centered, masochistic pleasure of sorts. Hartman argues that empathy actually "confounds

Rankin's efforts to identify with the enslaved because in making the slave's suffering his own,

Rankin begins to feel for himself rather than for those whom this exercise in imagination

presumably is designed to reach" (19). This rejoinder illustrates "the dangers of a too-easy

intimacy… at the expense of the slave's suffering" (20).

Hartman is right to point out the "difficulty and slipperiness of empathy" (18), and I

agree that it is a precarious relation, one that threatens to privilege the empathizing subject and

to objectify (if not "obliterate") the recipient. Moreover, as many social scientists have noted,

empathy can be engaged for self-serving or destructive purposes; the ability to identify with the

thoughts and feelings of another, for example, serves the dangerous designs of serial killers or

sociopaths quite handily. Some scholars therefore refer to the "dark side of empathy," or

examine how empathy (particularly "cognitive empathy") can "underlie manipulative

personalities," including individuals who exhibit the "dark triad of personality": narcissism,

Machiavellianism, and psychopathy (Wai & Tiliopoulos 794).

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[4] The human "object" of empathy can be regarded as a (lower-case) "other," for in this case the term does not necessarily indicate categorical difference. As I will discuss later in this Introduction, the (capital) "Other" indicates a figure of radical or categorical difference, as considered by the perceiving "subject." Like the notion of fellow-feeling, this term emerges from a long philosophical tradition, from ancient Greek thought to German idealism to postcolonial, feminist, and critical race theory.

Arthur Ciaramicoli and Katherine Ketcham write that "empathy's paradox is that this innate ability can be used for both helpful and hurtful purposes.… Empathy can be used to exploit people's emotions and direct their behavior in order to take advantage of them" (7–9). In one troubling real-world example, Ciaramicoli and Ketcham describe how a rapist is able to "'read' [his victim's] thoughts and emotions from her facial expressions, the way she walked, talked with friends, and interacted with strangers" (115). But during the assault that they analyze, empathy also saves the victim's life, as she discerns the attacker's intention to kill her and thwarts it. As this example illustrates, it is best to think of empathy as a capacity and an interpersonal relation that is itself morally neutral: it can be used for good or for harm, or even for evil. Ciaramicoli and Ketcham propose a distinction between *authentic empathy*, "motivated by a genuine concern for others and a desire to help them," and *functional empathy*, "primarily concerned with what other people can give you"—or what you can take from them (126). In this dissertation, I will draw a similar distinction between *benevolent empathy* and *self-serving empathy*, synonymous terms that seem (at least to me) more precise and less fraught with confusing connotations. (Can't "benevolent empathy" or "self-serving empathy" be both "authentic" and "functional"?) To me, the more important question is whom the empathy primarily serves. I also acknowledge that empathy can (and often does) serve both the empathic subject and the object of empathy. In the case of a romantic overture, for example, should one party's imaginative identification with "the other"—which may be, and often is, mirrored by the other—be considered benevolent or self-serving? Is love ultimately selfish, self-modifying, or self-effacing? Or can such questions be meaningfully answered in general discussion, without the necessary close readings of specific interactions within each interpersonal relationship? To those who study it closely, empathy offers up many such halls of

mirrors. And yet, these confounding examples demonstrate why it is such a promising and complex object of inquiry.

Even in the twenty-first century, empathy remains a subject of polarizing debates between its champions and its skeptics. To the Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso, "our innate capacity for empathy is the source of that most precious of all qualities, which in Tibetan we call *nying-je*…. Generally translated simply as 'compassion,' the term… connotes love, affection, kindness, gentleness, generosity of spirit and warm-heartedness" (76-77). Gyatso calls *nying-je* "the supreme emotion," a "combination of empathy and reason" (77). In similarly rose-colored terms, Maia Szalavitz and Bruce Perry write that "empathy underlies virtually everything that makes society work—like trust, altruism, collaboration, love, charity. Failure to empathize is a key part of most social problems—crime, violence, war, racism, child abuse, and inequity, to name just a few" (4). The cultural benefits of empathy are sometimes envisioned as springing from literary reading; for example, Martha Nussbaum argues that "narrative imagination is an essential preparation for moral interaction. Habits of empathy and conjecture conduce to a certain type of citizenship and… [a community] that cultivates a sympathetic responsiveness to another's needs" (90). And Lisa Zunshine illustrates how readerly empathy allows fictional narratives to serve as social and cultural primers for immigrants and non-native English speakers (22).

But others find talk of narrative empathy vapid, wishful, or politically motivated. Suzanne Keen argues that "a novel-reader may enjoy empathy freely without paying society back in altruism," and she finds little evidence to support the so-called "empathy-altruism hypothesis" (*Narrative* 168). Ann Jurecic observes that "recent work in affect theory… warns us to be wary of the fellow feeling associated with social emotions, such as empathy, sympathy, compassion, and pity… [which] can be expressions of power, appropriations of

others' experience[s], and falsely oversimplified understandings of social and cultural relationships" (11). Amy Shuman asks, "who has the right to tell a story, who is entitled to it?" (3). She argues that narrative empathy "destabilizes entitlement by creating the possibility that people can legitimately retell each other's stories" (4). And even if the teller of the tale is also the protagonist (as in autobiographical narratives), Shuman warns that "the metaphor of wearing another's shoes not only makes it seem easier than it is but also obscures the complex ethical issues involved" (150). Right-wing pundit Kevin D. Williamson recently wrote that "sympathy is about the other guy—and empathy is all about me and my precious feelings…. Empathy is a gateway to the most vulgar and intellectually indefensible kind of identity politics" (33-34). And George Pigman points out that as early as 1935, one commentator had already warned that "the concept of empathy in psychological discussion has come to mean so much that it is beginning to mean nothing" (qtd in 237).

The widely disparate understandings of empathy reflected above are due in part to an uncritical and often unsupported enthusiasm for empathy commonly expressed in American popular culture. Keen, for one, derides the "fuzzier sense of empathy as the feeling precursor to and prerequisite for liberal aspirations to greater humanitarianism" (*Empathy* viii). Indeed, many of empathy's champions do not acknowledge or account for the possibility that empathy can be employed for destructive or self-serving purposes. For example, on the campaign trail in 2007, then-Senator Obama announced that if elected President, he would nominate Supreme Court justices who have "the heart, the empathy, to recognize what it's like to be a young teenage mom. The empathy to understand what it's like to be poor, or African-American, or gay, or disabled, or old" (qtd in "Obama"). Presumably, jurists who possessed this quality would therefore be inclined to rule in favor of the poor, the disabled, the elderly, or minority groups. But this presumption implicitly links empathy to altruism and prosocial behavior. Most

references to empathy in popular culture similarly overlook the "dark side of empathy," using "empathy" to signify what might more precisely be called benevolent empathy.

Even among scholars, discussions of empathy often rely upon a constellation of related terms whose own definitions are vague or variable. Therefore, definitions of empathy oscillate along with the meanings of behaviors and attitudes such as "empathic concern," "empathic understanding," "empathic accuracy," "perspective taking," "experience taking," "narrative transport," "embodied simulation," "vicarious introspection," "affective communication," "affective responsiveness," "emotional expression," "emotional intelligence," "emotional contagion," "mindreading," and "theory of mind."[5] With so many overlapping and subjective terms, it is perhaps inevitable that scholars will disagree about how to define and limit exactly what empathy means.

For the purposes of this dissertation, I define empathy simply as a state or process of imaginative identification with another being. This identification takes place through both reason and emotion in both mind and body, and it is therefore often said to occur in both "cognitive" and "affective" domains. The *Merriam-Webster Collegiate Dictionary* defines empathy as "the action of understanding, being aware of, being sensitive to, and vicariously experiencing the feelings, thoughts, and experience of another" as well as the "capacity" for such a relation. This vicarious emotional and physiological experience constitutes what I call "imaginative identification," with the caveat that it is often an instinctive or even involuntary response. Although it is quite possible to experience and/or to narrate empathy for a non-

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[5] See, for example, Heinz Kohut, "Introspection, Empathy, and Psychoanalysis," *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association* 7 (1959): 459-483; Geoff F. Kaufman & Lisa K. Libby, "Changing Beliefs and Behavior Through Experience-Taking," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 103.1 (2012): 1-19; William Ickes, *Empathic Accuracy* (New York: Guilford P, 1997); Simon Baron-Cohen, *Mindblindness: An Essay on Autism and Theory of Mind* (New York: Oxford UP, 2003); and Lisa Zunshine, *Why We Read Fiction: Theory of Mind and the Novel* (Columbus: Ohio State UP, 2006).

human creature, my project will only investigate empathy between humans (to include human narrators and literary characters). More specifically, I will consider two categories of narrative empathy: the *diegetic empathy* expressed and exhibited by narrators and characters toward other characters, and the *readerly empathy* that readers may experience toward various narrators and characters.

Evidence of diegetic empathy is available through the thoughts, feelings, attitudes, and actions narrated within literary narratives. Evidence of readerly empathy is, of course, subjective and particular to each individual reader. My discussions of readerly empathy are therefore necessarily speculative and open for debate. Rather than telling readers how they *should* respond to texts, I share my responses (and those of some other readers) as a manner of demonstrating how narratives *can* elicit more or less empathetic responses, through any number of formal qualities, plot devices, and rhetorical strategies. In doing so, I draw upon both my own responses to literary texts and the responses expressed by other readers, including literary critics and former students. I do not wish to suggest that my responses to literary narratives are "correct" or superior or universal; I am heedful of Wolfgang Iser's observation that "[each] text is potentially capable of several different realizations, and no reading can ever exhaust the full potential, for each individual reader will fill in the gaps in his own way" (280). However, I follow the logic of James Phelan in presuming that while individual readers' responses will vary, the range of variation among careful, competent readers is perhaps smaller than some classical reader-response theorists have suggested. Readers of Ishmael's narrative, for example, may not share his willingness to embrace "pagan friends" and "sober cannibals," but they are unlikely to find his openness to such relationships odious or disreputable, because the tale is told from Ishmael's perspective and because the text inclines readers to see the world as he does through any number of subtle devices. Likewise, they are unlikely to identify

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completely with Ahab, although they may share certain character traits or personal qualities (race, gender, socioeconomic status, stubbornness, or strong ambition, to name just a few) with the obsessive and imperious ship captain. As Stanley Fish said of another great American writer, "whether the reader likes or dislikes the experience of Faulkner's delays, [s]he will, in common with every other reader, experience them" (5). The same is true of Melville's long and quirky but also idealistic and philosophically probing text. Whatever one may think of Ishmael's entreaty to "squeeze ourselves universally into the very milk and sperm of kindness" (323) or Ahab's injunction to "strike through the mask!" (140), every careful reader must consider them.

Phelan's rhetorical reader-response theory, upon which I elaborate in the following chapter, rests upon the logic that "my experiences as a reader matter a great deal and so do yours—but both mine and yours are responsible to the text as it has been constructed by an author who guides us to experience it in one way rather than another" (ix). In assessing how readers realize, derive, and produce meaning from literary texts, Phelan's model accounts for all three points of the rhetorical triangle: author, text, and reader. He concludes that "[al]though shared experiences are far from inevitable, they are both possible and desirable" (x). The "desirability" of shared readerly experiences should be understood not as a right-or-wrong type of judgment, but rather as a sentiment to which most teachers of literary narratives can relate: even if they disagree on their interpretations of a text, we want our students to be "on the same page," both literally and figuratively, in order that our discussions of literary texts can be meaningful.

The question(s) of empathy's relation to literature—or, more precisely, the relationships between readers and narratives, the relationships between readers' responses to narratives and their subsequent attitudes and behaviors, and the relationships between textual

empathy and readerly empathy—remain open for debate. This dissertation will not attempt to answer these questions definitively or comprehensively, for they are as broad as the humanities themselves, and the answers will necessarily vary between readers and between texts. In the pages that follow, I provide some terms and concepts for discussing narrative empathy more precisely, drawing on several distinct but relevant fields of study: cognitive neuroscience; social, cognitive, and developmental psychology; history; narratology; and, of course, literary theory and criticism. In a perfect world, a project of this sort would be approached in collaboration with social scientists and neuroscientists, and indeed, I have discussed my project with a number of scholars in these fields. Accordingly, I have conceived of my arguments about narrative empathy as hypotheses that could in turn be tested and "measured" through the various methodologies available to social scientists and neuroscientists. As I move forward with this project, I hope to continue those conversations, and to engage in interdisciplinary research that might further illuminate the complex neurological, cognitive, affective, and interpersonal processes that collectively drive and enable narrative empathy.

The dissertation is historically and chronologically bounded in order to focus on what I consider to be a formative century of American literature and culture. It takes as its historical starting point the 1845 publication of *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave, Written by Himself* (though this text is not discussed in detail until Chapter Four). Douglass's first autobiography laid out in stark, powerful prose the hypocrisies of a land founded on "freedom" and enslavement, "equality" and domination, "Christianity" and exploitation.[6] "I… hate the corrupt, slaveholding, women-whipping, cradle-plundering, partial

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[6] In addition to his 1845 *Narrative* and his 1855 *My Bondage and My Freedom*, Douglass published two versions of the *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass, Written by Himself*, in 1881 and 1892 (some refer to the latter as the 1893 edition). All subsequent discussions to *Life and Times* in this document will refer to the revised and expanded 1892 edition, as it appears in the Library of America collection, unless otherwise noted.

and hypocritical Christianity of this land," he emphatically wrote (97). Throughout the chapters of this thesis, I will trace four literary sites of empathy, categorized by chronology, genre, and thematic content, through the year 1945, which marks the shift from World War II to the Cold War, ushering in the nuclear age. This year is also associated with the paradigm shift to postmodernist literature, which has often been described interchangeably as "contemporary" or "post-1945" literature.

I begin with a chapter that traces the philosophical "prehistory" of empathy (predating the appearance of the word in the English language) and outlines contemporary "scientific" (including both neuroscience and the social sciences) scholarship on the subject. I then devote four chapters to analyzing specific literary texts, selected for their thematic, historical, and contextual interconnections. In these latter four chapters, I have attempted to place texts and authors from different cultural perspectives—including considerations of race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, religion, and regional identity, among other categories—in conversation with each other, in the hopes that this study can itself bridge divides of difference, like many of the narratives it explores. This predominantly theoretical first chapter is followed by four critical chapters focusing on works of American fiction and autobiography. I selected these genres due to their strong association with narrative, though a broader project might also have focused on narrative poetry, film, creative nonfiction, and folklore, among other genres and media.

Chapter Two addresses four texts from the decade leading up to the Civil War: Harriet Beecher Stowe's influential abolitionist novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852); Frederick Douglass's sole venture into fiction, "The Heroic Slave" (1853); Herman Melville's (not so) short story "Benito Cereno" (1855); and Harriet Jacobs's autobiographical account *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861). Jacobs's text was originally considered abolitionist fiction by many readers, because Jacobs assigned pseudonyms to her "self" character (Linda Brent) and

to other real-life figures who have since been identified by Jean Fagan Yellin and other literary scholars. All four works depicted "Others" defined primarily by racial identity, but as I will argue, categories such as gender, ethnicity, and nationality also played key roles in the construction (and complication) of characters' identities and in the various appeals for empathy that these four narratives present.

Chapter Three analyzes three novels from the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries: Helen Hunt Jackson's *Ramona* (1884), María Amparo Ruiz de Burton's *The Squatter and the Don* (1885), and Willa Cather's *My Ántonia* (1918). Despite the significant temporal gap between the first two novels and the third, all three texts depict racial, ethnic, and cultural rifts between immigrants and native-born Americans —though each text conceives of the "immigrant" and the "native-born" in different ways. These three novels reveal empathy's close kinship with love and demonstrate the cognitive and cultural limits of empathy for three narrators and their "Others"—both beloved and despised.

Chapter Four considers the life-writings of three American authors from roughly the same period as Chapter Three: Frederick Douglass, Edith Maude Eaton, and Mary Antin. Though these three historical figures' life experiences varied widely, each had witnessed mainstream American society from the perspective of an "Other." Their autobiographical writings appeal for readerly empathy through a variety of rhetorical strategies and treat their "past-self" protagonists with varied degrees of emotional and intellectual distance. Yet all three writers express a deep-seated desire for fuller inclusion in human society, and all three texts pose powerful appeals for readerly empathy.

Finally, Chapter Five investigates how narrators employ focalization, tone, narrative conflicts, and what I call "strategic misreadings" in order to elicit readerly empathy for characters in three modernist novels: F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925), Zora

Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937), and William Faulkner's *Go Down, Moses* (1942). Though these novels' narrators take very different approaches to the stories that they tell, each novel draws upon the particular voice of its narrator(s) in order to elicit readerly empathy for specific characters. But before I turn to the story of narrative empathy in American literature, I will first address the enigmatic term "the Other" and briefly trace its history (or histories) from ancient Greece through modern Western thought.

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Like the idea of empathy, the notion of "the Other" can be very simply explained, but that simplicity masks the complex and intertextual articulations of the idea throughout the Western intellectual tradition. Without attempting to compile an encyclopedic list of those articulations, I will offer my own definition and outline its antecedents in Aristotelian thought, Continental philosophy, and psychoanalytic discourse, as well as more recent postcolonial, feminist, queer, and critical race theory. For recreational readers or for those more inclined to read the short version, I recap this trajectory and lay out my argument regarding narrative empathy for "the Other" in the three final paragraphs of this section and the brief section that follows it.

"The Other" is often an absent presence in Aristotle's works, because many of his philosophical discussions explicitly address and concern those like himself: free, Greek-speaking, adult men. At times he acknowledges the presence of Greek women, children, and slaves, but these references usually emphasize their relationships to men. In *Politics*, Aristotle invokes the hierarchical nature of family relationships in order to characterize the proper functions of a political state. Just as "every household has a 'king,'" the village forms a natural "development of a household" with its own tribal or municipal ruler, and "a partnership of

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several villages is a state" (qtd in *Philosophy* 383-384). Aristotle locates the primary modes of interpersonal relations within three relationships: "master and slave, husband and wife, father and children" (385). All three relationships exist as hierarchies, with the patriarchal master / husband / father as the dominant subject. "The slave is an animate article of property," Aristotle writes, and "the art of acquiring property is part of household management. After all, without the basic essentials, it is impossible to exist, let alone live the good life" (386). Clearly, this "good life" was not intended for the enjoyment of all human beings. "The Others" were those who ensured that (upper-class male) Greek citizens could maintain their high standards of living. Greek democracy therefore functioned as a system of exploitation designed to serve the powerful elites. The "animate article[s] of property," like the women and children who populated the households and villages of Aristotle's world, were envisioned merely as servants and role-players.

Outside of the Greek political and domestic spheres were other Others: the "barbarians" from other cultures whose domestic and political relationships were not so firmly entrenched. Aristotle maintained that "barbarian and slave are by nature identical" and that "a natural ruler is not to be found among barbarians [because their society exists as] a partnership between slaves, female and male" (383). In other words, if men could not rule over the women and children in their own homes, they were not fit for Greek citizenship—or for freedom. This logic would prove quite persistent. As Helmut Heit has shown, the relation to barbarian Others in Aristotle's thought was consistently reproduced by later European thinkers who claimed descent from Greek philosophy as evidence of "Western cultural superiority" (725). Aristotle's hierarchical notion of human society and his implicit concept of "the Other" would also influence his views on empathy (or at least on catharsis and pity), as I discuss in the following chapter.

A more exhaustive history of this important concept would no doubt uncover countless

nuances and developments in human conceptions of "Others" between ancient Greece and

eighteenth-century Germany—with the Crusades, the Spanish Inquisition, European wars

between Catholics and Protestants, and a host of other conflicts offering plentiful examples—

but in the interest of brevity I will jump ahead to the intellectual legacy of the European "Age

of Enlightenment." According to Kant's famous definition,

> Enlightenment is man's emergence from his self-imposed… inability to use [his] own understanding... [through his] indecision and lack of courage to use [his] own mind without another's guidance. *Dare to know! (Sapere aude.)* 'Have the courage to use your own understanding,' is therefore the motto of the enlightenment. ("What" para. 1)

In his first critique, *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781/1787), Kant explores the possibility of *a*

priori knowledge, whose truth can be verified independently of experience. He also

distinguishes between the *noumenal* and the *phenomenal*; that is, between the real essences of

things and our sensory perceptions of them, as mediated through the human body. While

Kant's thought helped to systematize our modern understanding of knowledge and how it is

produced, it also tended to divide human knowledge and experience into structured

dichotomies. Simon Critchley explains that the subsequent tradition of Continental philosophy

springs from the attempts of philosophers such as Hegel, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and

Heidegger to "overcome the pernicious dualisms of the Kantian system": "form versus content,

sensibility versus understanding, reason versus experience, nature versus freedom, the pure

versus the practical, and so on" (31, 17). These dualisms perpetuate the logic of self and Other:

the epistemological tendency to split the world into opposing camps.

Nineteenth-century European philosophers attempted to overcome Kant's "pernicious

dualisms" by identifying a "unifiying principle in the activity of the subject.… for Hegel, it

was the notion of Spirit" (Critchley 31). John N. Findlay writes that Hegel's "concern is always

with the *Begriffe* or universal notional shapes that are evinced in fact and history, and with the

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ways in which *these* align themselves and lead on to one another, and can in fact ultimately be regarded as distinguishable facets of a single all-inclusive universal or concept" (vii). The prevalent mechanism of this teleological process, for Hegel, was the dialectic, or the confrontation of some thesis (or entity, or idea) with its opposite, or antithesis; the synthesis of the two is achieved through a process of "overcoming" or *Aufgehoben* ("Hegel" 626). Hegel defines the dialectical movement as "this course that generates itself, going forth from, and returning to, itself" (*Phenomenology* 40). We could say that this was Hegel's solution to Kant's dualisms, and in some fashion it resembles a vision of empathy for the Other, except that his most memorable example involves a violent struggle that results in slavery.

In the often-cited "Lordship and Bondage" section of *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807), Hegel posits the self and the other through the dialectic model of a master and his slave [*Herr und Knecht*]. In the passage, two free men encounter each other in their quest for "self-consciousness," which "exists in and for itself when, and by the fact that, it so exists for another; that is, it exists only in being acknowledged" (111). The two engage in a life-and-death struggle to attain "pure being-for-self," for "it is only through staking one's life that freedom is won" (114). The winner of the struggle becomes "lord," or master—possessing "the independent consciousness… that exists for *itself*"—and the loser becomes his "bondsman," or slave—possessing "the dependent consciousness whose essential nature is simply to live or to be for another" (115). But just as the master gains independent consciousness, writes Hegel, he loses the certainty of "*being-for-self* as the truth of himself," for the slave can no longer provide him with the recognition he requires: "a consciousness existing for itself which is mediated with itself through another consciousness [existing for itself]" (117). Ironically, through his fear of the master and through his working relation to the objects of his labor, the slave obtains the "being-for-self" that both originally desired, while the master remains in a

state of "unessential consciousness." Hegel's dialectical model dictates that "what the lord does to the other [i.e., enslaving him] he also does to himself, and what the bondsman does to himself he should also do to the other. The outcome is a recognition that is one-sided and unequal" (116). Hegel's model results in an unequal distribution of power and unequal forms of self-consciousness, but it does not presuppose these differences or posit them *a priori*. The slave becomes unequal to the master as a result of the struggle, rather than entering into Hegel's model as a figure of radical or categorical difference. Therefore, Hegel's other is not yet established as an irreconcilable "Other." Strangely enough, in some ways his condition is described as preferable to the master's.

Over a century later, Martin Heidegger reconsidered Hegel's notion of "being for self" by questioning what it means "to be." He opens *Being and Time* (1927) by arguing that the "Question of Being" had "sustained the avid research of Plato and Aristotle but from then on ceased to be heard" (1). Heidegger's influential work has often been critiqued for its apparent tautologies; in one passage, he stipulates that "Being is always the being of a being" (8). Some of the interpretive problems that arise from reading his work are undoubtedly due to translational difficulties, while others result from Heidegger's varying uses of a host of closely related terms. Richard Capobianco notes that "mystifying translations and commentaries aside, Heidegger scholarship has often been beset by a tendency to confuse his core concern with *das Sein / das Seyn*, Being / Beyng (the finite and negative *presencing* of beings in their beingness) with the traditional metaphysical core concern with *die Seiendheit*, the 'beingness' of beings" (7). But this clarification will probably be more helpful for Heidegger scholars than for the lay reader. Richard McDonough has identified two camps amongst Heidegger scholars: one "sympathetic" camp that attempts a "'Heideggerian' exegesis of Heidegger" but "cannot achieve sufficient distance for a genuine interpretation"; the other a "critical" camp that "ends

in mere caricature" and "cannot even find the target" (176-177). With these advisories in mind, what follows is my own attempt to lay out a small section of Heidegger's larger philosophy of being: his notion of being-with-others [*Miteinandersein*], as addressed in *Being and Time*.

In order to understand Heidegger's notion of "others," we must first consider his term *Dasein*. Literally translated as "being-there" or "to be there," the term is "an ordinary German word" with registers that range from descriptions of life as "luxurious" or "squalid" to questions about "the *Dasein* of God" (Haugeland 77). Heidegger's focus on not only *being*, but being-*there* (being-in-the-world) emphasizes the situated nature of existence. One not only is; one *is* in a specific place, surrounded by tangible objects and other beings. Heidegger therefore insists that "the world of *Dasein* is a *with-world* [*Mitwelt*]. Being-in is being-with [*Mitsein*] others…. *Dasein* in itself is essentially being-with" (116-117). Yet his emphasis on being-with others seems less than genuine, for "the others" in Heidegger's thought lead quickly back to the self. He writes that

> "Others" does not mean everybody else but me—those from whom the I distinguishes itself. Others are, rather, those from whom one mostly does *not* distinguish oneself, those among whom one also is. This being-there-too with them does not have the ontological character of being objectively present "with" them within a world. (115)

This logic—*"the others" are more or less like myself*—may look like empathy on its surface, but in Heidegger's analysis, it tends to render "the others" increasingly anonymous and nondescript. He soon begins to refer to "others" as "them" or "they," and he concludes that "being-with-one-another as such creates *averageness*. It is an existential characteristic of the they…. Every mystery loses its power…. Everyone is the other, and no one is himself…. The self of everyday *Dasein* is the they-self, which we distinguish from the authentic self, that is, the self which has explicitly grasped itself" (123-125). Heidegger therefore moves from acknowledging that being-in-the-world is inextricable from being-with-others to distilling "others" into a generic "they," with whom most humans share an "average" identity and a

somehow "inauthentic" subjectivity. The "authentic self" is presumably one that can extract itself from the anaesthetic group-think of "the others." Being-in-the-world with others, for Heidegger, seems more like a "pre-existing condition" (in the negative, medical sense) than a desirable or beneficial circumstance.

Emmanuel Lévinas begins his meditation on "the Other" with a critique of Heidegger's *Dasein*. In his 1946-47 lectures on "Le temps et l'autre," published in 1979 and translated into English in 1987, Lévinas argues that in Heidegger's work, "the relationship with the Other… plays no role in the drama of being or in the existential analytic. All the analyses of *Being and Time* are worked out either for the sake of the impersonality of everyday life or for the sake of solitary *Dasein*" (*Time* 40). Lévinas acknowledges that "the other in Heidegger appears in the essential situation of *Miteinandersein*, reciprocally being with one another," but this notion does not account for "the face-to-face relationship" with other beings (40-41). Nevertheless, like Heidegger, Lévinas finds solitude to be the essence of being. "I touch an object, I see the other," he writes. "But I *am* not the other. I am all alone…. Inasmuch as I am, I am a monad" (42). Elsewhere Lévinas describes the function of reason as the "disclosure of the other where the other, in manifesting itself as a being, loses its alterity" ("Trace" 346). Knowledge of the other (I would use the capitalized "Other" in this sense, though its meaning is different in Lévinas's work) therefore causes the Other to become known, "coming home" to knowability and familiarity. This sense of homecoming and recognition resembles what I call "empathy for the Other." Yet Lévinas wishes to avoid what he calls a "return"; he privileges "the Other" that is *unheimlich* and unknown. "A work conceived radically is a movement of the same unto the other which never returns to the same" ("Trace" 348). And it is only with the approach of death that Lévinas locates "[the] relation with something that is absolutely other, something… whose very existence is made of alterity" (*Time* 74). His work therefore links the inscrutable alterity

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of other (human) beings with the nature of death—and, possibly, of God. "The relationship with the other is not an idyllic and harmonious relationship of communion, or a sympathy through which we put ourselves in the other's place; we recognize the other as resembling us, but exterior to us; the relationship with the other is a relationship with a Mystery" (*Time* 75). Here Lévinas counters Heidegger's notion of others as an average "they" that causes "every mystery [to lose] its power" (124). If empathy is a recognition of the Other as a fellow-human, Lévinas desires to encounter the unknowable, the unrecognizeable, the sublime. Rather than making the Other more like himself, he suggests a counter to empathy for the Other, which we might call "going Other," to play on the old unfortunate phrase "going native." Building on two centuries of Continental thought about "the Other," Lévinas moves to embrace the *unheimlich*, never to return to "the same."

My notion of "the Other" also draws upon the rich theoretical tradition of psychoanalytic discourse, and the concept ranges widely in Freudian and Lacanian thought. In that primordial scene of Freud's theory, the "Oedipus complex," the child purportedly forms a "sexual preference" for his or her opposite-sex parent and a corresponding antagonism for his or her same-sex parent.[7] "Put crudely, it is as though a sexual preference were established very early, as though the boy saw a rival for love in his father, and the girl in her mother, and removing them could only be of benefit to the child" (*Interpretation* 197). The boy's father or the girl's mother therefore serves as the originary Other in Freud's work. The father also serves as the figure of authority and restraint—qualities the child will internalize through the development of the super-ego. "The super-ego retains the character of the father" and

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[7] The heteronormative and male-centered nature of Freud's model of child sexuality and the essentializing of gender roles in his analysis have been addressed by numerous queer and feminist scholars of psychoanalysis, most notably Michael Warner, Thanem and Wallenberg, Karen Horney, Clara Thompson, Betty Friedan, and Luce Irigaray.

represents "our relation to our parents. When we were little children we knew these higher natures, we admired them and feared them; and later we took them into ourselves" (*Ego* 30-32). If the same-sex parent represents the initial Other, that Other becomes incorporated into the self through the super-ego.

In his 1915 essay "Mourning and Melancholia," Freud identified two other interpersonal relations through which the self of the subject becomes bound up with or "overwhelmed by" the Other: when falling in love or becoming stricken with suicidal melancholia. The melancholic patient, Freud explained, "suffered a loss… in regard to his ego" after his ego became bound up with that of a loved one (585)—elsewhere he describes this process as "the transformation of object-libido into narcissistic libido" (*Ego* 24). This loved one was then lost, rejected the lover, or for some reason had grown loathsome. The essay describes a typical melancholic patient as suffering from extreme self-abasement: "the patient represents his ego to us as worthless, incapable of any achievement and morally despicable," though Freud notes that these judgments "are hardly applicable to the patient himself" ("Mourning" 584-585). Rather, the "self-reproaches are [actually] reproaches against a loved object which have been shifted away from it on to the patient's own ego" (585-586). Freud proposes, for example, that "the woman who loudly pities her husband for being tied to such an incapable wife is really accusing her *husband* of being incapable, in whatever sense she may mean this" (586; author's emphasis). For the melancholic subject, then, "the Other" is the lost love-object with whom the subject has formed a narcissistic identification; the subject comes to reproach himself or herself for the loss of the loved one, and/or the state of being "slighted, neglected, or disappointed… import[s] opposed feelings of love and hate into the relationship" (588). This self-loathing, redirected from the lost love-object onto the subject's own ego, purportedly explains why melancholic patients are prone to suicide. "In the two opposed

situations of being most intensely in love and of suicide the ego is overwhelmed by the object, though in totally different ways" (589). We might say that Freud posits an unhealthy identification or obsession with "the Other" as the root cause of melancholia.

On another level, Freud's theory of repression revealed that many of the mind's processes remained preconscious or unconscious: that which was "latent but capable of becoming conscious" he designated as preconscious, as opposed to the "dynamically unconscious repressed" (*Ego* 5-6). Moreover, Freud showed that what remained repressed was in fact opposed from becoming conscious by "a certain force": the human mind's "dynamics" for preventing itself from awareness of certain ideas too troubling or transgressive to admit conscious realization (4-5). But this was not only how pathological minds operated. Julia Kristeva lays out how Freud's exploration of the unconscious mind also revealed "the Other" as a necessary component of the healthy self, or ego. "With the Freudian notion of the unconscious the involution of the strange in the psyche loses its pathological aspect and integrates within the assumed unity of human beings an *otherness* that is both biological *and* symbolic and becomes an integral part of the *same*" (181; Kristeva's italics). To recognize the unconscious mind that lurks within the self is to acknowledge this inner Other. As Arthur Rimbaud mused, "*Je est une autre*."[8]

Jacques Lacan distinguishes between—but never neatly defines—the (lower-case *a*) *autre* and the (capital *A*) *Autre*, which correspond to the English "other" and "Other." Lacan translator Alan Sheridan notes that "the '*a*' [in '*objet petit a*'] stands for 'autre' (other), the concept having been developed out of the Freudian 'object'… differentiat[ing] the object from (while still relating it to) the 'Autre'…. However, Lacan refuses to comment on either term

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[8] "I is an other." Arthur Rimbaud, letter to Paul Demeny, 1871.

here" (282). In *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* (first presented in Paris, in 1964), Lacan uses "the Other" to signify a field of vision: "the gaze I encounter… is not a seen gaze, but a gaze imagined by me in the field of the Other" (84); an undefined object of desire (104), "the locus of speech" (129), an interlocutor/signifier of the unconscious – "the unconscious is the discourse of the Other" (131), the "form" of "the genital drive" (189), and simply "Meaning" (211). Remembering Lacan's overarching and repeated claim that "the unconscious is structured like a language" helps to make sense of the following explanation: "the Other is the locus in which is situated the chain of the signifier that governs whatever may be made present of the subject—it is the field of that living being in which the subject has to appear" (20, 203). Elsewhere, with echoes of Hegel, he explains that "the subject is subject only from being subjected to the field of the Other" (188). For Lacan, like Kristeva, Freud's investigation of the unconscious opens the door to imagining "the Other"—the shadowy realm of the self from which meaning emerges, through language as well as through non-linguistic drives and appetites. Yet such loose usage of the term hearkens back to Theodore Reik's 1935 comment (about "empathy") that "the concept… has come to mean so much that it is beginning to mean nothing" (qtd in Pigman 237). If "the Other" can signify a an object of desire, a dark bladder comparable to Plato's cave, and the locus of speech, one begins to wonder what it can't encompass.

In conversations parallel to and sometimes engaged with Continental philosophers and psychoanalytic discourse, postcolonial, feminist, and critical race theorists have reconceived "the Other" in less abstracted and more embodied forms. As early as 1897, W.E.B. Du Bois laid the foundation for his notion of "double-consciousness," asking, "Am I an American or am I a Negro? Can I be both?" ("Conservation" 821). In *The Souls of Black Folk*, he writes that double-consciousness is "a peculiar sensation…. One ever feels his twoness,—an American, a

Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body" (5). Double consciousness describes the subject position of the Self rendered Other by racialized and racist cultural logic, yet striving for the (imagined) integrity of self-realization. Du Bois was one of the first to express a notion that is now widely accepted by critical race theorists: that human races were *constructed by humans* based on purportedly distinguishable phenotypes that were, in fact, "exasperatingly intermingled…. [Although] the grosser physical differences of color, hair and bone go but a short way toward explaining" racial groupings, humans have been divided into these groups "which, while they perhaps transcend scientific definition, [appear] clearly defined to the eye of the Historian and Sociologist" ("Conservation" 816-817).

Though he did not explicitly name this process as the (social/historical/legal) construction of racial "Others," Du Bois illuminated the historical process of racial formation. Subsequent critical race theorists have carried on this project. In her 2001 essay "Social Origins of the Idea of Race," anthropologist Audrey Smedley describes how "attitudes and beliefs about human differences… began to evolve in the late seventeenth century in North America and the plantations of the Caribbean Isles and continued to develop throughout the nineteenth century" (3). English laws restricting "intermarriage with Irish women, the wearing of Irish dress, the use of Irish language, and other forms of social interaction" were, writes Smedley, "perhaps the first apartheid laws of the Western world" (7); these predecessors to slave codes and Jim Crow laws demonstrate that racial Othering was a local and contextual process which was not always based on skin color or continental origins. Smedley notes that early justifications for enslaving Africans hinged on religious rather than racial differences: "they were already slaves in Africa, it was argued, and under the Christian English, enslavement in the New World would save their souls and train them in the arts of civilization"

(15). But the possibility of religious conversion brought this logic quickly to its practical limits, and a new, less mutable regime of difference became necessary. "The idea of savagery as a condition of all Africans was extended even to those whose ancestors had been in the Americas for generations, regardless of whether they had ever been… slaves" (16). Smedley's examination of the historical emergence of racial differences as a product of political and economic exigencies helps to explain why race is often said to be "socially constructed," even though many Americans continue to regard it as an essential or natural phenomenon. Yet the acknowledgement that race is a social construct should not provide an easy hall pass for avoiding conversations about race. Michael Omi and Howard Winant remind us that the social construction of race continues to structure the lived reality of most human beings. "Race will *always* be at the center of the American experience," they write, and "opposing racism requires that we notice race, not ignore it" (5, 159).

Postcolonial theorists have helped to illuminate how the creation of (racial, ethnic, national, and colonial) Others has historically served the interests of capitalist and imperial powers. In his assiduous investigation of western academic (and) imperialist conceptions of the East, Edward Said writes that "the Orient is not only adjacent to Europe; it is also… one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other" (1). Said's study parallels Toni Morrison's observation that "the subject of the dream is the dreamer" (*Playing* 17); he argues that European and American scholarship about "the Orient" actually reveals more about Western desires for power and knowledge than it reveals about Oriental "Others": "to the extent that Western scholars were aware of contemporary Orientals or Oriental movements of thought and culture, these were perceived either as silent shadows to be animated by the Orientalist… or as a kind of cultural and intellectual proletariat useful for the Orientalist's grander interpretative activity, necessary for his performance" (208). Said also recognizes that this intellectual

puppeteering is not unique to the imaginary dichotomy of "East" and "West": "the construction of identity… involves the construction of opposites and 'others' whose actuality is always subject to the continuous interpretation and re-interpretation of their differences from 'us.' Each age and society re-creates its 'Others'" (332). Said's observation that "the Other" exists in the mind of the beholder informs my understanding of this concept. And, to guard against what Timothy Marr calls "asymmetrical encounter[s]" with the Other (196), we should also acknowledge and investigate how Asian and Middle Eastern cultures engaged with and imagined "the West." The logic of Othering cuts both ways, even if unequal power dynamics tend to "Other" dispossessed and minority groups disproportionately.

In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Franz Fanon characterized the African colonial subject in terms that echo Du Bois: "The black man has two dimensions. One with his fellows, the other with the white man…. This self-division is a direct result of colonialist subjugation" (17). But some postcolonial critics have warned against an overly fixed concept of "the Other" as a stereotypical oppressed subject. Homi Bhabha writes that "the stereotype is at once a substitute and a shadow. By acceding to the wildest fantasies… of the colonizer, the stereotyped Other reveals something of the 'fantasy' (as desire, defence) of that position of mastery" (117). And projections of Otherness can flow with or against unequal power dynamics. In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon defined European colonists in the Caribbean as "the outsider[s] from elsewhere, different from the indigenous population, 'the others'" (*Wretched* 5). Whether colonizer or colonized, it seems that "the Other" exists only in the mind of the beholder.

Feminist scholars have long decried the ways in which patriarchal societies position women as Others, though more recent feminist thought insists that gender cannot be theorized independently of race, ethnicity, class, and culture. In *The Second Sex* (1949; trans. 1953), Simone de Beauvoir mused that "woman… finds herself living in a world where men compel

her to assume the status of the Other. They propose to stabilize her as object and to doom her to immanence" (xxxv). De Beauvoir acknowledges the biological differences between men and women—the physiological nuances of sexual intercourse, the differential imperatives of menstruation and childbirth. Still, she concludes, these differences "fail to explain why woman is the Other; they do not condemn her to remain in this subordinate role" (33). De Beauvoir's explanation for how woman came to occupy this role—investigating biology, history, literature, myth, and cultural norms—parallels the interventions of twentieth-century postcolonial and race theory critics. "Man feminizes the ideal he sets up before him as the essential Other," she writes. "Treasure, prey, sport and danger, nurse, guide, judge, mediatrix, mirror, woman is the Other in whom the subject transcends himself without being limited, who opposes himself without denying him; she is the Other who lets herself be taken without ceasing to be Other, and therein she is so necessary to man's happiness and to his triumph that it can be said that if she did not exist, men would have invented her" (179, 186). Gloria Anzaldúa draws a similar conclusion in *Borderlands / La Frontera* (1987): "Because, according to Christianity and most other major religions, woman is carnal, animal, and closer to the undivine, she must be protected. Protected from herself. Woman is the stranger, the other. She is man's recognized nightmarish pieces, his Shadow-Beast" (39). Mae Henderson relates this concept more specifically to black female identity: "the interlocutory character of black women's writings is… not only a consequence of a dialogic relationship with an imaginary or 'generalized Other,' but a dialogue with the aspects of 'otherness' within the self" ("Speaking" 344). And bell hooks calls for a feminism that strives for "the eradication of domination and elitism in all human relationships" rather than one which centers around "highly educated white women with class privilege" (20, x). Though notions of "the Other" can be constructed to dehumanize figures of difference, they can also connote a false sense of

common status that fails to acknowledge real differences in lived experience. As a social construct, perceived alterity is not homogenous or symmetrical: one can be "Other" in more ways than one. Perhaps we are all Others in countless ways.

Kenji Yoshino argues that the most recent form of oppression—the latest "assault on our civil rights"—is the imperative to "cover" behaviors and identity traits that are considered non-normative in American culture. This "phase of gay history" (and all human history) follows previous imperatives: originally, the imperative to *convert* the Other to a more normative status, and more recently, the imperative for the Other to *pass* as "normal." These imperatives have a long racial/ethnic history in the United States, not to mention other categories of difference. "Passing pertains to the *visibility* of a particular trait, while covering pertains to its *obtrusiveness*," writes Yoshino (18-19).

The unspoken demand to *cover* non-normative identities—to downplay difference, mimicking social norms, seeking an always imaginary center—can apply to multiple aspects of the self. Yoshino argues that "this country is in the grip of white supremacy as [much as] it is in the grip of heteronormativity" (125). In his own personal history, the need to cover an Asian-American identity was coupled and overlaid with the need to cover a gay identity. One faculty colleague at Yale Law School warned him, "You'll have a better chance at tenure… if you're a homosexual professional than if you're a professional homosexual" (17). But Yoshino judges that "I have covered my own Asian-American identity as much as I have covered my gay one" (125). The implicit logic in these and many similar social interactions is that it's "ok to be Other," as long as one doesn't "flaunt it" or seem to take pride in that identity. Previous imperatives to "transform" or "pass" the non-normative in oneself essentially mandated, *Don't be the Other!* Conversely, the imperative to "cover" mandates, *Don't be so Other!* We should perhaps consider alterity as a sliding scale. To revise a memorable passage from George

Orwell's *Animal Farm*, all Others are created equal, but some Others are more equal than others.

We have now traced the notion of "the Other"—or perhaps we might say, of "others" and "Others"—from Aristotelian thought to Continental philosophy and psychoanalytical discourse, as well as critical race theory, postcolonial, feminist, and queer theory. My generic definition of "the Other" as a perceived figure of radical and/or categorical difference draws more obviously upon the latter theorists than upon their predecessors. This is perhaps true because scholars and intellectuals in these latter fields had the advantageous critical vantage point of western thought from the margins of western culture: in many different ways, minority, postcolonial, feminist, and queer thinkers had experienced the viewpoint of the Other, or at least the experience of a self seeking authenticity despite what Du Bois called "two warring ideals": a struggle worthy of Hegel's *Herr und Knecht* but occurring *within* the mind of the marginalized subject. Said could see that every age—and every culture—creates its Others; that "the Other" was merely a phenomenological construct, a matter of perspective. It is my hope that acknowledging "the Other" as a fantasy of the perceiving subject will allow us to better understand the role of empathy in revealing "the Other" as a fellow human. But this empathy should not, as Heidegger suggested, merely "duplicate the self"[9] or erase the real and important differences between human beings. As Anthony Appiah writes, a cosmopolitan engagement with "the Other" requires us to demonstrate both *universal concern*—"the recognition of our responsibility for every human being"—and *respect for legitimate*

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[9] "The relation of being to others then becomes a projection of one's own being toward oneself 'into an other.' The other is a duplicate of the self" (*Being* 121). Saidiya Hartman echoes this definition of empathy and warns against it, as I will discuss in Chapter One. Timothy Marr neatly summarizes the predicament: "Making the foreign familiar runs the danger of imperially incorporating others in ways that can make the very space of worldly engagement a new wall for the projection of stereotypes that can further alienate peoples and their cultures from themselves and from each other" (190). Benevolent empathy for "the Other" should certainly eschew projecting stereotypes or "imperially" substituting oneself for the Other.

difference—"we neither expect nor desire that every person or every society should converge on a single mode of life" (xv). Although we must acknowledge that empathy is not always or necessarily linked to altruism, it is my hope that narrative empathy is and can be what Appiah would call a cosmopolitan practice.

My dissertation project acknowledges these varying critical notions of "the Other" and uses the term in the generic sense of perceived radical or categorical alterity. Categorical alterity denotes the perception of an *outgroup member*: a man described by a woman, a person of a different race or ethnicity (as or perceived as such by the narrator), and so on. Radical alterity denotes the sense of *extreme difference* or non-normative qualities, often indicated by references to freakishness, savagery, or inscrutability. Often these two types of perceived alterity overlap or work together; accordingly, "the East" is characterized by western scholars (per Edward Said's analysis) as exotic, feminized, and quaint, but also as aggressive and terrorist-related. The imaginary Other is Other because of his membership in an outgroup, but also because of his perceived strangeness, however that strangeness may be construed. Though in American literary studies "the Other" is often construed as an oppressed, disadvantaged, or minority character, this is not always or necessarily the case when we consider literary texts from a narratological perspective. Because the identity of "the Other" depends upon the perceiving subject (in many cases, the narrator and/or the reader), "the Other" is a fluid and contextual construct. For the purpose of discussing narrative empathy, I use "the [capital-O] Other" to designate the perception of radical and/or categorical alterity on the part of some narrator or character as opposed to an undifferentiated "other" (i.e. anyone other than the perceiving subject: an undifferentiated "someone else").

If "the Other" is defined by radical and/or categorical alterity, empathy works against the logic of Otherness as an imaginative *identification with* an/other. Whereas Others are

perceived as foreign, unknown, and inscrutable, empathy permits and invites one to know and understand them, not merely as objects of study, but as selves-like-myself. This virtual and experiential identification emphasizes shared aspects of common humanity over perceived forms of categorical difference that divide the perceiving reader, narrator, or character from the perceived Other. Therefore, when it is successfully elicited and utilized in accordance with altruistic purposes, narrative empathy can convert perceptions of "Others" into perceptions of "fellow-humans."

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Human narratives contain myriad variables—they reflect the complexity of the human brain, and they are as troubling and interesting as human history—so any reductive argument about how empathy functions in *all* narratives would be easily refuted. It is not hyperbolic to state that narrative empathy turns upon thousands of "moving parts"—not only in the sense of the thousands of word choices that authors make, but also in the larger relationships among words, ideas, characterizations, plots, and formal qualities. We can think of these variables as coexisting (often simultaneously) among the three separate camps of the author, the narrative (or text), and the reader. For example, a reader's response to a text in which a particular autobiographical narrator describes his upbringing as a young Native American who was adopted and raised by his grandparents could be influenced by any number (or all) of the following factors:

- the more-or-less compelling "voice" of the narrator (according to the reader's judgment);
- the more-or-less exciting/entertaining/dramatic plot (according to the reader's judgment);
- the fact that the reader is or is not male, Native American, southern, and/or adopted;
- the fact that the reader (regardless of the above qualities) has or hasn't had an analogous experience, either personally or vicariously through friends, relatives, and associates;
- the reader's religious, political, and/or philosophical persuasions, which may incline him/her to approve of the protagonist's actions and attitudes, or may not;

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- the fact that the author is or is not who s/he says s/he is;
- the fact that the author was once a member of white supremacist organizations, or not; and
- if so, the reader's response to the realization that the above statement is true.

Of course, this list could be extended to include any number of particular aspects of the narrative's plot, characterizations, or formal qualities. I mention the specific factors above with an actual example in mind: *The Education of Little Tree*, by Forrest Carter, a *nom de plume* for Asa Earl Carter (1976; reprinted posthumously to widespread acclaim in 1986; the author died in 1979). This first-person narrative was initially read and understood by many readers (including myself and several family members) as a factual account of a Cherokee boy's upbringing in the Appalachians. But the memoir was revealed as "a hoax" in 1991, when *The New York Times* ran an Op / Ed piece by Dan T. Carter, a history professor at Emory University and (possibly) a distant relative of the actual author. The article claimed that Forrest Carter was in fact "a carefully constructed mask" assumed by a former Ku Klux Klan member who had run for office on a white supremacist platform and who allegedly penned the 1963 speech in which George Wallace called for "Segregation now… Segregation tomorrow… Segregation forever" ("Transformation" paras 4-5). This claim, which was never repudiated, led the original publishers to reclassify the book as a "novel," though many who had previously read it did not immediately learn of the author's true identity. *The Education of Little Tree* remained on Oprah Winfrey's list of recommended children's books until 2007, when she removed it, citing an "archiv[al] error" (Italie para. 2).

For my purposes, this narrative illustrates how aspects of author, text, and reader collaborate in the production, transmission, and reception of literary narratives. Should we read *Education*—if we read it at all—as an example of narrative empathy, by an empathetic narrator for the past self of his protagonist? Did the author feel empathy for this character of his own creation? Do we as readers empathize with the narrator, the child protagonist, or even the

author? If we initially empathized with the narrator or the protagonist (based on spurious notions of the text's "authenticity"), should we reconsider that empathy in light of the author's true identity? After discovering the truth about "Forrest Carter," Winfrey mused, "there's a part of me that said, 'Well, OK, if a person has two sides of them and can write this wonderful story and also write the segregation forever speech, maybe that's OK.' But I couldn't—I couldn't live with that" (qtd in Italie para. 10). Similarly, Sherman Alexie commented that "*Little Tree* is a lovely little book… but ultimately I think it is the racial hypocrisy of a white supremacist" (qtd in para. 6). These responses demonstrate that how we read and respond to literary narratives often depends upon factors external to the narratives themselves. Many of these factors are personal and idiosyncratic, and each reader must engage in critical self-analysis in order to account for them. Yet I believe that human narratives possess more power than they are normally credited with having. Even though she ultimately disavowed the book, it is rather remarkable that Oprah was able to consider the work of a white supremacist—even in retrospect—as a "wonderful story." As my dissertation will reveal, I have long wondered how many hearts and minds have been changed by literary engagements with "the Other," however that Other is construed.

In the pages that follow, I argue that for careful, competent readers, narrative judgments based on our understanding of textual storyworlds become more important than categorical factors of identity and identification. [10] Furthermore, I assert that judgments based on moral and emotional reasoning—*"What would I do in the same situation?"*—are ultimately more influential than shared experience or plot-based circumstances—*"That same thing happened to*

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[10] For this project, I have embraced and redeployed Stanley Fish's (early) definition of a "competent reader" as a member of "a linguistic system that every native speaker shares" (5)—although I recognize the shortcomings of such a nativist definition, which many of my best students have belied. I will elaborate further on James Phelan's notion of "narrative judgments" in Chapter One.

me!" It is not necessary for us as readers to have actually seen a human being whipped in order to cringe at reading such a whipping described; nor does our vicarious experience of Huck and Jim's adventures on the raft depend upon previous river-rafting experiences. To put this point another way, it is often a sense of shared *felt*-experience rather than a similarity of actual or circumstantial experience that promotes readerly empathy. It is not necessary for us to have "been there" or "done that" before, but only that we can imagine how it would feel. But this imagining is not a merely affective act. Benevolent empathy requires a coordinated dance between our cognitive and affective faculties, an embodied response that circulates throughout the brain and the central nervous system. Even according to the most current textbook produced by Duke University's Center for Cognitive Neuroscience (Sinauer P, 2013), "at present there is no agreed-upon neurobiological account of how the brain and body interact to generate integrated emotional states" (Purves 319).

As I have discussed above, empathy occurs in the context of a precarious relationship between subject and object, empathizer and empathizee. Yet I argue that when employed responsibly, in a spirit of mutual respect and with acknowledgment of real human differences, benevolent empathy (and the narratives that depict and/or elicit it) promotes a more humane, egalitarian, and cosmopolitan world—perhaps even a world without Others.

Chapter One

A CRITICAL (PRE)HISTORY OF NARRATIVE EMPATHY

This dissertation analyzes two primary categories of narrative empathy: *diegetic empathy*, which refers to interpersonal relations between characters (or between narrators and characters), and *readerly empathy*, or interpersonal relations between readers and narrators or characters.[1] These categories could also be defined as the ("diegetic") ways in which empathy is represented within a literary text and the ("readerly") ways in which empathy is experienced by readers of that text. Both categories are grounded in the notion of *narrative*, for which Gerald Prince offers the following definition: "the recounting… of one or more real or fictitious events communicated by one, two, or several narrators to one, two, or several (more or less overt) narratees" (58). Key to this definition is its dual emphasis on events and recounting.[2] Some narratologists define narratives more particularly as stories that recount "at least two real or fictive events… neither of which logically presupposes or entails the other," in order to distinguish the complex forms usually referenced by the term "narrative" from the mere reporting of a single event. Generally, narratives are understood as

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[1] I use the phrase "narrators and characters" to denote relationships that may emerge between a narrator and a character, between one character and another character, or between a character and a narrator. Because empathy is a "directional" and asymmetrical relationship—generally proceeding from one individual toward another (or a group of others)—these distinctions remain important, despite my more general references above. These are categories that map onto distinctions in other scholars' analyses (most notably in the work of Suzanne Keen), but I conceived of these terms before I became acquainted with their work.

[2] Prince's examples are perhaps more illuminating: he explains that the statement "The goldfish died" constitutes a narrative (albeit an extremely short and simple one), because it recounts an event, while the statements "Electrons are constituents of atoms" or "Mary is tall and Peter is small" would not qualify as narratives, because they merely describe conditions or states.

consisting of a beginning, a middle, and an end, as Aristotle posited of ancient Greek tragedy in his *Poetics*.[3] Nevertheless, Prince argues that dramatic productions (such as those which Aristotle discussed) *do not* qualify as narratives in the most technical sense of the term, because they reproduce events on the stage rather than recounting or narrating them, thus relying on *mimesis* (showing) rather than *diegesis* (telling). For the purposes of my project, I will define *narrative* capaciously as a text that tells a story, whether fictional or factual, regardless of the (known or unknown) identity of the narrator. This chapter will begin by considering recent scholars' articulations of the relationship(s) between narrative and empathy before exploring the "prehistory" of a concept that was not precisely named in the English language until the early twentieth century.

Narratology, Reader-Response Theory, and Cognitive Studies

Because both fictional and non-fictional narratives invite (or even require) readers to enter into the imagined worlds and minds of their characters, it seems logical that the effective communication of textual narratives depends upon the practice of readerly empathy. "Fiction exists," writes Fritz Breithaupt, "by inviting, channeling, and managing empathy" ("How" 402); the same might be said more broadly of narratives. But the relationship between narrative and empathy recalls the old question about the chicken or the egg. For while human transmission and response to narratives rely upon empathy, the experience of empathy is also grounded in the practices of constructing, telling, and repeating narratives— practices that human children of most (if not all) cultures learn at a very young age (Prince

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[3] "Tragedy is an imitation of an action that is complete, and whole, and of a certain magnitude; for there may be a whole that is wanting in magnitude. A whole is that which has a beginning, a middle, and an end" (*Poetics* I:vii). We might debate whether or not Prince's example "The goldfish died" (from the previous footnote) would qualify as a narrative under Aristotle's definition—the answer depends upon the "magnitude" of the goldfish's death.

58). Therefore, Breithaupt proposes that "empathy may be a complex and culturally coded form of behavior," which functions based on "highly developed forms of narrative fiction…. Perhaps there would be no empathy without narrative" (402). These two complex but fundamental forms of human behavior seem to rely upon each other in symbiotic fashion.

The types of narrative empathy found in literature and the ways in which authors employ those types vary widely. Some narratives demonstrate modeled empathy—a featured empathic relation between two figures in which one narrator or character comes to identify with another narrator or character, presumably as a model for readers to follow.[4] Narratives may also depict instances of failed empathy between narrators and characters, particularly when readers are led to arrive at some judgment about a narrator or character that markedly differs from that offered by the text.[5] Some narrators employ direct appeals for empathy (and/or sympathy) from their readers, either on their own behalf or on behalf of other characters. While it is not always the case, these textual depictions of empathy often work to elicit readerly empathy and, in a sense, "reward" the reader for responding accordingly. However, narratives can also prompt readerly empathy for devious or strategic purposes, enticing or manipulating readers into empathic responses to characters or narrators who turn out to be mistaken or even morally suspect. Likewise, narrators or characters may appear to act or feel empathetically, only to reveal their ulterior motives later in the narrative. This catalog is by no means exhaustive, but it begins to register the various, nuanced ways that

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[4] Some scholars have questioned the distinction between characters and narrators, arguing that narrators are merely characters in the text who "speak" to the reader, regardless of whether or not they are identified by name or engaged in the plot. I maintain the distinction between the two in order to focus on the different roles that narrators play within the structure of narratives and to emphasize the additional agency they are granted by authors due to their ability to address readers directly, in their own words.

[5] I will elaborate on various instances of failed, absent, misguided, and/or misleading narrative empathy in Chapters Two, Four, and Five.

empathy can function, both within a literary text as well as between text and reader. Indeed, the two functions are rarely disconnected; the degree of a reader's empathic response is often directly (but not always proportionally) related to the workings of empathy within the text.

One of the most fundamental axioms of reader-response theory is that every reader's response to a narrative is unique, based on her own private engagement with the text as well as the personal experiences upon which she draws while reading—including the previous experiences of reading other texts. For example, Jane Tompkins (paraphrasing Stanley Fish) writes that "meaning… is not something one extracts from a poem, like a nut from its shell, but an experience one has in the course of reading" (*Reader-Response* xvi). The reader-response movement in literary criticism followed close on the heels of the zenith of post-structuralism, with its attendant reprioritization of entities once conceived as objects—language, discourse, the reader—over entities formerly privileged as subjects—God, the rational self, the author. Roland Barthes famously wrote that "the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author" (1470). But contemporary scholars have questioned whether narratives (and their authors) are actually as passive or as devoid of inherent meaning as either of these schools suggests. James Phelan argues that readers tend to "experience the same books in similar ways…. often different readers do share (not totally but nontrivially) responses to the same narrative" (x). Phelan emphasizes the role of "narrative progression" in readers' formulations of narrative judgments: "judgments and progressions are central to accounting for the possibility of shared experience… they both depend on and influence every other element of narrative" (xi). Since the order of the narrative structures the reader's experience of it as well as her response to it, Phelan follows Aristotle's method of identifying a (plot-based) beginning, middle, and end to each narrative, as readers tend to form judgments in the same order. Phelan considers the author, the text,

and the reader as three points on the rhetorical triangle, emphasizing the role that each plays in the rhetorical situation of reading. This model offers a corrective to overly reader-centric models of literary criticism—as well as the author-centric model that Barthes disdained and the text-centric model of the New Critics. Phelan's model accounts for all three fundamental elements of the narrative enterprise, without unnecessarily privileging one over the other—though he devotes most of his analytical energy to textual analysis.

Phelan's rhetorical theory of narrative suggests that while readers are free to draw their own conclusions and to pass their own judgments, narratives (especially well-crafted ones) tend to guide those judgments in somewhat predictable directions. Readers may find Huckleberry Finn charming or crude in his lack of erudition, but they rarely consider him a secret abolitionist or a bad Christian, despite his memorable resolution, "All right, then, I'll *go* to hell." Likewise, readers may debate the efficacy of the novel's final section (as Ralph Ellison, Ernest Hemingway, and others have done), but they are not likely to argue that Tom Sawyer is revealed to be the novel's actual protagonist, or that the final section reveals that Huck actually hates Jim because of his race. As Phelan argues, narratives tend to establish and communicate to readers their own ethical standards: "narrative judgments proceed from the inside out rather than the outside in" (10)—and Twain's celebrated novel is no exception. Contemporary intersections of narratology and cognitive studies are increasingly turning traditional models of reader-response theory on their heads, revealing that most narratives are not read *by readers* like Rorschach blots—as cryptic vessels to fill with their own conscious or subliminal ideas and experiences—but rather that they read themselves *to readers* in various ways. These arguments should be considered, I would submit, not as reinscriptions of New Criticism, with its willful blindness towards sticky issues of racism, patriarchalism, heteronormativity, and other hegemonic ideologies, but rather as a sensible

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acknowledgement that readers do not "create" the meaning of literary texts any more than authors "control" their responses to those texts. The words on the page exert a certain (limited) agency of their own.

Based on their close analysis of readers' detailed responses to short stories,[6] David S. Miall and Don Kuiken—an English professor and a psychology professor from the University of Alberta—have proposed that readers respond to narratives through four overarching domains of "feeling responses" (the italicized terms which follow name these categories). *Evaluative feelings*, not unique to reading, include the "enjoyment, pleasure, or satisfaction" derived from reading or experiencing narratives—or the lack thereof (223). The researchers note that these types of feelings are not usually experienced at a deep analytical level, but they may motivate readers to continue or discontinue reading. *Narrative feelings*, including sympathy and empathy, refer to readers' reactions to narrators and characters as well as their mimetic simulation of narrated feelings or experiences (224). Miall and Kuiken note that these types of feelings often "unfold along conventional, pre-scripted lines… reflect[ing] the attitudes expressed by a sympathetic narrator" (224).[7] In contrast to these predominantly content-based responses, *aesthetic feelings* consist of readers' responses to striking formal features of the text, including unusual or powerful word choices that "capture and hold their attention." These "foregrounded features" often cause readers to pause or slow their reading and to "report greater uncertainty" in interpretation (224). Although aesthetic feelings are initially prompted by irregular or memorable formal characteristics, Miall and

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[6] Miall and Kuiken analyzed readers' responses recorded at various stages throughout the narratives in order to trace the progression of narrative judgments (in Phelan's terms), or, in their own terms, to "capture the temporally unfolding *experience* of a text rather than its consummating *interpretation*" (239; authors' italics).

[7] Some of the texts considered in my study will challenge this characterization of "narrative feelings" and how they unfold; nevertheless, Miall and Kuiken's categorizations are useful for considering the layers of feeling that accompany the reading experience.

Kuiken suggest that they may prompt readers to reconsider their understanding of a text more fundamentally: "they may initiate changes in the reader's grasp of the text's meaning" (225). Finally, through complicated processes in which they come to understand and associate themselves with fictional characters, some readers may experience *self-modifying feelings* that cross or collapse the boundaries between textual narratives and their own lived experiences. Such responses "restructure the reader's understanding of the textual narrative" and may "create unexpected challenges to the reader's sense of self" (223, 230).

Miall and Kuiken's study draws upon Ted Cohen's notion of "metaphors of personal identification,"[8] which describes how readers "implicitly [take] on the embodied perspective of a figure in the text: 'I am X'" (qtd in 232). Like James Phelan, Miall and Kuiken emphasize the importance of narrative progression, for such relations between readers and narrators or characters develop unevenly over the chronological course of readers' experiences of reading the text, not as immediate or unchanging responses. Hence, in their recommendations for further study, the researchers stress that "the features of the story and its episodic rhythms regularly guide the flow of readers' thoughts, reflections, and feelings…. Readers' commentaries [over the course of the reading process] provide the descriptive 'thickness' necessary to uncover the oscillating influence of text and reader on reading experience" (239). In particular, they note that by creating a shared "class" of humanity that encompasses textual experiences as well as their own, readers may "transcend conventionally (non-affectively) scripted boundaries" (230). Through "metaphors of personal identification," Miall and Kuiken conclude, "we make the stories we read our own" (237). Yet this process of "mak[ing] stories… our own" falls short of the poststructuralist hyperbole

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[8] See Ted Cohen, "Identifying with Metaphor: Metaphors of Personal Identification," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 57.4 (Fall 1999): 399-409.

that the reader creates all the meaning on his or her own. Making stories our own involves a much more complicated and interesting meeting of minds.

One reason readers tend to form judgments about narrators and characters sequentially, imagining their mental states and the reasoning that underlies their behavior, is that we "read" people this way in real life. Cognitive psychologists, primatologists, and literary critics describe the human proclivity to infer other humans' thought processes as "mindreading," or "Theory of Mind" cognitive processing. Shaun Nichols and Stephen P. Stich, for example, have argued that healthy humans have a "mental architecture" which allows them to engage in "mindreading" processes, and that mental representations can be stored under categories of "beliefs" and "desires"—they name this theory the "representational account of cognition" (12–15). Nichols and Stich go on to argue for an evolutionary cognitive ability or repository that they call the "Possible World Box," or PWB, which is "part of the basic architecture of the human mind" (58). This mental structure and/or ability enables hypothetical reasoning, and the authors consider it an "exaptation," or a property that was initially "selected" (in the evolutionary sense) for one function but later "coopted" for other roles (64). "The PWB, initially used just for hypothetical reasoning, becomes an exaptation: it gets recruited as a mechanism for behavior prediction" (65).

In a rather more pithy manner, Lisa Zunshine defines mindreading as "our ability to explain people's behavior in terms of their thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and desires" (6). Sanjida O'Connell, whose research examines the rudimentary traces of similar behavior in several species of primates, argues that a thoroughly developed "Theory of Mind is the hallmark of humanity: knowing the workings of another person's mind allows us to be compassionate, cruel, concerned, and conniving" (5). According to these and other scholars, mindreading activities provide the cognitive basis for empathy, which in turn provides the

psychological basis for (mostly) peaceful coexistence: "without empathy, human society as we know it could not function" (O'Connell 127). Nevertheless, they acknowledge that humans with certain psychiatric or developmental disorders may be unable to develop this ability.[9] Zunshine describes empathy as an evolutionary cog in the wheel of human civilization. She writes that we can (or should) "conceive of the fictional narrative as a cognitive artifact in progress—an ongoing thousands-year-long experimentation with our cognitive adaptation… [which] constantly diversifies the ways in which it engages our Theory of Mind" (26-27). In other words, humans produce and analyze narratives through Theory of Mind practices because we have evolved the ability—perhaps even the imperative necessity—to treat them in this way.

These theories suggest a pragmatic environmental basis for human empathy. Imaginative identification with others helps humans adapt to complex and changing situations with important implications for survival and/or reproduction. Zunshine considers fiction as a mindreading practice that can help us hone our interpersonal skills—particularly in unfamiliar contexts, such as her own experience as an immigrant in the United States. Textual narratives may serve as cultural guidebooks, demonstrating specific social conventions and linguistic practices, though such applications certainly have their limits. (One might not find in the fiction of William Faulkner or Zora Neale Hurston, for example, a helpful primer for how to speak—or act—properly "southern" or "American.") Zunshine also

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[9] Both O'Connell and Zunshine discuss humans with autism as the exceptions that prove the rule. O'Connell's work charts the development of TOM in young children, noting specific cognitive abilities, such as the capacity for understanding causality and false beliefs. "The litmus test for Theory of Mind," she writes, "is whether an individual can understand that another has a false belief, a belief about the world that is logical, but which does not correspond to reality" (17). Zunshine notes that autism is characterized not only by "the profound impairment of social and communicative development," but also by an indifference to storytelling—emphasizing the link between empathy and narrative (8). For an extended analysis of why autistic subjects cannot fully comprehend the process of mindreading, see Samuel Baron-Cohen's *Mindblindness: An Essay on Autism and Theory of Mind* (New York: Oxford UP, 2003).

characterizes fiction as a mirror to life—not in terms of its content, in the traditional sense of "art imitating life," but in terms of readers' responses to people and situations both represented and real: *responses to art* imitating *responses to life*. According to her theory, readerly empathy emerges as part of a larger, fundamentally human enterprise: understanding the mental states of others and their relative disposition toward ourselves.

Like Zunshine, Fritz Breithaupt views narrative empathy as a close approximation of human relations in lived experience—not only resembling the ways in which we empathize with actual people, but in some ways encouraging or amplifying this real-life behavior. Breithaupt reasons that the human tendency to empathize with other humans must be blocked on a regular basis for pragmatic reasons: otherwise, we would go about our daily lives imagining the mindsets of every person we encountered—in the elevator, on the street, in the grocery store. The results of such obsessive behavior, he proposes, would be disabling. Therefore, while most humans possess the ability to imagine the mindsets of others, we also require the ability to block this tendency, to encounter a fellow human without automatically wondering, *what is s/he thinking or feeling right now?* Breithaupt argues that fiction offers an optimal opportunity to *suppress* the blocking mechanism that normally prevents us from engaging in empathy: "narration… is the exceptional form in which empathy is admitted" (*Cultures* 10). When reading literary narratives, he suggests, we know that we are not actually engaged with flesh-and-blood people who might place demands upon us as listeners. Therefore, we (consciously or subconsciously) suppress those normal "blocking mechanisms" and allow ourselves to identify freely with narrators and characters, often more powerfully than we identify with the actual humans who populate our daily lives. This theory explains why psychological test subjects who were notified that test texts were fictional

"narratives" have reported greater identification with the characters than those who understood the same texts to be "news stories."[10]

Breithaupt proposes that empathy should be considered as a "choosing of sides," following a model analogous to a sports fan cheering one team against another or a jury passing judgment in a civil suit (*Cultures* 18). Describing the relation of the readerly "empathizer" or observer to the textual "empathizee" (A), who is engaged in conflict with some unsympathetic narrator or character (B), Breithaupt writes, "we empathize with the effect of B's action on A to the degree that it corresponds to our position of observation. Empathy is possible when the observer registers what the other can see, feel, observe" ("How" 422).

At first glance, this triadic model of empathy seems useful, but the model soon strains under scrutiny. Many instances of narrative empathy (both textual and readerly) involve choices between courses of action and their accompanying moral considerations, rather than mere A-or-B decisions. When Huckleberry Finn makes his fateful and climactic decision not to report Jim's whereabouts to Miss Watson (who, we later learn, was already dead, and Jim already freed by her last will and testament), Huck's choice is not so much between Jim and Miss Watson as between following or transgressing the racial codes of white southerners in the antebellum South. The decision requires Huck to consider the fraught and perilous subjects of Jim's humanity, the debt of loyalty owed to an old and faithful friend, the dangers of standing against the force of cultural consensus (and taboo)—these considerations represent, in Faulkner's famous phrase, "the problems of the human heart in conflict with itself" ("Banquet" para. 2). To apply Breithaupt's model to Huck's internal conflict and

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[10] See Rolf A. Zwaan, "Effect of Genre Expectations on Text Comprehension," in *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Learning, Memory, and Cognition* 20 (1994): 920-933, as discussed in Keen "Theory" 216.

resolution, not to mention the reader's own matrix of responses to this progression, seems reductive no matter how one applies it. Does Huck choose between (A) Jim and (B) white southern cultural norms? Between (B) adherence to a racist code and (A) subversion of that code? In order to force Twain's narrative into this Procrustean bed, one must amputate not only its plot but also its enduring power. Narrative empathy, both textual and readerly, requires more imaginative work than a mere choosing of sides.

Suzanne Keen has proposed that we might better understand narrative empathy as originating from the author's perspective, in light of the author's intended audience. She describes the authorial employment of "strategic empathy," in which "authors attempt to direct an emotional transaction through a fictional work aimed at a particular audience, not necessarily including every reader who happens upon the text" (*Empathy* 142). Keen identifies three categories of this "transaction": *bounded strategic empathy*, which "occurs within an in-group, stemming from experiences of mutuality, and leading to feeling with familiar others"; *ambassadorial strategic empathy*, which "addresses chosen others with the aim of cultivating their empathy for the in-group, often to a specific end"; and *broadcast strategic empathy*, which "calls upon every reader to feel with members of a group, by empathizing our common vulnerabilities and hopes" (142). Although she has acknowledged elsewhere that "readers' empathic dispositions are not identical to one another" and that "novelists do not exert complete control over the responses to their fiction" ("Theory" 214), Keen's emphasis on the author's *intended* audience seems to belie this caveat. Moreover, her theory presumes that the author's intentions for his or her text will generally be followed— Keen classes the myriad possibilities under which readers may respond "differently" under the rubric of "empathic inaccuracy," as if the matter of "achieving" an unknown reader's empathetic response can or should be likened to a game of darts. "Empathic inaccuracy

occurs when a reader responds empathetically to a fictional character at cross-purposes with

an author's intentions," she explains, rather obliquely (*Empathy* 138).[11]

Keen's study suggests that authors generally belong to the groups that they write

about or on whose part they hope to elicit empathy, which is not always the case. Moreover,

her emphasis on group membership and identification implies that authors, narrators,

characters, and readers generally identify with each other based on their membership in

various (racial, ethnic, gendered, and other) in-groups rather than as individuals with unique

histories, dispositions, and reading practices. This premise implies that readerly empathy

across categorical lines of difference is the exception rather than the rule, an "accurate"

response to a "strategic" authorial intention rather than a fundamental human relation. While

I acknowledge and commend Keen for the vigor of her review of scientific literature (which

provides an excellent sense of how empathy functions, but has little bearing on her

arguments regarding reader response), this dissertation represents a sustained argument

against her conclusions. For if narrative empathy is only available to members of each

reader's in-group (however defined), what meaningful work can it do in the world?

Keen is especially interested in the real-world results of narrative empathy, which

social psychologist C. Daniel Batson and developmental psychologist Nancy Eisenberg have

investigated as the "empathy-altruism hypothesis." Keen suggests that the "case for altruism

stemming from novel reading [is] inconclusive at best and nearly always exaggerated" as a

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[11] Keen's textual example—a scene from Opal Palmer Adisa's novel *It Begins with Tears* (1997), seems especially problematic. After describing the scene, in which a woman accused of prostitution and "man-stealing" is tied to a bed and has "fiery chopped red pepper [stuffed] into her nose and vagina," Keen notes (with surprise!) that her male undergraduate students seem reluctant to discuss the scene. Her assumption that they have failed to "respond empathetically to a fictional character" based on their gender seems extremely tenuous, based completely on their reticence. She concludes that the male students "might feel offended by or implicated in the novel's attack on patriarchal values" (*Empathy* 138), but does not seem to consider that young men might be reluctant to discuss the female anatomy under any circumstances, let alone the particular circumstances of this novel. The "empathic inaccuracy" at work in this situation seems to describe the relation between teacher and student more than the relation between reader and author.

result of the "current vogue for empathy" as well as the need to justify the role of the humanities in contemporary society (*Empathy* vii-viii). While Keen's analysis of contemporary psychological studies is broad and rigorous, and while her suspicions about the ulterior motives that drive some champions of empathy are no doubt valid, her ultimate pessimism seems as unfounded as the optimism that she derides. Indeed, the long-term results of reading narratives (both fictional and non-fictional) may be impossible to measure through strictly empirical means. What type of study would document the results of reading a particular novel, or even a set of texts, over the course of one's life? One recent study of a much more limited scope, which I will discuss later in this chapter, offers empirical evidence to the contrary.

Mary-Catherine Harrison has observed that "Keen does not [attend] to the ways in which particular authors and texts might have positively shaped the attitudes and actions of historical readers" (258)—partly because such work is nearly impossible to do. Even if altruistic behavior could be empirically identified, how would a claim of causality—for literary reading or any other "influence"—be justified? Drawing causal relationships between earlier "influences" (such as the reading of a certain text) and subsequent actions (such as an instance of empathetic or altruistic behavior) requires deeply speculative conjectures and problematic assumptions. Even if the examples seem clearly related—taking a stand against anti-Semitism after reading a Holocaust survivor's memoir, for example—how could one assert that the earlier action caused or precipitated the latter one? Even if a test subject were to assert that the earlier experience influenced the later one, would such a claim be empirically admissible? And even if we were to accept such a claim, we would also have to ask, is there not a possibility that the subject would have taken a similar stand without reading the memoir? Perhaps s/he was constitutionally disposed toward empathy in the first

place, which could explain the initial choice to read the memoir. Or, perhaps the memoir helped to strengthen an already nascent resolve. Would we say that the act of reading was partly responsible? And would that part be more like 60%, 30%, or 10%? Obviously, even in this "simple" example, such conclusions would seem highly tenuous at best.

In this study, I will not venture any hypotheses about the empirical or "real-world" effects of literary reading; nor will I argue that narrative empathy necessarily results in more empathetic behavior on the part of the reader. Indeed, it might be the case (as Keen asserts) that the cathartic experience of empathizing with literary characters provides its own "satisfaction" in place of any actual engagement with fellow-humans. However, the historical influence of narratives—including Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Sinclair's *The Jungle*, Gilman's *The Yellow Wall-Paper*, and Ellison's *Invisible Man*—in American political and social movements suggests that this is not the case. More often, artists, intellectuals, and activists have considered the experience of reading deeply formative and powerfully influential, and their belief in the power of literary narratives suggests that life imitates art at least as often as art imitates life. But before I explore that trajectory, it will be informative to consider the long "prehistory" of the concept of empathy in Western philosophy.

Representation, Identification, and "Pity" in Ancient Greek Philosophy

The foremost western philosophers of classical antiquity did not address a relation precisely identifiable as empathy, as the term is defined and employed in contemporary discourse. However, they did consider the interactions between language, representation, aesthetic qualities, and emotional responses—primarily in reference to dramatic works, epic poetry, and political rhetoric. In Plato's *Republic*, for instance, Socrates proscribes various types of literature, including any stories judged to misrepresent "the nature of gods and

heroes" as well as those that contain gloomy depictions of the afterlife, lamentations for the dead, depictions of "violent laughter," and poetry or stories too heavily reliant on "representation." Plato's Socrates defines representation as "assimilat[ing] oneself to another person in speech or manner," tantamount to the performance of dramatic roles (87). Such literature is dangerous, he explains, because "if our young men listen to passages [depicting uproarious laughter] seriously and don't [consider] them unworthy, they are hardly likely to… resist the temptation to similar words and actions" (80). Those exposed to dramatic representations are considered likely to imitate literary depictions that they have read, performed, or observed, in their actual lives. The Socrates figure represented in *Republic* (ironically performing precisely the type of *mimêsis* that he condemns) considers the performance of undesirable dramatic roles especially dangerous because such representations "establish habits… which become second nature" (89). Though it does not examine the particular processes or pathways by which readers or audiences are influenced by aesthetic representations, Plato's text clearly considers the arts as a strong influence on collective culture and individual behavior. Elsewhere in the *Republic*, Socrates famously states that "the music and literature of a country cannot be altered without major political and social change" (125).

In Book X of the *Republic*, Plato makes his strongest case for the "dangerous" and influential nature of aesthetics. Art "has a terrible power to corrupt even the best characters… even the best of us enjoy it and let ourselves be carried away by our feelings" (349). Poetry causes one's "better nature" to "relax its control" over the impulse to laugh, to cry, to feel anger or desire, for "what we feel for other people must infect what we feel for ourselves"; hence "pleasure and pain become your rulers" (350-351). In short, aesthetic representations affect us powerfully; they evoke an emotional response, influencing even normally restrained

judgments and opinions. For Plato and his rendering of Socrates, the arts are dangerous because of their ability to undermine the stoic, moderate temperament that both men valued and sought to promote. But in attempting to point out the dangerous influence of aesthetic representations, they unwittingly testified to the timeless value of the arts and their centrality to the human experience.

Aristotle also considered the arts influential, as evidenced by his lengthy examinations of poetry and rhetoric, but he did not seem to share Plato's fear of literary works as being culturally "dangerous." In his *Poetics*, Aristotle observes that imitation, or *mimêsis*, "comes naturally to human beings from childhood," and from it they derive a "universal pleasure" (6). As a form of *mimêsis*, drama elicits emotional responses from audience members: "tragedy is an imitation of an action that is admirable, complete and possesses magnitude; in language made pleasurable, each of its species separated in different parts; performed by actors, not through narration; effecting through pity and fear the purification of such emotions" (10). It is this purification, or *catharsis*, that Aristotle finds chiefly valuable in the arts and in light of which he assesses the quality and effectiveness of various works.

In *Rhetoric*, Aristotle describes the ways in which audiences respond to various forms of oratory, focusing on specific emotions and the strategies that evoke them most effectively. The primary purpose of "rhetoric" is to persuade; therefore, he defines the term as "the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion" (6). The orator must "make his own character look right and put his hearers… into the right frame of mind" (59). To do so, he must rely upon the three primary modes of persuasion: the "personal character of the speaker" (*ethos*), the proof "provided by the words of the speech" (*logos*), and audience's emotional response or "frame of mind" (*pathos*) (7). His recommendations

for speakers seeking to evoke specific emotions would influence subsequent theories of rhetoric as well as notions of sympathy and empathy that remain current in the twenty-first century.

Aristotle defines pity as "a feeling of pain caused by the sight of some evil, destructive or painful, which befalls one who does not deserve it, and *which we might expect to befall ourselves* or some friend of ours" (77; emphasis added). He describes the types of people who are less likely to feel pity: those who are already ruined (by poor fortune); those who find themselves "immensely fortunate" and are therefore unlikely to imagine themselves in any danger; and those who are easily stirred by more "immediate" emotions such as anger or confidence. Conversely, the types of people most likely to feel pity are "those who think evil *may* befall them or such as have already had it befall them and have safely escaped from it; elderly men, owing to their good sense and their experience; weak men, especially men inclined to cowardice… educated people, since these can take long views"; and those who have weak or elderly family members, "for these are our own, and the evils mentioned above may easily befall them" (77). Aristotle suggests that pity is a sentiment experienced more often and more strongly by those who perceive themselves or their loved ones as being somehow vulnerable: "we feel pity whenever we are in the condition of remembering that similar misfortunes have happened to us, or are expecting them to happen in [the] future" (77). Empathy is sometimes represented in American popular culture through the platitude "I feel your pain," whereas Aristotle's conception of pity might be summarized as "I *fear* your pain"—that is, "I fear that whatever caused you pain will happen to me as well." He also emphasizes the importance of personal similarities between the pitier and the pitied: "we pity those who are like us in age, character, disposition, social standing, or birth; for in all these cases it appears more likely that the same misfortune may befall us also… what we fear for

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ourselves excites our pity when it happens to others" (78). For Aristotle, the key to pity for

another is the fear of a similar fate for oneself. Similarly, the notion of empathy as a self-

centered and even a self-serving sentiment is frequently invoked by contemporary empathy

theorists, as I will discuss later in this chapter.

Updating the Ancients: Eighteenth-Century Theories of Emotion

Eighteenth-century philosophers of human behavior were also interested in questions

of how emotion was transferred between actors and observers, though their terms of analysis

were not necessarily focused on dramatic performances or rhetorical strategies. In his 1739

Treatise of Human Nature, David Hume described what he viewed as the most remarkable

"quality of human nature"—"that propensity we have to sympathize with others, and to

receive by communication their inclinations and sentiments, however different from, or even

contrary to our own" (2.1.11: 206).[12] Hume's notion of sympathy encompasses what

Aristotle called pity as well as what social scientists now define as empathy, but more

broadly, it describes what is now understood as theory-of-mind cognition.

Hume begins his investigation into human psychology by dividing "all the

perceptions of the human mind" into *impressions*—defined as people, things, events, or

conditions perceived with "force and violence," including "sensations, passions, and

emotions"—versus *ideas*, or "the faint images of these [impressions, experienced through]

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[12] Because Hume's famous *Treatise* is separated into "books," parts, and sections, it is commonly referenced through this tripartite division. I have added page numbers from the 2008 Oxford UP edition as an additional reference. Hume's work was first published in 1739 with only Books I and II ("Of the Understanding" and "Of the Passions," respectively); he was only 28 years old. Book III ("Of Morals") was added in a 1740 publication. Although this final "book" indicated the direction of his future philosophical inquiry—culminating in *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* (1751), which Hume considered "of all my writings incomparably the best" (qtd in Leitch 483)—his original *Treatise* is "usually regarded as his masterpiece" (483), and Book II is most relevant to my topic. As one contemporary critic summed up the work, Hume "wished to find a basis for morality not in God or 'reason' but in social existence…. He praises men's capacity for fellow-feeling and sympathy; he praises sociability itself" (Denby 254-255).

thinking and reasoning" (1.1.1: 7). In contemporary parlance, these categories loosely correlate to what some contemporary social scientists distinguish as the affective versus the cognitive realms of perception. Hume acknowledges that sometimes "our ideas may approach to our impressions" and that examples of the two categories may be difficult to distinguish (1.1.1: 7), but he nevertheless argues that ideas are almost always formed in response to impressions, or as reflections of them. "We cannot form to ourselves a just idea of the taste of a pine-apple, without having actually tasted it" (1.1.1: 9); likewise, the *idea* of pain is generally formulated and experienced as a response to the *impression* of pain.

What Hume considered so remarkable about sympathy is that it appears to function through an inverted process in which *ideas* lead to *impressions*. "A cheerful countenance infuses a sensible complacency and serenity into my mind; as an angry or sorrowful one throws a sudden damp upon me" (2.1.11: 206). The smile or frown is perceived first as an observation or an idea, not a "passion" or impression. Yet "this idea is presently converted into an impression, and acquires such a degree of force and vivacity, as to become the very passion itself, and produce an equal emotion, as any original affection" (2.1.11: 206). Hume does not precisely explain why the usual process of cognition—which might be described as the conversion of affective sensations into conscious, cognitive thought[13]—is reversed in the case of sympathy, but he suggests that the impressions of others are somehow transmitted to the observer, and he offers several hypotheses for when and how this transmission is most likely to occur. Following Aristotle, Hume suggests that various forms of resemblance are likely to foster sympathy: "any peculiar similarity in our manners, or character, or country, or

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[13] For a thorough discussion of how affective sensations can be considered as pre-cognitive or pre-subjective states, see Brian Massumi, "The Autonomy of Affect," *Cultural Critique* 31 (Autumn 1995): 83-109. Ruth Leys offers a thoughtful counterargument to Massumi and others in "The Turn to Affect: A Critique," *Critical Inquiry* 37.3 (Spring 2011): 434-472.

language… facilitates the sympathy" (2.1.11: 207). Sympathy is also strengthened by family relationships, by previous acquaintance, and by physical proximity, or "contiguity" (2.1.11: 207). Perhaps sympathy is a natural human activity, Hume concludes, because humans are inherently narcissistic: "the idea, or rather impression of ourselves is always intimately present with us"—in other words, we are constantly relating external events and individuals back to our own sense of self. By relating others' sentiments to ourselves, we inevitably produce similar emotions "with a like vivacity" (2.1.11: 207). Had he known about mirror neurons, Hume would have likely enlisted them in his *Treatise* to provide the "how" for this "inevitable" response.

Hume's countryman Adam Smith similarly found the dynamic of sympathy central to the human experience. Though he is better known today as the author of *The Wealth of Nations*—a book that famously credited the strength and stability of free markets to the dictates of self-interest—Smith was also strongly committed to the notion of "fellow-feeling," which he viewed as crucial for social coexistence and human flourishing. Amartya Sen considers it unfortunate that many scholars of Smith's work have focused primarily on his notion of "self-love" as a motivation for exchange, "rather than [qualities that make] normal exchanges sustainable, such as trust and confidence between the two parties" (xi). In his *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (first published in 1759, though he continued to revise and expand the work until his death in 1790), Smith considered the principles that governed what he called "fellow-feeling." This category included the sentiments of pity and compassion, but Smith (like Hume) defined sympathy more broadly as "our fellow-feeling with any passion whatever," and he insisted that fellow-feeling with happiness could be just as strong as the experience of shared grief or suffering (15).

To Smith, the transmission of emotion appeared to function as an act of the imagination. "Though our brother is upon the rack," he expounds, "our senses will never inform us of what he suffers…. It is *by the imagination only* that we can form any conception of what are his sensations" (13; emphasis added). Yet an "attentive spectator" will not always mirror the emotions of the individual(s) being observed. Smith argues that it is possible to feel compassion for infants, for the mentally handicapped, or even the dead—proving that sympathy can function by producing in the observer an emotion that the "actor," or individual observed, is incapable of feeling. "We blush for the impudence and rudeness of another," even if s/he is unaware of committing any impropriety, he observed (16). Likewise, the "furious behavior of an angry man" is more likely to provoke sympathy for "his enemies" if the observer does not understand his "provocation" (15). "General lamentations" tend to provoke curiosity rather than immediately eliciting grief on the part of the observer, if observed without understanding the object or cause of the actor's grief. Therefore, sympathy "does not arise so much from the view of the passion, as from that of the situation which excites it" (16). This distinction suggests a complicated interplay between the affective and cognitive realms, much like Hume's complex traffic between "impressions" and "ideas."

Smith characterizes sympathy not only as a natural human behavior, but also as a source of pleasure. "Nothing pleases us more than to observe in other men a fellow-feeling with all the emotions of our own breast" (18). But this sense of pleasure cannot be based merely on "self-love," he reasons, for why would we take pleasure in observing the grief of a fellow-mourner? He concludes that "correspondence of the sentiments of others with our own appears to be a cause of pleasure, and the want of it a cause of pain," even when the sentiment in question is sadness: "sympathy… enlivens joy and alleviates grief" (19). Smith's argument here is somewhat circular: could the sight of others experiencing a shared

grief not also appeal to human narcissism? If part of "self-love" is the belief that one has responded appropriately to certain events, could the grief of others not serve as a form of validation, even contributing to one's own positive view of oneself? Yet Smith's insistence that self-love is not the basis for all human behavior reveals that he did not "believ[e] in the dominating presence [or] the rationality of human selfishness" (Sen x).

In addition to a correspondence between the emotions of actors and observers, Smith believed fellow-feeling to rely upon a sense of proportionality—both between the actor's emotions and the events that caused them and between the emotions of actor and observer. "If I laugh loud and heartily when [a friend] only smiles," or if "my grief exceeds [his]," both individuals experience a sense of "dissonance" (22). Sympathy therefore involves a proportionality between sentiments; the observer "approve[s] of the passions of another… as suitable to their objects" (22). Presumably this "suitability" would lead to a corresponding sympathy; if the Other's sentiments seem justified by circumstances and events, I am likely to share them. But in some cases, Smith continues, we may approve of others' sentiments *without* feeling them too, such as a stranger's grief at the death of a loved one. "We should… approve of his grief" even though we may not share it, for example, if the actors in question "are entirely unknown to us" (23). Sympathy involves the observer's judgments about the "suitableness or unsuitableness" of emotional responses as well as the "proportion or disproportion which the affection seems to bear to the cause" (24). But even when these conditions are met, and the observer's judgments are favorable, the corresponding emotion may not be elicited from the observer.

The final stipulation above recalls Hume's statements about the human tendency to feel greater sympathy for those who resemble us (*resemblance*), those who bear close relationships to us (*acquaintance*), and those who are physically near us (*contiguity*). Smith

similarly concludes that we "expect less sympathy from a common acquaintance than from a friend… [and] still less sympathy from an assembly of strangers" (29). Here both theorists essentially agree with Aristotle's claim that "we pity those who are like us in age, character, disposition, social standing, or birth; for in all these cases it appears more likely that the same misfortune may befall us also" (*Rhetoric* 78). To these claims, Smith adds a sliding scale: the more intimately an observer knows or cares for the actor, the more sympathetically s/he will respond. From the cusp of the eighteenth century, this influential philosopher construed something like empathy as a function of familiarity and a matter of proper etiquette. Soon it would be recognized as a more pressing concern, or even a matter of survival.

Darwinian Evolution and the Expression of Emotions

Nineteenth-century theories of evolution and natural selection are not often considered in conjunction with sympathy, sentiment, or human psychology. At first glance, these theories seem to emphasize conflict and competition over imaginative identification or humane interaction; the socializing inclinations of Hume and Smith appear to be supplanted by visions of a dark, amoral struggle to survive. Charles Darwin himself noted in *On The Origin of Species* (1859) that the "struggle for existence" might be "most severe between individuals and varieties of the same species" (128, 114). This statement seems especially prescient because it was published just one year before the onset of the U.S. Civil War, one of the bloodiest and most destructive struggles for existence in human history. Darwin's groundbreaking book was first published in the U.S. in January 1860, and his theories were soon touted in support of scientific racism and the eugenics movement. Roger Smith writes that

> Theories of social evolution, which were developed independently of Darwin…
> focused on the description of developmental stages to describe human evolution….
> [Social Darwinists] saw a parallelism between the development of the individual

mind, from childlike sentiments to mature thought and emotion, and the development of culture" (479).

For example, in his 1868 German work *Natürliche Schöpfungsgeschichte* [published in translation as *The History of Creation* in 1876], Ernst Haeckel drew on Darwin's work to argue in favor of polygenism—the belief that separate races derived from distinct "pre-human" origins. The book's frontispiece featured twelve racial/facial profiles, "descending" row by row from top left to bottom right, respectively representing the "Indo-German," the "Chinese," the "Fuegian," the "Australian Negro," the "African Negro," the "Tasmanian," the gorilla, the chimpanzee, the "orang," the gibbon, the proboscis monkey, and the mandrill (Scott).
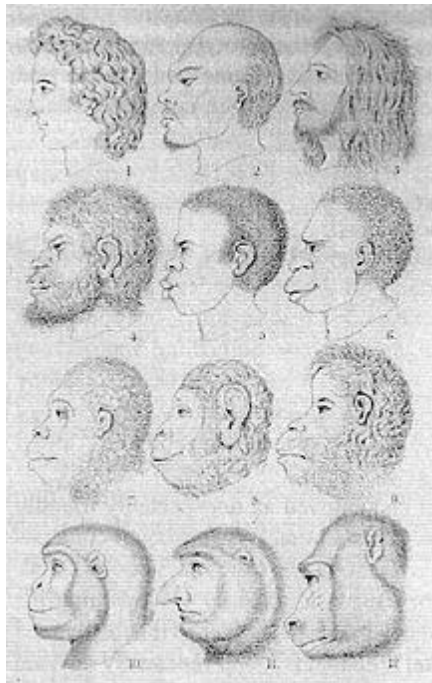
Gustav Müller, frontispiece to Haeckel's *Natürliche Schöpfungs-geschichte* (1868), depicting six human "races" and six simian species

To Haeckel, these images demonstrated that "the differences between the lowest humans and the highest apes are smaller than the differences between the lowest and the highest humans" (qtd in Weikart 106). He went on to identify ten separate "species" of

humans (later expanding the number to twelve), arguing that they had become biologically differentiated at a pre-human stage through a process that paralleled the development of separate languages. "Just as… the German, Slavonic, Greco-Latin, and Irano-Indian parent language[s] are derived from a single common Indo-Germanic parent tongue, and just as their differences are explained by *Adaptation*," wrote Haeckel, "so in like manner the different species, genera, families, orders, and classes of vertebrate animals are derived from a single common vertebrate form of animal" (111). In other words, Haeckel argued that different "races" of humans diverged from each other before becoming "fully human"—a derivation that he mapped onto the pre-historic origins of different languages. In a later work, the 1904 *Lebenswunder* [*Wonder of Life*], Haeckel would write that "the value of life of these lower wild peoples is equal to that of the anthropoid apes or stands only slightly above them" (qtd in Weikart 109). The pathways to the eugenics movement and fascist ideology lay clearly ahead.

But Darwin had not intended for his theories to support such rhetoric, and in *The Descent of Man* (1871), he argued in favor of *monogenesis*—the notion of a common ancestry for all humans. James Moore and Adrian Desmond argue that Darwin was motivated in part to write about human evolution by "his revulsion at slavery. He felt not only scientific curiosity but a moral imperative to explain how racial differences arose naturally within one human species" (xiii-xiv). Nevertheless, he "dreaded publishing the *Descent*," for he expected his friends and associates to consider him "an outcast & a reprobate" after reading it (qtd in xv). Similar fears had prevented him from including any explicit references to "races" of humans in *Origin*. Yet, Moore and Desmond explain, throughout the 1850s and 1860s, "Darwin was fortifying himself" to publish his true

conclusions, and he did so in part by requiring his children to read anti-slavery novels, including *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (xxviii).

Darwin's opus on human evolution begins with a section that outlines the evidence for non-human origins for the human race, including "homologous structures in man and the lower animals" (22), "the causes which have led to [humans] becoming erect" (71), "the gradually increasing weight of the brain and skull in man" (75), and the "advancement of the intellectual powers through natural selection" (152). In the book's third chapter, Darwin addresses the "difference in mental power between the highest ape and the lowest savage" and finds it "immense" (85)—countering Haeckel's equation of less technologically advanced humans to "anthropoid apes." Lois Cuddy and Claire Roche have argued that "Darwin's rhetoric in *The Descent of Man*… represents and further justifies white man's belief in his own superiority," based on his use of a taxonomic scale of "high" to "low" humanity (18), but in fact Darwin seems to stress similarities between even the most divergent human beings, rather than emphasizing their difference. For example, he writes that "the Fuegians rank amongst the lowest barbarians; but I was continually struck with surprise how closely the three natives on board HMS 'Beagle,' who had lived some years in England, and could talk a little English, resembled us in disposition and in most of our mental faculties" (*Descent* 86). Although the rhetoric of racial hierarchies and racialist ideas echoes throughout his book, when one considers the great resistance Darwin faced in publishing his research, his attempt to draw similarities with what he perceived to be "the lowest barbarians" of the human race rather than drawing distinctions between them and himself seems to counter the rhetoric of Haeckel and other eugenicists—both those of Darwin's day and those yet to come.

After *The Descent of Man*, Darwin went on to posit more extensive similarities between humans of disparate races and cultures in *The Expression of Emotions in Man and Animals* (1872). The book is in many ways an extension of the two previous works, as Darwin finds in his objects of study all the more evidence to support the evolution of humans and "distinct but allied species" including "various monkeys" from "a common progenitor" (13). Yet he emphasizes not a "vertical" model—with various races closer to or farther removed from the apes, on an evolutionary scale—but rather a "horizontal" model which asserts various human "expressions and gestures" that other species do not share (16). The introduction includes sixteen hypotheses, for which Darwin hopes more evidence can be found in "all the races of mankind, especially with those who have associated but little with Europeans" (16-17). This evidence would support Darwin's theory of fundamentally shared human characteristics that transcended cultural differences: a common biological inheritance for all *Homo sapiens*. For example, Darwin asks, "When a man is indignant or defiant does he frown, hold his body and head erect, square his shoulders and clench his fists?" (16; hypothesis 3), and "When a man wishes to show that he cannot prevent something being done, or cannot himself do something, does he shrug his shoulders, turn inwards his elbows, extend outwards his hands and open the palms; with the eyebrows raised?" (18; hypothesis 13).

Certainly, in his call for (western) researchers to go observe "those who have associated but little with Europeans," Darwin reiterates the rhetoric and the methodology of European anthropologists studying "primitive" Others, a project often conflated with imperialism, slavery, and western hegemony. Nevertheless, the research questions that he lays out in *Expression* seem motivated by a hypothetical universalism that focuses on human similarities rather than cultural differences or eccentricities. As Patrick Colm Hogan argues,

"no racist ever justified the enslavement of Africans or colonial rule in India on the basis of a claim that whites and nonwhites share universal human properties. Rather, they based their justifications on presumed differences among Europeans, Africans, and Indians, usually biological differences, but often cultural differences as well" (38). To the contrary, Darwin's project was not an attempt to define a western self through a sense of primitive difference, but an early attempt at interracial and intercultural, or even universal human empathy. For in reading Darwin's hypotheses, one can infer the author's unstated opinion after every question: *Yes, I believe we all do!*

Darwin proposes three general principles that characterize the expression of emotions by humans and other closely related species—focusing on mammals and especially on primates. By "expression," he does not merely signify facial expressions; rather, the category includes "movements or changes in any part of the body," such as a dog wagging its tail, a horse pawing the ground, or "the dilation of the capillary vessels of the skin" (29). These "expressions" include involuntary changes, such as the dilation of the irises or the quickening of a heartbeat, as well as intentional or voluntary movements. Darwin's first principle of "serviceable associated habits" describes a use-association for certain physiological responses to external conditions or sentiments (29). Many of these responses entail changes to the eyes; for example, Darwin notes that even from infancy, humans instinctively wince or blink when surprised by a loud noise, as if to shield their eyes from danger. Because this is a logical response, he surmises that "some actions, which were at first performed consciously, have become through habit and association converted into reflex actions" (41). This notion follows the Lamarckian principle of "soft heritability"—the transmission of learned or acquired traits to one's offspring. As a related non-human example, Darwin notes that dogs, wolves, jackals, and foxes "often make with all four feet a few scratches backwards" after

"voiding their excrement," though the action is rarely effective in covering said excrement.

Darwin judged this instinctive behavior "a purposeless remnant of an habitual movement,

which was originally followed by some remote progenitor of the dog-genus for a definite

purpose, and which has been retained" without a sense of purpose (46). He recapitulates this

first principle:

> when any sensation, desire, dislike, &c., has led during a long series of generations to
> some voluntary movement, then a tendency to the performance of a similar
> movement will almost certainly be excited, whenever the same, or any analogous or
> associated sensation… is experienced; notwithstanding that the movement in this case
> may not be of the least use. (51)

Expressions of emotion, he suggests, arise over "a long series of generations" from initially

purposeful gestures and physiological responses into habits that are passed along as instinct.

The infant does not know why it blinks any more than the dog knows why it "scratches

backwards"; the purpose has been lost in transmission.

Darwin's second principle is the "principle of antithesis," describing expressive

actions that physically demonstrate opposite or contrary emotions. As an example, he

describes the contrary stances of dogs when they are angry or affectionate:

> When a dog approaches a strange dog or man in a savage or hostile frame of mind he
> walks upright and very stiffly; his head is slightly raised… the tail is held erect and
> quite rigid; the hairs bristle… the pricked ears are directed forwards, and the eyes
> have a fixed stare…. These actions follow from the dog's intention to attack his
> enemy…. (53)
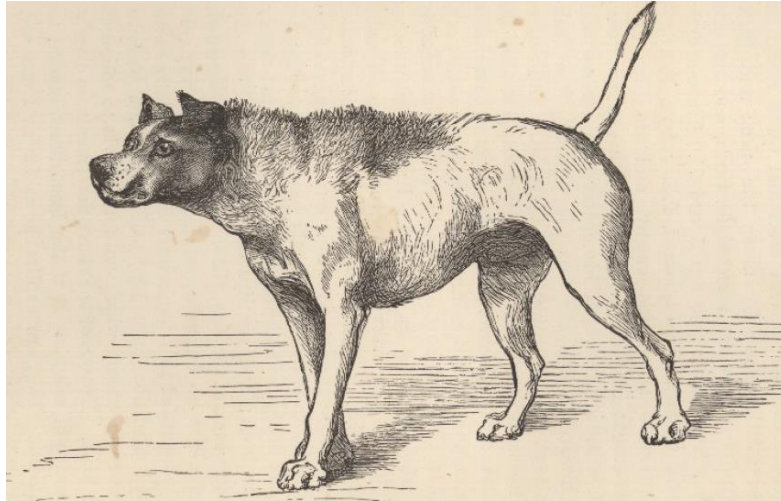
"Dog approaching another dog with hostile intentions" (54)

Conversely, when this hypothetical dog realizes that the invading stranger whom it

previously threatened is in fact its master,

> his whole bearing is reversed. Instead of walking upright, the body sinks downwards
> or even crouches, and is thrown into flexuous movements; his tail, instead of being
> held stiff and upright, is lowered and wagged from side to side; his hair instantly
> becomes smooth; his ears are depressed and drawn backwards, but not closely to the
> head; and his lips hang loosely. (53)

"The same in a humble and affectionate frame of mind" (55)

From these and many other examples, Darwin argues that physical postures and

gestures have evolved as a mechanism for expressing contrary emotions, even though they

are often assumed unconsciously or automatically. For example, he notes that humans often

demonstrate "impotence or an apology" by "shrugging the shoulders"—a gesture which he

believes was probably developed as a pre-conscious or unintentional movement. "The gesture is sometimes used consciously and voluntarily, but it is extremely improbable that it was at first deliberately invented… [for] young children sometimes shrug their shoulders under the above states of mind" (65). He likens the vocabulary of nonverbal gestures to languages which were "invented" by man, "if, indeed, the word *invented* can be applied to a process, completed by innumerable steps, half-consciously made" (63). Darwin understood that for "social animals" such as humans, "the power of intercommunication between the members of the same community…between the opposite sexes, as well as between the young and the old,—is of the highest importance" (62). These physical, nonverbal forms of communication provide the foundation for primitive forms of mindreading and empathy, as observers were able to perceive the mental states of other humans, even without hearing and understanding their thoughts.

Darwin proposed that "the performance of ordinary movements of an opposite kind, under opposite impulses of the will, has become habitual in us and in the lower animals, so when actions of one kind have become firmly associated with any sensation or emotion, it appears natural that actions of a directly opposite kind, though of no use, should be unconsciously performed through habit and association, under the influence of a directly opposite sensation or emotion" (67). In other words, habit had caused certain gestures to become associated with certain emotions, for what Darwin called "useful" purposes: to threaten, to entice, or to express humility. His second principle posits that some types of expressions became habitual merely as counterpoints to the emotions they opposed.

Darwin's third principle asserts that the nervous system in humans and other animals could produce actions or expressions "independent of the will, and, to a large extent of habit" (69). In certain cases, autonomic expressions of emotion derive from "historical" or

evolutionary use-associations; for example, Darwin notes that a person or animal afflicted with extreme pain in one limb is often seen "to shake it, as if to shake off the cause, though this may obviously be impossible" (76). Likewise, crying out or screaming in pain may relate back to the (useful) tendency of "the young of most animals, when in distress or danger, [to] call loudly to their parents for aid" (76). Nevertheless, not all seemingly autonomic actions clearly demonstrate such "usefulness": trembling, observable in a number of strong emotional states, "is of no service, often of much disservice" (70). Whatever the reason for the range of responses—and Darwin considers a wide variety of facial expressions, gestures, and automatic processes such as breathing and cardiac function—Darwin asserts that most can be explained through a combination of his three principles. Nevertheless, it is not always in humans' power to control their responses or the way emotions are expressed. "A man suffering from grief may command his features, but cannot always prevent the tears from coming into his eyes. A hungry man, if tempting food is placed before him, may not show his hunger by any outward gesture, but he cannot check the secretion of saliva" (79). Darwin believed that such responses evolved over "the long line of our descent," and moreover that "all the chief expressions exhibited by man are the same throughout the world" (384, 381). The expression of emotions might not be completely under humans' control, but Darwin believed it to result from a fundamentally shared set of physiological responses to a variety of conditions and emotional states.

Darwin echoes Hume and Smith as he marvels at the dynamic of human sympathy—by which he, like his predecessors, describes the communicability of emotions, particularly those of friends or relatives. "Many a man, from whose eyes no suffering of his own could wring a tear, has shed tears at the sufferings of a beloved friend," wrote Darwin (228). "It is still more remarkable that sympathy with the happiness or good fortune of those whom we

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tenderly love should lead to the same result" (228). He proposed one reason for this phenomenon: "the long-continued habit of restraint which is so powerful in checking the free flow of tears from bodily pain, has not been brought into play in preventing… tears in sympathy with the sufferings or happiness of others" (229). Darwin anticipated the work of more recent Theory of Mind scholars in his conclusion about the importance of emotional expression (and their proper interpretation) for the welfare of the human race. "We readily perceive sympathy in others by their expressions; our sufferings are thus mitigated and our pleasures increased; and mutual good feeling is thus strengthened" (386). The communication of corresponding emotions—the cognitive and behavioral basis for what later scholars would call empathy—could perhaps be explained as an evolved capability that promotes human understanding and potentially helps to prevent conflict.

William James, Emotions, and the Question of Truth

William James did not disagree so much with Darwin's theories as with the ways in which they were received by scientists and philosophers as all-encompassing truths about human existence. In general, James echoed Darwin's beliefs about the transmission or communication of human emotions as well as his evolutionary approach to the topic. Once an assistant and understudy of Darwin's outspoken critic (and polygenesist) Louis Agassiz, James wrote to his brother Henry in 1868, "the more I think of Darwin's ideas, the more weighty do they appear to me…. I believe that that scoundrel Agassiz is unworthy either intellectually or morally for him to wipe his shoes on" (qtd in Menand 142). Louis Menand writes that James "believed that the theory of natural selection should be regarded like any other idea—as a hypothesis, good in some situations, not so good in others, and not as a basis for values" (145). James understood—both in keeping with Darwin's work and counter to

many strains of social Darwinism—that humans had evolved "the capacity to make choices *incompatible* with 'the survival of the fittest'" (Menand 146), and this would become a central premise of his 1890 opus *The Principles of Psychology*, a book as grounded in uncertainty as many Darwinians considered *On The Origin of Species* grounded in certainty. James worked on the two-volume study for twelve years, and upon completing it he reported to publisher Henry Holt that his "loathsome, distended, tumefied, bloated, dropsical mass, testif[ied] to nothing but two facts: 1st, that there is no such thing as a *science* of psychology, and 2nd, that W. J. is an incapable" (qtd in Goodman para. 10).

The psychologist, wrote James, often considered "the minds he studies" as mere objects; he "reports them and their mutual relations as truly as he can without troubling himself with the puzzle of how he can report them at all" (*Principles* I: 183-184). The "irreducible data of psychology," properly conceived, consisted of "four squares," which James labeled as follows:

William James's "four squares" of psychology (*Principles* I: 184)

The error, James argued, was omitting the first square from the theory of knowledge. Therefore, he insisted that "*Introspective Observation is what we have to rely on first and foremost and always*… the looking into our own minds and reporting what we there discover" (I: 185; author's emphasis).

James's particular brand of pragmatism, often called "radical empiricism," might be described as a theory of consciousness, a way of understanding humans' relationships to their objects of inquiry. In his chapter on "Reasoning," he writes,

> All ways of conceiving a concrete fact, if they are true ways at all, are equally true ways. *There is no property* ABSOLUTELY *essential to any one thing*. The same property which figures as the essence of a thing on one occasion becomes a very inessential feature upon another. (*Principles* II: 333)

James offers as an example the paper on which he is currently writing his manuscript.

> Now that I am writing, it is essential that I conceive my paper as a surface for inscription…. But if I wished to light a fire… the essential way of conceiving the paper would be as combustible material…. It is really *all* that it is: a combustible, a writing surface, a thin thing, a hydrocarbonaceous thing, a thing eight inches one way and ten another, a thing just one furlong east of a certain stone in my neighbor's field, an American thing, etc., etc., *ad infinitum*. (II: 333)

To James, finding the "truth" about any "thing" was primarily an exercise in perspective-taking. "My excuse is necessity," he writes, "the necessity which my finite and practical nature lays upon me" (II: 333). "Truth" was a function of usefulness and necessity. As Will Durant explains, "Scholasticism asked, What *is* the thing,—and lost itself in 'quiddities'; Darwinism asked, What is its origin?—and lost itself in nebulas; pragmatism asks, What are its consequences?—and turns the face of thought to action and the future" (669).

In his 1899 collection *Talks to Teachers on Psychology: and to Students on Some of Life's Ideals*, James extended this relativistic approach to broader conclusions about the human experience, emphasizing the importance of understanding that other beings encounter the world through different sensory experiences and value systems.

> Hands off: neither the whole of truth nor the whole of good is revealed to any single observer, although each observer gains a partial superiority of insight from the peculiar position in which he stands. Even prisons and sick-rooms have their special revelations. (qtd in Goodman para. 34)

This commitment to acknowledging what James called the "plurality of outlooks," he argued,

"commands us to tolerate, respect, and indulge those whom we see harmlessly interested and happy in their own ways, however unintelligible these may be to us" (qtd in para. 34). He was describing a prerequisite of altruistic empathy: an appreciation for the perspectives of others. Later he would come to include the practice of philosophy in his analysis. Philosophical theories, James wrote in *A Pluralistic Universe* (1909), "are just so many visions, modes of feeling the whole push… forced on one by one's total character and experience, and on the whole *preferred*—there is no other truthful word—as one's best working attitude" (qtd in para. 44).

At times James's commitment to seeing the world from multiple perspectives rendered him almost incapable of decisive action. Louis Menand quips that James "thought that certainty was moral death, and he hated to foreclose anything" (75). His initial decision to resign from Harvard took him four years to act upon, and Menand cites some telling snippets from James's diary from the fall and winter of 1905:

> October 26, "Resign!"; October 28, "Resign!!!"; November 4, "Resign?"; November 7, "Resign!"; November 8, "Don't resign"; November 9, "Resign!"; November 16, "*Don't* resign!"; November 23, "Resign"; December 7, "Don't resign"; December 9, "Teach here next year." He retired in 1907. (75-76)

Perhaps this seeming inability to make up his mind led James to take such a strong interest in the force of habit on individual volition and the physiological basis of emotions. Although some human habits were based on "innate tendency," he believed that through "education" habits could be cultivated—preferably "by the age of thirty," at which point he believed that "the character has set like plaster, and will never soften again" (*Principles* I: 121).

James's theory of emotion, often called the "James-Lange theory" for its (acknowledged) debt to the Danish physiologist Carl Lange, described the conscious processing of emotion as a sort of afterthought or secondary reaction to initial, physiological

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changes. In a famous passage, James explained that "common-sense says, we lose our fortune, are sorry and weep; we meet a bear, are frightened and run; we are insulted by a rival, are angry and strike." To the contrary, he argued, "we feel sorry because we cry, angry because we strike, afraid because we tremble" (*Principles* II: 449-450). James therefore reversed the traditional notion that "perception of some emotion-arousing event" led to an emotional response, which in turn brought about a physiological reaction (Goodwin 181). Instead, he argued that "the bodily changes that *are* the emotions are felt immediately upon the perception of an emotion-arousing stimulus, prior to the awareness of a cognitively recognizable emotion" (182; emphasis added). In other words, by the time we are aware of experiencing fear, grief, or anger, our bodies are already enacting it.

William James's work proceeds from his father's but does not always affirm it; indeed, Kristin Boudreau writes that "William's lifework took the form, in part, of a response to his father's theories" (174). In place of a monistic cosmos premised upon "unity with a larger being," William posited a "pluralistic universe" in which meaning is always contingent and truths are better understood as hypotheses (175). In James's work, Kristin Boudreau observes, "sympathy emerges as a significant problem impinging on psychological, philosophical, social, medical, and spiritual realms" (176). Therefore, it is somewhat surprising that in *The Principles of Psychology*, James devotes only two pages (out of nearly 1,400) to an explicit discussion of sympathy. He registers, but does not resolve the ongoing debate among contemporary psychologists over whether or not human sympathy is based on instinct or self-interest. James merely notes that certain "forms of sympathy, [such as] that of mother with child… are surely primitive," and that "menace or harm to the adult beloved or friend excites us in a corresponding way, often against all the dictates of prudence" (410). Nor are these traits unique to humans: "a dog will lick another sick dog, and even bring him

food; and the sympathy of monkeys is proved by many observations to be strong" (410)—here the influence of Darwin's work is clearly demonstrated.

But even if some forms of sympathy are instinctive or "primitive," James notes that the sympathetic response is "peculiarly liable to inhibition from other instincts," such as fear, disgust, anger, and the "hunting instinct" which leads humans to fight and kill (411). "If evolution and the survival of the fittest be true at all," writes James, "the destruction of prey and of human rivals *must* have been among the most important of man's primitive functions…. It is just because human bloodthirstiness is such a primitive part of us that it is so hard to eradicate" (412).

William James highlights a number of apparent paradoxes in the nature of sympathy as well as what we now call empathy: both are apparently grounded in instinct, but they often operate *counter* to self-interest. Therefore, to repeat Menand's apt phrase, they seem to function "incompatibl[y] with 'the survival of the fittest'" (146)—but only if that Darwinian process is understood strictly as a competition between individuals. In the case of parents imaginatively identifying with their children, or regarding the conciliatory effects of fellow-feeling between rival groups, the very abnegation of immediate and individual self-interests may actually prove crucial to collective survival—of the group, or even of the species. (This idea would receive a more nuanced and comprehensive explanation in Richard Dawkin's 1976 book *The Selfish Gene*.) Second, James's theory of emotion suggests that our conscious awareness of feeling functions as an afterthought to more immediate physiological responses. If this is true, and if shared or transmitted emotion is the basis for sympathy and empathy, would it be possible for these interpersonal relations to function in a non-deterministic fashion? Yet James does not give himself entirely over to determinism; his pragmatist philosophy repeatedly insists upon its own "usefulness." Rather, James's belief in the possibility of

cultivating desirable habits suggests that an element of free will remains, even if the true extent of its freedom is less than humans would like to believe or have traditionally believed. While his lifelong devotion to the study of the human mind indicates his belief that human relations could be understood and influenced through persistent efforts, James's conclusions were ultimately—and quintessentially—indeterminate. On his desk, after his death in 1910, James's final words were found, inscribed on a single sheet of paper. They read, "There is no conclusion. What has concluded that we might conclude in regard to it? There are no fortunes to be told and there is no advice to be given. Farewell" (qtd in Durant 678).

Twentieth-Century Pragmatism: Dewey on Emotional Experience

If William James accepted Darwin's theories only partially and reluctantly, John Dewey embraced them completely. Will Durant writes that "mind as well as body was to [Dewey] an organ evolved, in the struggle for existence. His starting-point in every field was Darwinian" (681). Both thinkers are often classified as "pragmatists," but William James remained interested in metaphysics throughout his career—even dabbling in mysticism in his later years—while Dewey flatly dismissed any philosophy that "got lost in dreams of another world" (qtd in Durant 682). Both theorists repeatedly discussed the power of instinct and habit, but while James seemed to find certain dispositions and impulses almost inevitable, Dewey believed strongly in the ameliorative power of education, training, and culture. "The noblest man living in a desert absorbs something of its harshness and sterility, while the nostalgia of a mountain-bred man when cut off from his surroundings is proof how deeply environment has become part of his being" (*Art* 359). Dewey argued that philosophers and psychologists often overestimated the power of instinct, and he maintained that most aspects of human behavior could be "considerably modified and controlled by social training"

(Durant 684). Small wonder that this theorist would become such a cherished figure in the field of educational philosophy.

Dewey, like James, was integral in the development of modern psychology, and both scholars were fascinated by the so-called "reflex arc"—the notion that reflexive actions could bypass the brain. Many of the foundational experiments that established this notion were carried out on recently decapitated frogs, whose nervous systems would nevertheless respond to a variety of stimuli. In his 1896 essay "The Reflex Arc in Psychology," Dewey argued for a more continuous model of reflexive reactions that did not "assume sensory stimulus and motor response as distinct psychical existences" but rather asserted an unbroken "circuit" from stimulus to response that comprised a "sensori-motor coordination" (360-361). In an even earlier essay that predated James's *Principles of Psychology*, Dewey acknowledged on the one hand the contributions of "physiological psychology"—presumably including the frog-decapitators—but also warned that "physiology can no more, of itself, give us the what, why, and how of psychical life, than the physical geography of a country can enable us to construct or explain the history of the nation that has dwelt within that country" ("New"). Dewey was aware of the value of new insights into the ways in which the human brain and nervous system functioned, but he also believed there were mysteries that physiology alone could not illuminate.

Both theorists were also interested in aesthetic experiences and judgments. In Chapter Three of *Art as Experience* (1934), which Tom Leddy calls "Dewey's most famous writing in aesthetics" (2.3), Dewey writes that "the intimate nature of emotion is manifested in the experience of one watching a play on the stage or reading a novel…. Experience is emotional but there are no separate things called emotions in it" (*Art* 43). Dewey seems to argue against the James-Lange theory of emotion here (without explicitly naming it) when he asserts that

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> We jump instantaneously when we are scared, as we blush on the instant when we are ashamed. But fright and shamed modesty are not in this case emotional states. Of themselves they are but automatic reflexes. In order to become emotional they must become parts of an inclusive and enduring situation that involves concerns for objects and their issues. (44)

Whereas James had located emotion squarely in the physiology of jumping or blushing—going so far as *equating* the physiological changes to the emotion felt—Dewey defines the realm of emotion as a *separate* domain of conscious recognition that may *follow* physiology, but at times is separate from it, or even completely disconnected. The decapitated frog presumably feels no pain, even though it may respond to certain stimuli just as a thinking, feeling human would.

Why did this matter? Dewey compared human mental processes to the movement of physical objects that are "physically transported" in the construction of "a new object":

> The miracle of mind is that something similar takes place in experience without physical transport and assembling. Emotion is the moving and cementing force…. It provides unity in and through the varied parts of an experience. When the unity is of the sort already described, the experience has aesthetic character even though it is not, dominantly, an aesthetic experience. (*Art* 44)

Dewey believed that aesthetic perceptions and responses are properly understood in terms of experiences: finite sets of (inter)actions and perceptions, bounded by time and space, which cohere as distinct and definable events. Such an event, explains Tom Leddy, is "marked off from other experiences, containing within itself an individualizing quality" (2.3). Dewey describes various examples of such experiences: "a piece of work is finished in a way that is satisfactory; a problem receives its solution; a game is played through; a situation… is so rounded out that its close is a consummation and not a cessation" (*Art* 37). This way of understanding human experiences seems very much in keeping with James's pragmatism: it functions and makes sense on an experiential basis; its rules are flexible and loose; its truths are defined situationally rather than universally. "Experience is realistic, not abstract,"

Dewey wrote in "The New Psychology" (1884). "Psychical life is the fullest, deepest, and richest manifestation of this experience. The New Psychology is content to get its logic from this experience, and not do violence to the sanctity and integrity of the latter [experience] by forcing it to conform to certain preconceived abstract ideas." Like William James, Dewey wanted the messy and individualized experience of human existence to direct the new discipline of psychology, not some abstract, theoretical notion of what human existence generally or notionally entailed.

Dewey's understanding of empathy is therefore set in the context of an aesthetic emotional experience, and it accounts for the mental states of the empathizing subject as well as the object of empathy. He argues that the "nature and import" of such an experience "can be expressed only by art, because there is a unity of experience that can be expressed only as an experience" (*Art* 44). Empathy, a term introduced initially to describe the aesthetic appreciation of artistic objects, is here applied to the field of human psychology, only to liken it to aesthetic and philosophical investigations. As an example, Dewey considers an interview that takes place between a hypothetical employer and a hypothetical job applicant. "The primary emotions on the part of the applicant may be at the beginning hope or despair, and elation or disappointment at the close. These emotions qualify the experience as a unity…" (44).

> But as the interview proceeds, secondary emotions are evolved as variations of the primary underlying one. It is even possible for each attitude and gesture, each sentence, almost every word, to produce more than a fluctuation in the intensity of the basic emotion; to produce, that is, a change of shade and tint in its quality. The employer sees by means of his own emotional reactions the character of the one applying. He projects him imaginatively into the work to be done and judges his fitness by the way in which the elements of the scene assemble and either clash or fit together. The presence and behavior of the applicant either harmonize with his own attitudes and desires or they conflict and jar. (44-45)

The employer perceives the applicant's mental state, both in terms of "basic emotions" and in subtle shades of emotion that vary in quality and intensity. These perceptions are based on

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nuances of attitudes and gestures as well as word choices. But at the same time, the employer considers "his own emotional reactions" to the applicant, and he "projects him imaginatively into the work to be done." The experience is active as well as passive: the employer combines his own affective response to the applicant and his vision of how the applicant would perform the job, based on the applicant's words, actions, and emotional affect. In this hypothetical situation, the minds and bodies of two humans engage in a complicated interplay, and the nature of their interaction has very tangible effects for both. Empathy occurs—to whatever extent and in whatever fashion—through the mutual engagement of embodied minds. James famously described the sensory world of a newborn child as "one great blooming, buzzing confusion" (*Principles* I: 488); Dewey's model of empathetic engagement might be called a "blooming, buzzing exchange" of cognitive and affective information.

The Prehistory, in Hindsight

The development of modern beliefs about empathy (and sympathy, the rubric under which it has been discussed for most of human history) has therefore come full-circle. The ancient Greeks conceived of *catharsis* as a response to aesthetic and rhetorical situations which could be manipulated for political purposes; the philosophers of the Scottish Enlightenment promoted fellow-feeling as a counter to self-love that was necessary for the peaceful functioning of civil society; Darwin and his followers considered sympathy, rather contradictorily, as both a necessity for human survival and as a false suspension of natural competition; and the pragmatists returned the notion of empathy to the realm of emotion and aesthetics. To be sure, these varying conceptions were proposed in very divergent historical and cultural contexts; Dewey posited an aesthetic view of empathy in a book on aesthetics,

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whereas Hume and Smith were more concerned with the foundation of nation-states, and

Aristotle considered the role of pity as it pertained to ancient Greek tragedy and oratory. But

at the core of these discussions, some fundamental qualities of sympathy and empathy remain

fairly constant. The imaginative identification of humans with other humans is consistently

depicted as a "natural" or innate trait; its functioning is described as a source of pleasure, a

solace in grief, and a salve to pain. Fellow-feeling is often discussed as a counter to selfish

interests and competition. Although some theorists acknowledge that it may actually serve

the interests of those who experience it or that individuals may elicit the sympathies of others

to serve their own ends, it is more often characterized as a counterpoint to selfish or self-

serving pursuits. Thus for Aristotle, we pity others with whose positions we can readily

identify. Adam Smith viewed sympathy as a counterpoint to the self-love that fueled

capitalist economies. Darwin posited universal (and universally perceptible) expressions of

emotion as evolved capabilities that deterred humans from a constant struggle for survival.

For James, sympathy was offset by the "hunting instinct" (II: 411).

One gradual (if not constant) shift can be observed over this "prehistory" of empathy,

and it pertains to the notion of agency regarding human emotions. The ancients discuss

mimêsis, catharsis, and audience reactions as emotional experiences that can be manipulated

by dramatic performances—and, per Plato's recommendations, which can be actively

avoided if judged undesirable. Therefore the clever orator can "make his own character look

right and put his hearers… into the right frame of mind" (*Rhetoric* 59), just as the clever

audience member can presumably choose not to identify with a public speaker or a tragic

character. To Hume and Smith, empathy emerged as an innate human sentiment, an "idea…

converted into an impression" which "acquires such a degree of force and vivacity, as to

become the very passion itself" (*Treatise* 2.1.11: 206). Smith insisted that "it is *by the*

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imagination only that we can form any conception of what [another's] sensations" (*Theory* 13). This imaginative act presupposed a rational and intentional subject: the "we" in his statement "we can form any conception." Though Hume's description suggests that the perceived emotion, after its conversion from idea to impression, takes on a great "degree of force and vivacity"—an intimation of the "autonomy of affect" which recent scholars have seized upon—he nevertheless grounds the process by which such impressions are generated in the narcissistic self. If emotions could convey themselves with such seeming volition, it was only because "the idea, or rather impression of ourselves is always intimately present with us" (2.1.11: 207).

Darwin's view of empathy was markedly less centered in an intentional, rational subject. The linking of physical expressions to particular emotions was perhaps once "performed consciously," but he argued that many such expressions "have [since] become through habit and association converted into reflex actions" (*Expression* 41). Humans are primarily creatures of habit and instinct, Darwin asserted, and we act according to principles that long ago became embedded in our ancestors' genes. This was the first suggestion that emotions could essentially exert their own will, asserting themselves into human subjects rather than being "formed" by willful human subjects. William James carried this notion even farther. Not only do we act according to instinct and habit, but indeed our conscious emotions are physiologically pre-determined: "we feel sorry because we cry, angry because we strike, afraid because we tremble" (*Principles* II: 449-450). James left the door open for free will, for he argued that habits could be intentionally formed and cultivated in order to shape our emotional destiny. But this was a new and different portrait of human volition; rather than a self-determined and self-directed actor, the self was conceived as a constantly shifting entity in a stream of consciousness, subjected to the strong winds of instinct and

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habit. To this portrait, Dewey restored a modicum of human agency—his empathetic subject "projects [the applicant] imaginatively into the work to be done and judges his fitness by the way in which the elements of the scene assemble and either clash or fit together" (*Art* 45). This human actor does ultimately "judge" the other through the workings of his own imagination, echoing Smith and Hume in their model of the rational, intentional self. But the object of the empathizer's judgment is not merely the fellow-human, but rather the "elements of the scene," the overlapping cognitive and affective experiences of both individuals. At the end of this theoretical arc, empathy and other forms of affect are deemed not *quite* autonomous, but they appear to function of their own accord, if not actively and arduously managed.

The Contemporary Science(s) of Empathy

Over the last several decades, scholars in a variety of disciplines—ranging from cognitive psychology to neurobiology to child psychiatry—have made exciting discoveries about the nature and importance of empathy. Studies of autism have revealed the mechanisms of "theory of mind" cognitive processing, in which humans interpret the mental states of other humans by "reading" facial expressions, postures, gestures, and other forms of non-verbal communication.[14] Neuroscientists have realized that "mirror neurons" cause the human brain to undergo a "shared activation" when observing another individual performing an action. Therefore, test subjects who see an individual waving her hand experience brain activity very similar to the individual who actually waves her hand. This "embodied

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[14] For extended discussions of theory of mind processes, see Simon Baron-Cohen, *Mindblindness: An Essay on Autism and Theory of Mind* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1995); Sanjida O'Connell, *Mindreading: An Investigation into How We Learn to Love and Lie* (New York: Doubleday, 1998); Shaun Nichols and Stephen P. Stich, *Mindreading: An Integrated Account of Pretence, Self-Awareness, and Understanding Other Minds* (New York: Oxford UP, 2003); and Lisa Zunshine, *Why We Read Fiction: Theory of Mind and the Novel* (Columbus: Ohio State UP, 2006).

simulation," which occurs automatically and unconsciously in the human brain, may provide

the "fundamental functional mechanism for empathy and, more generally, for understanding

another's mind."[15] Child psychiatrists and developmental psychologists have gained an

increasingly nuanced understanding of how humans learn empathy during infancy and early

childhood, largely enabled by the acquired ability to recognize specific emotions in specific

faces. Recent studies show that failure to "attach" to "parental" figures via facial recognition

dramatically increases infant mortality rates and hampers the ability to enter into intimate

relationships for infants who survive without doing so.[16] Most social scientists now

understand empathy as a complex relation, consisting of both affective and cognitive

dimensions, which enables humans' ability to experience and give love as well as mediating

the "fight-or-flight" instinct to fear or attack the unknown and the unfamiliar. As Maia

Szalavitz and Bruce Perry put it, "empathy underlies virtually everything that makes society

work—like trust, altruism, collaboration, love, [and] charity. Failure to empathize is a key

part of most social problems—crime, violence, war, racism, child abuse, and inequality, to

name just a few" (4).

In a 2010 article in the monthly publication of the *European Molecular Biology*

Organization (EMBO) *Reports*, Philip Hunter notes that "some parts of the picture" of the

"complex emotional processes that enable empathy and altruism" are emerging, including

studies of "so-called consolation behaviour in chimpanzees" and other forms of "sympathetic

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[15] Vittorio Gallese et al, "Intentional Attunement: Mirror Neurons and the Neural Underpinnings of Interpersonal Relations," *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association* 55.1 (2007): 132.

[16] See Mary Main et al, "Security in Infancy, Childhood, and Adulthood: A Move to the Level of Representation" in *Monographs of the Society for Research in Child Development* 50.2-3 (1985): 66-104; Daniel J. Siegel, *The Developing Mind: Toward a Neurobiology of Interpersonal Experience* (New York: Guilford P, 1999); and Maia Szalavitz and Bruce D. Perry, *Born for Love: Why Empathy Is Essential—and Endangered* (New York: HarperCollins, 2010). Though these publications were not been issued by elite university presses, their authors are all highly esteemed professors or former faculty members at UC-Berkeley (Main), UCLA Medical School (Siegel), and Northwestern University Medical School (Perry).

concern" exhibited by both humans and closely related species, including apes, dolphins, elephants, and certain species of birds (166). Sympathetic concern, writes Hunter, may be an offshoot of the neurological development of "spindle neurons," which are "believed to be a vital component of large brains capable of empathic social behaviour" (167). The species that exhibit such behavior all demonstrate evidence of "mirror self-recognition" (MSR), which human children typically develop between 18-24 months of age. Diana Reiss notes that the "onset [of MSR] is concurrent with the emergence of empathic behaviour and other indices of the theory of mind" (qtd in Hunter 166). Hunter concludes that "there seems to be a clear correlation between the emergence of MSR and empathic behaviour" (168). Such evolved capacities, he suggests, might explain behavior that is often categorized as "moral" in humans. "Much of the morality we see in primate and cetacean groups is underwritten by empathy, which is enabled by the kind of awareness of self and other that dolphins and primates—particularly great apes and humans—demonstrate" (168).

But even as human researchers make great strides toward understanding why apes or dolphins engage in certain forms of empathic behavior, rationales for human behavior remain an uncertain object of study. Contemporary researchers at Harvard University and other universities around the world have contributed to "Project Implicit," an online application that allows anonymous users to test their implicit biases and associations. Originally founded as a collaboration between researchers at Harvard University, the University of Virginia, and the University of Washington, Project Implicit seeks to "examine thoughts and feelings that exist either outside of conscious awareness or outside of conscious control" through a "safe, secure, and well-designed virtual environment" (Project). The Project's free online tests direct participants to make time-sensitive choices categorizing various terms into overlapping categories, generally alternating between grouping categories that are often implicitly

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associated or perceived as overlapping and those which counter normative associations. For example, in one block, the standard "race" test requires respondents to distinguish between "white and good" items and "black and bad" items—meaning that the terms can either refer to something white or something good, or the converse; the next block reverses these affiliations and asks the respondent to group terms again. So, the experiment asks participants to rapidly categorize (using a binary, right-or-left criterion) images such as the following:
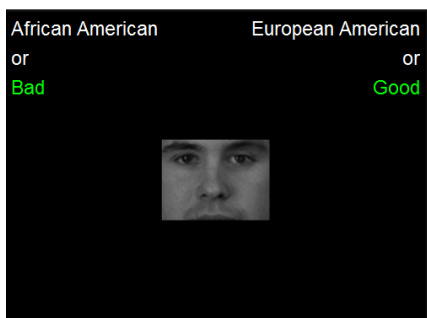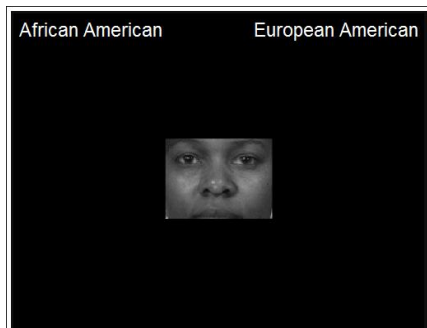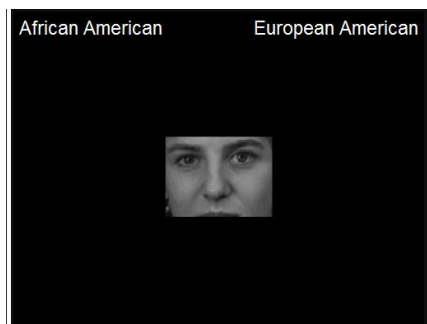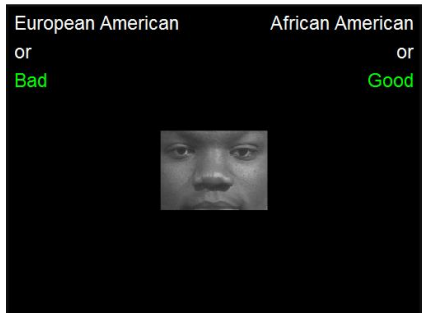
The respondent's speed at categorizing such prompts reveals implicit associations and biases, often running counter to the test subject's stated (or explicit) beliefs. For those who subconsciously associate "black" or "white" with "good"—or "male" or "female" with "career"—the speed with which they categorize "associated" terms is significantly faster. These results demonstrate that "prejudice can operate unwittingly, unintentionally, and unavoidably" (Hardin & Banaji 3). Moreover, the project illustrates that affective responses to members of other "groups"—here, those of other races and genders, but presumably based on any type of associative logic—often function without our conscious knowledge. Therefore, further studies of implicit attitudes may seek to identify "enabling conditions that promote egalitarianism and healthy individuation" (19). Such experiments help to reveal the (usually invisible) potency of normative ideologies, even those that we consciously seek to disavow.

The eminent sociobiologist Edward O. Wilson has recently argued that "tribalism is a fundamental human trait," noting humans' demonstrated propensity to prefer group members

over non-group members in countless social situations, even when the groups have been

randomly assigned (*Social* 57-61). "Our bloody nature," Wilson argues, "is ingrained

because group-versus-group was a principal driving force that made us what we are. In

prehistory, group selection lifted the hominids to heights of solidarity, to genius, to

enterprise. And to fear" ("Biologist" para. 17). This ingrained impulse to privilege the

members of one's own tribe helps to interpret the experimental results of Project Implicit.

Wilson explains that

> When in experiments black and white Americans were flashed pictures of the other
> race, their amygdalas, the brain's center of fear and anger, were activated so quickly and
> subtly that the centers of the brain were unaware of the response. The subject, in effect, could
> not help himself. When, on the other hand, appropriate contexts were added—say, the
> approaching African-American was a doctor and the white his patient—two other sites of the
> brain integrated with the higher learning centers, the cingulate cortex and the dorsolateral
> preferential cortex, lit up, silencing input through the amygdala. Thus different parts of the
> brain have evolved by group selection to create groupishness, as well as to mediate this
> hardwired propensity. (para. 12)

This research demonstrates that empathy across "tribal" lines—however one defines

the tribe—remains possible, but it requires an "uphill climb" against propensities that are

deeply ingrained in our biological history and essentially hard-wired in the human brain.

However, our ever-increasing awareness of the science of empathy promises to suggest new

strategies for controlling our biological destiny, whether as individuals, as a species, or as

citizens of the world.

Chapter Two

INVITATIONS TO EMPATHY AND SYMPATHY IN ABOLITIONIST NARRATIVES

The last chapter explored the long and winding "prehistory" of empathy, and this chapter turns to four works of American literature published during the decade before the Civil War, or in the intellectual chronology laid out in Chapter One, between the publications of Adam Smith and Charles Darwin. The United States were less than a century old, and the nation had recently concluded its involvement in the Mexican-American War, which I will discuss in fuller detail in Chapter Four. This chapter juxtaposes *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, by Harriet Beecher Stowe (1852); *The Heroic Slave*, by Frederick Douglass (1853); *Benito Cereno*, by Herman Melville (1855); and *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, by Harriet Jacobs (1861). These works appealed to readerly empathy (and sympathy) by contrasting scenes of abuse and deprivation with accounts of slave resistance and rebellion that emphasize the intelligence and dignity of the enslaved. These were not the first works of American literature to suggest the possibility of empathy; indeed, the concept was discernible in the earliest works of American fiction and throughout the history of North American slave narratives.[1] However, toward the end of the antebellum era, empathy became an increasingly

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[1] William Hill Brown's *The Power of Sympathy* (1789), widely acknowledged as the first American novel, was intended primarily to warn readers about the dangers of identifying too closely with others and "to Expose the fatal CONSEQUENCES, of SEDUCTION" (Preface). The earliest North American slave narratives, such as *A Narrative of the Uncommon Sufferings, and Surprizing Deliverance of Briton Hammon* (1760) and *A Narrative of the Most Remarkable Particulars in the Life of James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosaw* (1770), contain both implicit and explicit appeals for empathy, though not by that name. Other works of early American literature that are notable for their suggestions of empathy include James Fenimore Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826), Richard Hildreth's *The Slave; or, Memoirs of Archy Moore* (1836), Caroline Gilman's *Recollections of a*

central concern of American authors, both slave and free. These works often depicted

"Others" defined by racial differences, but as I will argue, categories such as gender,

ethnicity, and nationality also played key roles in the construction of identity and the appeal

for empathetic identification. In these works, the notion of a common humanity that

transcends categorical difference becomes central to the plot and is presented as an

overarching message, often with the author or narrator directly addressing the reader. As the

Civil War approached, the urging of empathy (by many other names) became a common

theme in American literature, and characters lacking in empathy—most notably those who

profited from the hunting, trading, buying, and selling of other humans—increasingly

became visible as villains and beliers of American ideals.

Stowe's Stereotypes and the Possibility of Empathy

Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is generally understood as a literary

artifact from the American abolitionist movement and the genre of sentimental fiction, which

reached its greatest popularity during the mid-nineteenth century. Sentimental literature can

be broadly defined as "literature that privileges the expression of feeling over intellect or

reason," though the term *sentimental* often carries negative or pejorative connotations

(Richards). Sentimental literature, discussed by some critics under the categories of

"domestic fiction" (Campbell), "popular fiction" (Tompkins), and "woman's fiction"

(Baym), often focuses on the lives of female protagonists whose daily existence occurs

mostly within the home—either the homes where the protagonists live or where they serve in

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Southern Matron (1838), Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* (1850), and William Wells Brown's *Clotel* (1853). See Julia A. Stern, *The Plight of Feeling: Sympathy and Dissent in the Early American Novel* (U of Chicago P, 1997); Elizabeth Barnes, *States of Sympathy: Seduction and Democracy in the American Novel* (New York: Columbia UP, 1997); and Christine Macdonald, "Judging Jurisdictions: Geography and Race in Slave Law and Literature of the 1830s," *American Literature* 71.4 (Dec 1999): 625-656.

various capacities. These characters generally define themselves through their familial

relationships (or the lack thereof) and struggle to attain a comfortable, stable lifestyle; the

works in which we find them are often marked by "stereotyped characters and sensational,

formulaic plots" (Tompkins xvii). In these works, virtuous characters are tested by the

cruelties of fate and the agents of vice, and their conflicts are usually punctuated with fervent

prayers and earnest tears.

In *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884), Mark Twain pilloried the American

sentimental literary tradition through his character Emmeline Grangerford, who composed

verse eulogies for deceased children. Emmeline's poems, while impeccably rhymed, call

equal attention to the limited scope of their protagonists' experience and to their own facile

art. Consider the young poet's "Ode to Stephen Dowling Bots, Dec'd":

> And did young Stephen sicken,
>   And did young Stephen die?
> And did the sad hearts thicken,
>   And did the mourners cry?
>   ….
> Then list with tearful eye,
>   Whilst I his fate do tell.
> His soul did from this cold world fly,
>   By falling down a well. (115)

Not coincidentally, Twain's sentimental poet has also died before Huck meets her family,

leading him to comment, "Poor Emmeline made poetry about all the dead people when she

was alive, and it didn't seem right that there warn't nobody to make some about her, now she

was gone; so I tried to sweat out a verse or two myself, but I couldn't seem to make it go"

(116). As a personified caricature of sentimental literature, Emmeline's lifespan is short and

full of tears, and she leaves little of artistic merit behind. The earnest Huck, in his inability to

"sweat out" even a stanza of such poesy, serves as a comic dismissal of sentimental literature

and its overwrought, hyperemotional style. As Eliza Richards explains, the term *sentimental*

often serves in literary criticism to "identify and condemn an emotional treatment in excess of its object, a false or contrived emotional response…. But such condemnation often does little except to indicate the taste of the particular critic, for one person's sentimentality may be another's sincere expression of authentic emotion" ("Sentimentality"). Indeed, by the broad definition of the sentimental offered above, Twain's novel could be said to belong to the genre, as its protagonist frequently seems to "privilege the expression of feeling over intellect or reason" (Richards).

The term *sentimentality* also carries historical associations of gender bias, because it was often employed by male literary critics to disparage literature written by female authors for a predominantly female readership—as Twain's example and many that followed it demonstrate. Jane Tompkins observes that "twentieth-century critics have taught generations of students to equate popularity with debasement, emotionality with ineffectiveness, religiosity with fakery, domesticity with triviality, and all of these, implicitly, with womanly inferiority" (*Sensational* 124). Therefore, in her analysis of nineteenth-century "woman's fiction," Nina Baym consciously avoids what she calls the "s word," though she argues that the sentimental should be understood to include "public sympathy and benevolent fellow-feeling" as well as the "private, excessive, undisciplined, self-centered emotionality" with which it is more commonly associated (xxix).[2] Over the last three decades, Tompkins, Baym,

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[2] Nina Baym's study explicitly excludes *Uncle Tom's Cabin* from her argument, because her book identifies an "overplot" in much of what she calls "woman's fiction," and Stowe's novel does not follow this formulaic plot. Baym explains the "overplot": "it is the story of a young girl who is deprived of the supports she had rightly or wrongly depended on to sustain her throughout life and is faced with the necessity of winning her own way in the world" (11). Baym notes that "we cannot strictly compare any female character from *Uncle Tom's Cabin* or any other Stowe novel with a heroine of woman's fiction, because the novel does not participate in the essential overplot and hence feminine roles are differently related to the structure" (16). Nevertheless, her defense of sentimental literature in general and her counter-critique of patriarchalist canon-building are both relevant to my treatment of Stowe's novel.

and other feminist critics have attempted to re-value sentimental fiction by focusing on the cultural and political influence that the genre exerted in American history. As Baym writes, "assessments of American literature have been biased in favor of things male—in favor, say of whaling ships rather than the sewing circle as a symbol of the human community; in favor of satires on domineering mothers, shrewish wives, or betraying mistresses rather than tyrannical fathers, abusive husbands, or philandering suitors; displaying an exquisite compassion for the crises of the adolescent male, but altogether impatient with the parallel crises of the female" (xiii-xiv).

While these attempts to restore texts such as Stowe's to critical prominence offer compelling reasons for their importance, I want to suggest a different reason for reading them. Rather than representing the pinnacle of sentimental literature—a genre or subgenre fraught with negative connotations and gender bias—I argue that *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and other antebellum American texts like it demonstrate an emerging (if still limited and underdeveloped) sense of narrative empathy. Therefore, they presage the important literary and cultural movement that follows rather than the subsequent decline and disparagement of an overwrought, hyperemotional style. These early articulations of empathy, despite their tearful content and their didactic narration, begin to develop an American consciousness of a shared human condition that transcends race, gender, and other constructed categories of identity. Make no mistake: Stowe's text does not arrive at any full conceptualization of empathy; nor does it always emphasize fellow humanity over the various signs and perceptions of the Other. But we continue to read Stowe, and I would argue that we *should* continue to read her work, because it registers the nascent stirrings of empathy in American literature and culture, fraught as they are with the persistent vestiges of racialism, patriarchalism, and ethnocentric logic.

At the heart of this argument lies the crucial distinction between sympathy and empathy—a distinction which, in Stowe's time, yet had no name. As I have outlined in the previous chapter, the first recorded use of the term "empathy" occurred in or around 1909, and its German predecessor *Einfühlung* was not a great deal older, having been coined by Roger Vischer in 1873. Nevertheless, as the previous chapter makes clear, the concept of empathy as a particular strain or element of sympathy had been suggested by many previous theorists, dating back to ancient Greece. If empathy can be described as an imaginative identification with an/other (or an Other), sympathy can be defined as a feeling for (or feeling sorry for) an/other or an Other, more nearly synonymous with pity or compassion.

It would be wrong to characterize sympathy and empathy as completely separate or mutually exclusive entities. Both relations rely on the Theory of Mind or "mindreading" cognitive processes discussed in Chapter One, and neither relation precludes the other. Rather, I argue that we should consider empathy and sympathy as overlapping relations that are nonetheless separated by a crucial distinction: empathy requires a fundamental identification with the Other (its "object") as a fellow human, while sympathy does not require such an imaginative identification.

Consider the example of a slave being whipped. Two abolitionist bystanders might observe the scene side-by-side and equally deplore the action, but one feels a greater degree of empathy (mixed with sympathy) and the other feels a greater degree of sympathy (mixed with empathy). The more sympathetic observer might think,

> *That poor slave. I wonder what he did to deserve such a penalty. Perhaps he is entirely innocent of the charges! He must be suffering terribly. How cruel must a man be to mete out such punishment! I think slavery is a horrid institution, and it should be abolished.*

These sentiments express a strain of "fellow-feeling" that suggests but does not make explicit the kinship of shared humanity. In fact, one might substitute an animal—an abused or

neglected dog, for example—in the place of the slave in the example above, and the sentiments expressed would be just as logical. There is also a palpable disconnection between the suffering slave's actual experience and the "sympathetic" observer's experience of it. The sympathetic observer is strongly opposed to slavery, but his or her relation to the suffering slave maintains a certain distance from personal experience and eschews any inclusive categorization that would group him together with the unfortunate sufferer. Indeed, the spectacle of suffering conveniently serves the political position s/he comes to express. The unfortunate slave remains an Other, despite the observer's sympathy.

In contrast, the more empathetic observer might think,

Such cruelty! Every lash of the whip seems to multiply his pain. I can almost feel the lashes on my own back. His cries make me shiver; I wonder how he endures it. I can't stand to watch.

The differences between this response and the previous one might at first seem slight. But a more careful reading of the two reveals that the second observer engages in a much more personal and imaginative consideration of the slave's experience. S/he repeatedly considers the slave's pain and his mental state, questioning the slave's thought processes and the extent of his agony. S/he imagines the experience of being whipped in a similar fashion, "feeling the pain" of the abused individual. The second observer is, to be sure, both empathetic and sympathetic, and the first observer demonstrates hints of empathy, but the differences between the two responses are clear. Sympathy without a full component of empathy can consider suffering, regret it, denounce it, even work to prevent it from happening again. But full empathy requires a personal response to suffering, one that considers the suffering subject as a fellow-human, through categories that make possible the observer's own inhabitation of the other's place, his perspective, his skin. In the language of platitudes (which, though often uttered without introspective analysis, nevertheless often convey a

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culture's conventional wisdom), the empathetic individual can imagine feeling another person's pain, stepping into another's skin, walking a mile in another's shoes.

In the final chapter of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (titled "Concluding Remarks"), Stowe identifies the various audiences to whom her book is directed: "To you, generous, noble-minded men and women of the South,—you, whose virtue, and magnanimity and purity of character, are the greater for the severer trial it has encountered,—to you is [my] appeal" (622). Stowe also directly addresses the "men and women of America" more generally, as well as "you, mothers of America" and "northern men, northern mothers, northern Christians" (623-624). Having named these audiences, Stowe then admonishes them:

> There is one thing that every individual can do,—they [sic] can see to it that *they feel right*. An atmosphere of sympathetic influence encircles every human being; and the man or woman who *feels* strongly, healthily and justly, on the great interests of humanity, is a constant benefactor to the human race. See, then, to your sympathies in this matter! Are they in harmony with the sympathies of Christ? or are they swayed and perverted by the sophistries of worldly policy? (624; author's italics)

In this passage, Stowe testifies to the power of "right feeling," for she believes that those who feel sympathy for "every human being," regardless of race, will act in a manner fully in keeping with Christianity. That this type of behavior includes not only assisting fugitive slaves, but also educating them and then "returning" them to Liberia, demonstrates the incompleteness of Stowe's account of fellow-feeling. Nevertheless, Stowe's formulation of sympathy for every human being, "in harmony with the sympathies of Christ," begins to describe an imaginative identification with the Other—though she delimits the potential extent of this relation by envisioning it in tandem with the repatriation project of American Colonization Society.

Uncle Tom's Cabin repeatedly entertains the idea of African Americans' shared humanity, but always with safety valves and escape clauses that undermine its possibility. It is from this *possibility of empathy* that the book derives its power, but that possibility is

always qualified, narrowly defined, and finally deported, so that its promise is never fulfilled.

Full-fledged empathy remains beyond the bounds of Stowe's vision, partly because she

focuses so exclusively on the affective experience, privileging "right feeling" over "right

thinking," whereas empathy requires a rational as well as an emotional basis. As her

character Mary Bird—the Senator's wife—puts it, "I hate reasoning… especially reasoning

on such subjects. There's a way you political folks have of coming round and round a plain

right thing; and you don't believe in it yourselves, when it comes to practice" (145). For

Stowe, feeling was a truer guide to moral action than the devious workings of logic and

rhetoric, which could be manipulated to "come round and round a plain right thing."

However, mere feeling could not fully assert the shared humanity of the racial Other; in her

aversion to "reasoning," Mrs. Bird—and Stowe, for whom she speaks here—precludes the

possibility of complete imaginative identification with the suffering slave. To underscore the

fleeting possibilities of narrative empathy in this text, I will focus on three pivotal scenes:

Eliza's spectacular crossing of the Ohio River, the Bird family's generosity toward Eliza and

Harry, and the crucifixion of Uncle Tom by Simon Legree.

     In the seventh chapter of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Stowe describes the flight of Eliza

Harris, a fugitive slave, across the semi-frozen Ohio River with her infant son Harry in her

arms. Stowe's depiction of this scene merits a lengthy quotation:

> A thousand lives seemed to be concentrated in that one moment to Eliza. Her room
> opened by a side door to the river. She caught her child, and sprang down the steps
> towards it. The trader caught a full glimpse of her just as she was disappearing…
> [and] he was after her like a hound after a deer. In that dizzy moment her feet to her
> scarce seemed to touch the ground, and a moment brought her to the water's edge.
> Right on behind they came; and, nerved with such strength as God gives only to the
> desperate, with one wild cry and flying leap, she vaulted sheer over the turbid current
> by the shore, on to the raft of ice beyond. It was a desperate leap—impossible to
> anything but madness and despair…. With wild cries and desperate energy she leaped
> to another and still another cake; stumbling—leaping—slipping—springing upwards
> again! Her shoes are gone—her stockings cut from her feet—while blood marked

every step; but she saw nothing, felt nothing, till dimly, as in a dream, she saw the Ohio side, and a man helping her up the bank. (117-118)

Chapter Seven, from which this passage is taken, is titled "The Mother's Struggle," and in this scene Stowe characterizes Eliza as an almost super-human mother figure. Her "desperate" leaps are described in a caricatured combination of action and emotion. From a physical perspective, they are nearly impossible—but not impossible to those of normal athletic ability. Rather, they are "impossible to anything but madness and despair." This desperate moment is narrated with a physical immediacy that belies its emotional distance. At one point the narration slips from past tense into present tense ("Her shoes are gone—her stockings cut from her feet"), but the passive verb "are" (present in the first clause; omitted from the second) renders the scene as a visual tableau rather than an action sequence in which the reader can imaginatively participate. Although Eliza's feet are bloody, we are encouraged to see the blood that "marked every step," not to feel the wounds that make them bleed. The narrator seems so excited by the spectacle that the syntax begins to break down; the series of present progressive verbs ("stumbling—leaping—slipping—springing") resembles a breathless textual stuttering.

This passage presents Eliza as a remarkable figure, but not as a human being with whom readers can easily identify. We are presented with a glimpse into her consciousness with the statement that "A thousand lives seemed to be concentrated in that one moment to Eliza," but this window into her mind is quickly shut; the action is narrated from the perspective of one watching, not through Eliza's own experience. Moreover, the narrator (who presumes to know Eliza's mind) tells us merely that "she saw nothing, felt nothing" during this incredible sequence. The same physical feats which render Eliza nearly super-human also make her seem, in a sense, less than human. Stowe's description of the slave trader, Mr. Haley, pursuing Eliza "like a hound after a deer" animalizes both characters and

undermines Eliza's shared humanity (the despicable Haley is also Othered by this characterization). Stowe's repeated descriptions of Eliza as "wild" and "desperate" also dehumanize her and distance her from the reader. The description of Eliza's "desperate leap" as "impossible to anything but madness and despair" is particularly telling. After so many references to "she" and "her" in this passage, it is odd that the narrator uses the pronoun "anything" here, where "anyone but a desperate mother" (or "woman") would have seemed a more natural choice. The slave-mother-as-action-hero runs like a deer to save her child; her cries are "wild" and her energy "desperate." During this climactic scene, she becomes first an animalized image and finally an unfeeling "thing." In this spectacular scene, Eliza is not rendered emotionally or psychologically present for the reader to identify with imaginatively; she is not made available for readerly empathy.

After crossing the Ohio River, Eliza and Harry arrive at the home of Senator Bird (who, we learn just before her arrival, has recently voted for the Fugitive Slave Act of 1950, legally requiring residents of free states to return fugitive slaves to their owners). When Senator Bird and his wife Mary are alerted to the new arrival, a somewhat tense exchange ensues in the kitchen. After Eliza confirms that she is a runaway slave and states that her master was kind, Mrs. Bird asks her, "What could induce you to leave a good home, then, and run away, and go through such dangers?" Eliza responds, "Ma'am… have you ever lost a child?" (149). This question leads to the revelation that one of the Birds' children ("little Henry") had died only a month before; likewise, Eliza explains, she has lost two children, and her own Harry was to be sold away from her. Henry's death frames the Birds' subsequent empathetic (and sympathetic) responses to Eliza. Mrs. Bird gives the dead child's clothes and toys to Eliza's Harry; the senator prepares to transport them to a safer hiding

place, leading Mrs. Bird to tell him (in a statement that anticipates Stowe's "Concluding Remarks"), "your heart is better than your head" (153).

In this passage, empathy is expressed explicitly by the characters and implicitly by the narrative's emphasis on the two mothers' shared sense of loss. Mrs. Bird tells her son that "our dear, loving little Henry… would be glad to have us do this…. I give [his things] to a mother more heart-broken and sorrowful than I am; and I hope God will send his blessings with them!" (154). Mrs. Bird identifies with Eliza because of their mutual losses; their shared experience and continued feeling of maternal grief overcomes the racial, cultural, and socioeconomic differences between the southern black fugitive slave and the northern white senator's wife. The Birds' willingness to help Eliza and Harry is premised on this identification: *they*—the Others—are *like us*. By emphasizing the women's similar experiences and the common nature of their maternal affections, the narration emphasizes their fellow humanity rather than their alterity. The similarity of the two boys' names is yet another reminder of this fellow humanity.[3] Mrs. Bird's first name—Mary—also reminds readers that this condition was also shared by the original Christian mother, who likewise experienced the loss of her son. But the shared experience described in this scene is an unusual and theatrical platform for empathy in Stowe's text. If Stowe's articulation of narrative empathy must rely upon such unpredictable coincidences, it follows that actual empathy would necessarily be scarce in Stowe's world. And even though the assistance that the Birds render to Eliza and Harry is generous (and politically dangerous), it should be noted that the extent of their empathetic debt is limited; after the fugitive slaves are safely seen on

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[3] Stowe's narrative emphasizes the similarities between free and enslaved characters on several occasions. George Harris, Eliza's enslaved husband, shares the name of Mas'r George, the son of the plantation owner. Likewise, the slave hunter Tom Loker, who experiences a change of heart by the end of the narrative, shares the name of the eponymous Uncle Tom.

their way, any demands upon the Birds are fulfilled, completed, dispensed with. Empathy, in Stowe's fictive universe, is depicted as a surprising but temporary obligation.

The protracted death of Uncle Tom offers another possibility for narrative empathy that is ultimately unfulfilled. Writing for a predominantly Christian audience, Stowe imbues Tom with all the qualities of a black Christ: his willingness to submit to undeserved torture, his self-sacrifice in order to save others; his forgiveness of his captor and tormenter, Legree. Stowe gives Tom the line of Christ on the cross—"Into thy hands I commend my spirit!" (581)—and then he lingers for two more days, dying slowly for dramatic effect. But Tom's suffering is largely omitted. The narrator merely comments that "scenes of blood and cruelty are shocking to our ear and heart," and after vague commentary about "the Christian's last struggle," the scene shifts to Sambo telling Legree that "He's most gone, Mas'r" (583-584). In fact, the preternatural calm with which Tom answers Legree's threats and the absolute absence of self-preservation on Tom's part seem, like Eliza's crossing of the Ohio, to detract from his humanity rather than to emphasize it. Tom, of course, is a type: the perfect Christian slave, unswerving in his religious zeal, suffering the torments of slavery just as Christ suffered to redeem humankind. Therefore, even though the narrative holds him up as a prime example of Christian virtue, he fails to evoke strong empathy because of his unreal perfection. Rather than a fellow human who suffers, questions, and doubts, Tom is a monolith, whose stereotyped responses to his situation are designed to teach and to wag a finger rather than to inspire imaginative identification.

Tom is also a perfect victim. As Kristin Boudreau has argued, sentimental fiction "generates compassion on the part of readers by depicting those victims as passive, feeble, and pitiable" (97). This compassion is not a response that requires the reader's self-projection into the place of the Other. Indeed, Tom is perfectly Christlike because he does precisely

what most readers would not: he sacrifices himself to save others who would never have done the same for him, and he forgives his malicious tormentors, even as they abuse him. Boudreau suggests that "the helpless, indeed the subhuman, object of pity is the necessary outcome of a political appeal based on sympathy for the suffering rather than on human entitlement" (97). Her description aptly maps onto my distinction between sympathy—which does not require identification with the "Other" as a fellow human—and empathy, which does. Boudreau's critique helps to explain why Stowe's sentimental novel, with its deployment of stereotypical characters to deliver an abolitionist message, was destined to fall short of narrative empathy, even as it suggests the possibility of such a relation.

Jane Tompkins notes that the novel's influence on nineteenth-century readers derived from its overt overlaying of Christian symbolism onto American politics: "*Uncle Tom's Cabin* retells the culture's central religious myth—the story of the crucifixion—in terms of the nation's greatest political conflict—slavery—and of its most cherished social beliefs—the sanctity of motherhood and the family" (*Sensational* 134). These were themes with which most readers of Stowe's America (and many contemporary readers) could identify on a personal level. But this project did not require her characters to demonstrate any psychological depth or nuanced individual identity, qualities that are central to the functioning of empathy. Therefore, even though her characters sometimes empathize with Others in the text, Stowe's text falls short of asking the same of her readers. It is quite possible to feel sorry for Eliza and for Tom without imagining oneself in their places.

Models of Manly Empathy in *The Heroic Slave*

If Harriet Beecher Stowe suggests the possibility of narrative empathy for the Other, but does not fully realize it in her text or make it available for her readers, Frederick Douglass's *The Heroic Slave* showcases numerous relations of textual empathy and invites

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readers to emulate their examples. The novella, Douglass's only foray into fiction, appeared

in 1853. First published (in serial form) in his self-edited *Frederick Douglass's Paper*, the

novella was later collected in the 1853 gift-book *Autographs for Freedom*, edited by Julia W.

Griffith (Foner 247).[4] Narrating the tale of the enslaved Madison Washington, loosely based

on actual events, the novella bears strong parallels to Douglass's own 1845 *Narrative*, as well

as Douglass's addresses on the abolitionist lecture circuit, which narrated his previous

experiences while enslaved. In *The Heroic Slave*, readers are addressed directly by an

unidentified narrator—sometimes through the inclusive pronoun "we"—and another

character, Mr. Listwell, models the role of the properly receptive and empathetic audience

member.

Early in the novella, Douglass alternates between narrative perspectives and degrees

of knowledgeability in ways that blur the boundaries between narrator and reader and

demonstrate the narrator's reliability. The narrative begins in the tone of an erudite and

knowing historian: "The State of Virginia is famous in American annals for the

multitudinous array of her statesmen and heroes" (220). This narrator notes the widespread

perception that a man hailing from Virginia is afforded special advantages: "even a man of

ordinary parts, on account of the general partiality for her sons, easily rises to eminent

stations" (220). These opening comments establish the narrator's familiarity with various

types of history: the kind recorded in scholarly "annals" as well as the observable, personal

histories of living Virginians. However, the narrator argues that one of Virginia's greatest

"children," a man who "loved liberty as well as did Patrick Henry" and "deserved it as much

as Thomas Jefferson," has been nearly forgotten by his countrymen (220). After this erudite

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[4] The full text of *The Heroic Slave*, as it originally appeared in *Autographs for Freedom*, is available online through the Carolina Digital Library Archives (CDLA) collection of North American Slave Narratives: <http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/douglass1853/menu.html>.

third-person introduction, the narrator shifts to the first person and to a more speculative tone when he surmises that Madison Washington one day "will, I think, command the pen of genius to set his merits forth" (220). The first-person utterance "I think" both qualifies the certainty of the narrator's previous statements and puts the reader in mind of an embodied narrative persona—some "I" who mediates between narrative and reader, whose opinions are offered as less than omniscient statements within the world of the text. Moreover, the "pen of genius" about which the narrator speculates does not seem to refer to the author's own pen, for the narrator goes on to liken Washington to "a guiding star on a stormy night" and "the gray peak of a menacing rock," of which only fleeting glimpses can be seen (220). "Curiously, earnestly, anxiously," he continues, "we peer into the dark, and wish even for the blinding flash, or the light of Northern skies to reveal him" (220). Washington remains "enveloped in darkness," and therefore it is only "speaking of marks, traces, possibles, and probabilities, [that] we come before our readers" (221). Far from the letters and prefaces with which white editors and character witnesses often "authenticated" the narratives of enslaved African Americans, Douglass's introduction openly acknowledges the limits of the narrator's knowledge and the dark uncertainties that still "envelop" his subject. However, the narrator's admission of limited knowledge demonstrates his honesty and sincerity in a manner that might actually elicit more trust from readers than one who claims omniscience or authoritative knowledge about his subject—particularly a subject as controversial as slavery in antebellum America.

This apparent sincerity is reenacted by the narrative shift from the first-person singular ("I think") to the first-person plural ("we peer into the dark"). With this phrase, the narrator seems to move from foreground to background—from the stage to the audience, figuratively speaking. In stating that "curiously, earnestly, anxiously we peer into the dark,"

the narrator seems to place his arm over the reader's shoulder, directing not only the angle but also the nature of her gaze. This use of "we" breaks down the boundaries between reader and narrator, presuming a common purpose and a shared state of mind. However, in the final sentence of his introduction, the narrator reveals the tenuousness of this bond, admitting that it is only with vague clues—"marks, traces, possibilities, and probabilities"—that "we come before our readers." The "we" that previously aimed to include readers now appears to refer only to those *other* than readers: to the narrator, to Madison Washington, and perhaps even notionally to all slaves. Moreover, this "coming before" the reader mimics the legal language of judges and juries, and the witnesses who "come before" them, rather than the language of friendly acquaintances. This phrase also returns the narrator to the foreground (or to the stage): no longer does he peer into the darkness with the reader; now he will tell the tale from the perspective of an Other, a member of the othered "we" that come before the reader, to state their case and hope for a favorable judgment. The narrator's inclusive "we"—like the empathy that such a pronoun implies—is a tenuous affair, much like Douglass's own addresses delivered to often hostile white audiences.

Part One of the four-part novella centers upon a lengthy monologue by the still-enslaved Madison Washington, speaking his thoughts aloud in the forest—a monologue that is overheard, without Washington's knowledge, by the "Northern traveler," Mr. Listwell. Though the reader is aware of Listwell's presence and is privy to his unspoken responses, the monologue is delivered through lengthy blocks of direct, unbroken quotation, collapsing the narrative layers between the speaker (Washington) and the reader:

> What, then, is life to me? It is aimless and worthless, and worse than worthless. Those birds, perched on yon swinging boughs, in friendly conclave, sounding forth their merry notes in seeming worship of the rising sun, though liable to the sportsman's fowling-piece, are still my superiors…. That accursed and crawling snake, that miserable reptile, that has just glided into its slimy home, is freer and better off than I. He escaped my blow, and is safe. But here am I, a man,—yes, a man!—with thoughts

and wishes, with powers and faculties as far as angel's flight above that hated reptile,—yet he is my superior, and scorns to own me as his master, or to stop to take my blows. (221)

Washington's words reveal the contradictions at the heart of his identity: the misery and internal conflict of a slave who nevertheless affirms his own humanity. He remains, as he reminds himself, "a man!"—but his social station as a slave renders him "inferior" to and less free than even birds and snakes. But he rejects this valuation, because as a human being, his "thoughts and wishes… powers and faculties" are far greater than these lesser creatures (221). The reader, like Listwell, is privy to Washington's private thoughts and feelings: his despair, his urgent desire for freedom, his resilient pride. Through his poetic diction, the reader can clearly sense his intelligence as well as the depth of his emotion. In this sense, the use of direct quotation serves as a form of textual empathy. Gayatri Spivak has famously asked, "Can the subaltern speak?" In Douglass's text, the Other (Washington) is able to speak at length, through direct quotation of extended monologues.

Washington also considers his own character in a critical light: "I neither run nor fight, but do meanly stand…. Can it be that I *dare* not run away?" (221; author's italics). Yet he ultimately rejects this notion as well: "I am no coward. *Liberty* I will have, or die in the attempt to gain it" (221). In contrast to the emotional numbness of Stowe's Eliza and the unflinching creed of Stowe's Tom, Washington's internal conflict exposes clearly to the reader (and to Mr. Listwell, the reader's proxy in the text) the difficult position of an enslaved person who retains his personal pride and dignity, resisting the status of the abject slave. This monologue invites the reader to empathize with Washington: his thought process is rendered transparent, and it mimics the patriotic line of Patrick Henry—"Give me liberty or give me death!"—while revealing the self-doubts that every human experiences. By comparing Madison Washington to a celebrated American patriot and then demonstrating his

comparable thought process, Douglass's novella challenges readers to consider the parallels between the two figures and to explain why such a sentiment might be heroic for the one and reprehensible for the other.

Listwell's role as an unknown and unacknowledged audience to Washington's monologue is comparable to that of the reader. When characters in a literary text speak to other characters, we read, in a sense, as unobserved listeners: we know that they are not really speaking to us. But in Douglass's text, Washington is not speaking to Listwell either. Rather, the "Northern traveller" watches in secret and listens well—as his name emphasizes—and the reader is invited to follow his example, as another unacknowledged audience of Washington's performance. The novella's structure therefore provides Douglass a double remove from the more familiar rhetorical situation of a lecturer directly addressing his audience. Here, Douglass (the author) gives us the words of another enslaved American, mediated by the unidentified narrator, with an unobserved listener (Listwell) providing an added buffer between the speaker (Washington) and Douglass's actual audience (the reader). These narrative layers seem to render Washington's speech more personal and less political, more sincere and less polemical, through the conceit of a man speaking his thoughts aloud, ostensibly in the earnest truth of solitude.

The omniscient narration of Listwell's thoughts also provides the reader with a direct avenue into the listener's consciousness, revealing his empathetic reaction to Washington's words. When he first overhears the speaker, Listwell wonders, "to whom can he be speaking?" and concludes that "he seems to be alone" (221). To this directly quoted mental question-and-answer, the narrator adds a more detailed account of Listwell's thoughts: "he became intensely curious to know what thoughts and feelings, or, it might be, high aspirations, guided those rich and mellow accents" (221). Here the narrator describes

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Listwell's motives as strongly empathetic: Listwell hopes to discover Washington's innermost "thoughts and feelings" in order to identify imaginatively with him as a fellow human. Here the text enacts a doubled relation of narrative empathy: the narrator imagines (or reveals) the thoughts and feelings of Mr. Listwell, who attempts to discern the thoughts and feelings of Madison Washington. Omniscient narration can therefore serve as another method of textual empathy, but the nature of this "mind-reading" seems to determine the extent of its empathy. Listwell's explicit desire to understand Washington's "thoughts and feelings," in addition to being empathetic in and of itself, is rendered in a more empathetic fashion than Stowe's purportedly omniscient narrator's comment that Eliza "saw nothing, felt nothing." Narrative mindreading that detects *no mental activity* does not provide a pathway for imaginative identification with the characters it depicts.

After Washington begins his monologue, the narrator notes that Listwell "had long desired to sound the mysterious depths of the thoughts and feelings of a slave" and that he "resolved to hear more" (222). Washington continues to speak his mind, though the narrator merely paraphrases many of his "scathing denunciations of the cruelty and unjustice of slavery" (222). Listwell listens actively, demonstrating Theory of Mind cognitive processes as he imagines Washington's mental state as being "goaded almost to madness by the sense of injustice done him" (223). To apply Breithaupt's triadic model of empathy, we might say that Listwell "chooses sides" with Washington here, against the white slaveowner (or all slaveowners) who might be said to "oppose" him.

The result of this experience, for Listwell, is that he resolves to oppose slavery: "From this hour I am an abolitionist" (223). He forms this resolution after a thorough consideration of Washington's speech, essentially echoing and paraphrasing the slave's words. "Here is indeed a man," muses Listwell, "of rare endowments,—a child of God,—

guilty of no crime but the color of his skin" (223). Listwell's reaction to Washington's

speech is described as physical as well intellectual: the narrator notes that "the speech of

Madison rung through the chambers of his soul, and vibrated through his entire frame" (223).

Listwell becomes a veritable echo chamber for Washington's words, and the northerner is

changed by the vicarious experience of Washington's plight. Listwell's resolution to stand

against slavery demonstrates Douglass's belief that empathetic identification based on words

alone can lead to political action and social change. Moreover, the response of the proxy

audience—Listwell—is offered as a template for the actual audience—the reader—to follow.

The effects of Listwell's conversion are manifested throughout the novella. Five years

later, he encounters Madison Washington fleeing from slavery, just outside Listwell's Ohio

residence, in a convenient plot twist reminiscent of Eliza's visit to the Bird residence. Taking

the Birds a step further, Listwell and his wife offer Washington shelter and see him safely to

freedom in Canada. After aiding the fugitive slave's escape, Listwell experiences "delightful

satisfaction that gladdened his heart" (232). When he comes upon Washington later in life,

back in bondage, Listwell attempts to aid him again by slipping "three strong files" into

Washington's pocket (240). Through these actions, Listwell's character demonstrates

Douglass's apparent belief in the possibility that an empathetic listener might experience a

true and lasting change of heart. By imaginatively identifying with Madison Washington,

Listwell becomes an abolitionist and actively aids the slave's escape on multiple occasions.

He is, in a sense, Frederick Douglass's perfect audience, or "ideal reader." As an speaker on

the abolitionist circuit, Douglass frequently encountered hostile crowds; he recalled being

"mobbed," harassed, and pelted with "evil-smelling eggs" in Ohio, Indiana, New York,

Vermont, and elsewhere (*Life* 671-675). Therefore, the "Northern traveller" who hears

Madison Washington's monologue and embraces his abolitionist sentiments so readily was a model listener that Douglass no doubt hoped his white readers would emulate.

Listwell is not the only model that Douglass offers his readers; Madison Washington also performs empathy in the text. As he explains to Listwell during their first meeting, Washington had asked for assistance from an elderly enslaved man after overhearing the man in prayer. In the situation Washington recounts to Listwell, the opening scene is recast, with Washington as the secret listener (in place of Listwell) and the old man as the speaker who believes himself to be alone (in place of Washington). As in the first instance, the listener believes the speaker's words to be earnest—for, as Washington opines, "the man who prays in secret is far more likely to be sincere than he who loves to pray standing in the street, or in the great congregation" (230). As if to confirm this estimation, the pious old man promises to help Washington: "the good man embraced me in his arms, and assured me of his sympathy" (230). But when the man attempts to purchase provisions for Washington, he is accused of stealing the dollar Washington gave him, and a group of white men bind him and whip him within Washington's sight and hearing. "They tied him to a tree, and began to whip him. My own flesh crept at every blow, and I seem to hear the old man's piteous cries even now" (231). Here the enslaved Washington expresses empathy for his fellow slave, claiming that he felt the old man's pain—"my own flesh crept at every blow"—and remembering the man's agony, as expressed by his "piteous cries." Again, the textual listener trusts and identifies with the speaker he overhears, and again the reader is invited to emulate the textual leader's response.

In the final section of *The Heroic Slave*, Tom Grant, the former first mate of the *Creole*, tells the story of the slave mutiny led by Madison Washington. His audience, a group of "ocean birds" gathered in a Richmond tavern, seems inclined to agree with Jack Williams,

a "regular old salt" who claims that the mutiny was "a discreditable piece of business," which reflected poorly on the ship's white captain and crew (244). Grant responds by recounting the mutiny in terms that credit the slaves' ingenuity and courage. He explains that Madison Washington was "as shrewd a fellow as ever I met in my life" and that "none of us knew the extent of his intelligence and ability till it was too late" (244). Grant's account of the mutiny demonstrates a form of textual empathy through its extensive quotations of Washington's words, including the following passage:

> 'Sir,' said he, 'your life is in my hands. I could have killed you a dozen times over during this last half hour, and could kill you now. You call me a black murderer. I am not a murderer. God is my witness that LIBERTY, not malice, is the motive for this night's work. I have done no more to those dead men yonder, than they would have done to me in like circumstances. We have struck for our freedom, and if a true man's heart be in you, you will honor us for the deed. We have done that which you applaud your fathers for doing, and if we are murderers, so were they.' (245)

Like Washington's monologue in the first section, this lengthy passage quotes him verbatim, allowing the slave to provide a thorough and thoughtful justification for his actions and comparing them to those of the patriotic heroes of the American Revolution. The desire for freedom is depicted here not only as a quintessentially American sentiment, but also a "truly" masculine one. In giving the slave a voice and by repeating his words through direct quotation, Grant's embedded narrative acknowledges Madison Washington as an autonomous and rational subject, with the power to speak for himself. It also offers a model of empathy that is emphatically masculine and almost completely devoid of sympathy. The slave depicted in this final section demands honor and respect, not compassion; the empathy he invites does not require his own abjection, helplessness, or erasure. He is no Uncle Tom.

But unlike Washington's earlier monologue, this passage is related not by an unidentified narrator but by the very character to whom it was originally addressed. In structuring the narrative this way, Douglass removes the black protagonist/speaker toward

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whom the (textual) white audience's anger and violence might otherwise be directed. Indeed, when Jack Williams questions the former first mate's courage and calls him an abolitionist, Grant physically challenges Williams, rising from his chair and exclaiming, "that man does not live who shall offer me an insult with impunity" (243). Douglass's text offers a courageous and outspoken white champion to defend the courage and dignity of Washington and his fellow mutineers, standing in as a substitute in their absence. This method of relating the slave mutiny through the first mate's recollections, in the context of a larger argument about the morality of slavery, dramatizes the reception of Washington's story and the challenging of the white audience's racial attitudes rather than the story itself. This narrative emphasis seems to suggest that the mutiny aboard the *Creole* matters more as a symbolic commentary about the incompatibility of slavery and American ideals than as a mere historical event.

With so many instances of textual empathy and the clear intention that readers should emulate its examples, Douglass's novella can be read as a veritable user's manual for "How to Empathize with the Other"; indeed, it is probably the most accurate explicit depiction of what we now call empathy in American literature from his time. But the accurate textual depiction of empathy and the compelling logic of its appeal do not guarantee the effective elicitation of readerly empathy: reader response is a much more complex psychological phenomenon.[5]

Even though Douglass's text offers various models of textual empathy, the power of its appeal is muted for a variety of formal reasons. First, the lead-in to Madison

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[5] As Lois Tyson explains, "in our daily lives we project [identity themes] onto every situation we encounter and thus perceive the world through the lens of our psychological experience. Analogously, when we read literature, we project our identity theme, or variations of it, onto the text" (169). James Phelan points out that narratives also structure readers' responses through their progressions from beginning to middle to end as well as characteristics such as "narrativity"—the relation of a narrator to his or her story, "lyricality"—the specific language used by the narrator, and "portraiture"—the description of people and places (xi-xii).

Washington's initial monologue is so brief and so abstract that the reader has little opportunity to be transported into Douglass's fictional world before Washington's ponderings on slavery begin. We meet the "Northern traveller" only long enough to know that his horse is thirsty before he overhears the "sound of a human voice" and proceeds to listen in. The abruptness of this staging renders the scene dramatic but, in a sense, unconvincing. If fiction—as Breithaupt, Zunshine, Keen, and others suggest—offers an ideal opportunity for readerly empathy because of its unreality, it also works by verisimilitude. The reader knows that a fictional text is not "true," but s/he becomes invested in its plot and its characters largely because they *seem true*. This seduction is accomplished in part through lifelike descriptions of people and places; we come to feel and understand a story as we gradually come to know them.[6] Therefore, the abruptness of Douglass's introduction of Listwell and Washington circumvents the process of "narrative transport," preventing readers from feeling a very close kinship to either character.[7]

The strongly didactic nature of Douglass's text—like Stowe's—may also distract or discourage contemporary readers from becoming imaginatively immersed in its world. As George and Willene Hendrick put it, *The Heroic Slave* employs "the debatable… literary device of making a story a vehicle for a message" (14). We might perhaps more subtly observe that the novella makes the narrative *too obvious* a vehicle for its message, for stories have served as vehicles for messages since the earliest recorded human narratives. To wit, the plot and its message are both signaled from the outset, by Douglass's title and by the

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[6] For a thorough analysis of how readers form narrative judgments, see James Phelan's *Experiencing Fiction: Judgments, Progressions, and the Rhetorical Theory of Narrative* (Columbus: Ohio State UP, 2007). For an extensive review of scholarship by psychologists on the types of feelings that are elicited by fictional texts, see David S. Miall and Don Kuiken's "A Feeling for Fiction: Becoming What We Behold." *Poetics* 30 (2002): 221-241.

[7] Psychology professor Melanie Green offers an overview of "Transport Into Narrative Worlds" on her faculty website at <http://www.unc.edu/~mcgreen/research.html>.

narrator's opening remark that Washington "loved liberty as well as did Patrick Henry…

[and] fought for it with a valor" equal to George Washington's. Here we have essentially the

abstract of the slave mutiny to follow, and additional details about the mutiny are provided

only as an afterthought, in Grant's final recollection. This plot centers around "a few

transient incidents," as the narrator calls them (220)—incidents that are structured around

very similar rhetorical situations: Listwell overhearing Washington's account of his situation,

Washington later recounting his escape and recapture to Listwell, and Tom Grant recounting

the mutiny to Jack Williams. The cumulative effect of these embedded narratives, with their

textual audiences and didactic messages, is a sort of audience fatigue: the reader is presented

with one after another discursive situation, all of which culminate in a very similar message.

If Stowe's plot in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is labyrinthine and unlikely, Douglass's plot in *The*

Heroic Slave is so thoroughly subservient to his message that it almost ceases to be a plot.

Empathy is emphatically possible in Douglass's storyworld, but his depiction of that world is

insufficiently transporting to allow readers to fully inhabit it. Nevertheless, Douglass's

novella presents a clear and sustained vision of narrative empathy that is reconciled with a

conventional American masculine identity coupled with patriotic American ideals, and it

offers clear models of empathetic behavior for readers to follow.

Insidious Alterity and Unreliable Narration in *Benito Cereno*

Many critics have noted the thematic parallels between *The Heroic Slave* and *Benito*

Cereno.[8] Both works of short fiction depict slave mutinies at sea; both are based on actual

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[8] See, for example, Joseph Young, "A Reversal of the Racialization of History in Hegel's Master/Slave Dialectic: Douglass's 'Heroic Slave' and Melville's 'Benito Cereno,' in *Race and the Foundations of Knowledge* (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 2006); Robert S. Levine and Samuel Otter, Eds., *Herman Melville and Frederick Douglass: Essays in Relation* (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 2008; and George and Willene Hendrick's introduction to *Two Slave Rebellions at Sea* (St James: Brandywine P, 2000).

events; both use the actual names of historical actors; both are narrated by unidentified but apparently omniscient narrators. Yet the texts' depictions of their enslaved protagonists are radically different. While Douglass's narrator provides readers with detailed descriptions of Madison Washington's consciousness, including extended direct quotations of Washington's words, Melville's narrator willfully withholds the thoughts and intentions of Babo, and his words are never related in an accurate context. The events depicted in *Benito Cereno* are based on the 1805 slave mutiny on the Spanish ship *Tryal*, and Melville based his story on Amasa Delano's account of the mutiny in *A Narrative of Voyages and Travels in the Northern and Southern Hemispheres* (1817). Like *The Heroic Slave*, Melville's version of the narrative begins with an apparently omniscient historical account of actual events, but for most of the story, the reader's knowledge is actually limited to the perceptions of Captain Amasa Delano, which are heavily influenced by Delano's racist and xenophobic beliefs. This partial and wrong-headed perspective delays the reader's realization that a slave mutiny has transpired. H. Bruce Franklin describes Melville's story as "a cryptic show of symbols staged to perplex, hoodwink, and even pillory at least some of its readers" (154). Indeed, as Dana Nelson has noted, the American captain cannot imagine the possibility of a slave revolt that renders the ship's human cargo subjects rather than objects: "It is impossible for Delano to entertain the notion of 'black' power…. Delano denies the slaves subjectivity" (*Word* 111-112). *Benito Cereno* highlights the delusion of a worldview in which empathy for the Other is not possible, because of Delano's preconception that enslaved Africans are not, first and foremost, fellow humans.

The method by which Melville's text channels the reader's attention into Delano's perspective contains subtle hints that the captain's perceptions may not be trustworthy. The text begins with a factual statement: "In the year 1799, Captain Amasa Delano, of Duxbury,

in Massachusetts, commanding a large sealer and general trader, lay at anchor, with a valuable cargo, in the harbour of St. Maria—a small, desert, uninhabited island towards the southern extremity of the long coast of [Chile]" (182). However, this seemingly objective statement of facts soon gives way to the figurative language of metaphor and foreshadowing: "The sky seemed a grey mantle. Flights of troubled grey fowl, kith and kin with flights of troubled grey vapours among which they were mixed, skimmed low and fitfully over the waters, as swallows over meadows before storms. Shadows present, foreshadowing deeper shadows to come" (182). Here the sky is compared to a garment, birds are compared to vapors and swallows, and the narrator gestures darkly toward the "deeper shadows to come." The shadows and shades of gray indicate the uncertainty of the narration, and the explicit reference to foreshadowing signals that the narrator will not immediately reveal all that he knows. This narrative tone serves as a warning for careful readers that dark deeds are afoot, and everything is not as it seems.

Nevertheless, the reader is provided with certain clues about Delano, presented in the ambiguous language of the narrator. "Captain Delano's surprise" at seeing a strange ship approaching with "no colors" flying, we are told,

> might have deepened into some uneasiness had he not been a person of a singularly undistrustful good nature, not liable, except on extraordinary and repeated excitement, and hardly then, to indulge in personal alarms, any way involving the imputation of malign evil in man. Whether, in view of what humanity is capable, such a trait implies, along with a benevolent heart, more than ordinary quickness and accuracy of intellectual perception, may be left to the wise to determine. (183)

The triple negative contained in the characterization of Delano as "not… undistrustful" camouflages the narrator's message: the captain is a trusting soul, and his tendency to underestimate the "malign evil in man" is a brand of naiveté. Knowing the evil of which "humanity is capable," the narrator suggests that Delano's trustfulness indicates subpar powers of perception. Because he is "singularly undistrustful," readers would be "wise" not

to trust him too much. But the rhetorical flourishes of the narrator's language, with its vague generalities, alliteration, and excessively conditional phrasing, all but conceal this advice. George Orwell has argued that "the slovenliness of our language makes it easier for us to have foolish thoughts…. banal statements are given an appearance of profundity by means of the *not un-* formation" (143, 147). In *Benito Cereno*, such "slovenliness" is carefully deployed by the narrator to conceal the true state of affairs: the slave mutiny that has occurred on board the *San Dominick*. Melville's misleading narrative illustrates Orwell's claim that "the great enemy of clear language is insincerity…. Political language… is designed to make lies sound truthful and murder respectable, and to give an appearance of solidity to pure wind" (154, 157). The tricky narration of *Benito Cereno* presents the reader with Delano's misconceptions in order to delay the reader's understanding that a mutiny has occurred. This careful presentation of a misreading causes the reader at least temporarily to mimic Delano's thought process. Despite numerous hints and suggestions, the text does not clearly indicate that the slaves are in control until Babo leaps into Delano's rover and raises his knife to "the heart of his master" (237). As John Bryant has noted, after composing "Bartleby, the Scrivener" in 1853, "Melville experimented further with unreliable narration. He made successive narrators increasingly dim-witted" (xxxi). *Benito Cereno* is a tale told by an unreliable narrator through the perceptions of a dim-witted protagonist.

In his extended misconception about the status of the *San Dominick* and its crew, Captain Delano repeatedly attempts to empathize with the Spanish ship captain, despite his doubts and suspicions about his counterpart's intentions. Surprised by Don Benito's lack of courtesy and congeniality, Delano muses that

> the Spaniard's manner… conveyed a sort of sour and gloomy disdain, which he seemed
> at no pains to disguise. But this the American in charity ascribed to the harassing
> effects of sickness, since, in former instances, he had noted that there are peculiar

natures on whom prolonged physical suffering seems to cancel every social instinct of kindness…. (189)

Here and elsewhere, Delano is puzzled by Don Benito's behavior, but he attributes it to the hardships that the captain and his crew have experienced. In the "charity" of his judgments, Delano repeatedly affirms the fellow humanity of his fellow captain, even as he fails to acknowledge the humanity of Babo and the other slaves. Dana Nelson explains that "'Benito Cereno' delineates a crisis in masculine subjectivity… a crisis in the intersubjective fraternity of white manhood" (*National* 3). This fraternity is threatened by Don Benito's aloof, incommunicative manner, but is finally restored when Captain Delano comes to understand its actual cause.

The Spanish nationality (and ethnicity) of the *San Dominick*'s captain and crew is repeatedly suggested as an explanation for their strange behavior. In calling attention to this ethnic difference, Delano and the narrator intimate that they are at least slightly Other, that they are not quite white. In one flight of free indirect discourse, the narrator notes that "Captain Delano bethought him… [that Don Benito's contemptuous manner was] not unlike… his imperial countryman's, Charles V., just previous to the anchoritish retirement of that monarch from the throne" (189). H. Bruce Franklin elucidates the symbolic importance of such commentary in Melville's own time. In the wake of the Haitian revolution, many Americans shared James Buchanan's view that "the United States had the moral duty to seize Cuba from the incompetent Spain," to prevent it from becoming "a second St. Domingo" (Franklin 150). As Melville wrote *Benito Cereno*, the U.S. had recently annexed more than half of Mexico's territory—formerly claimed by the Spanish—with the 1848 Treaty of

Guadaloupe Hidalgo.[9] Therefore, the figure of inept Spanish rule in Melville's story represents the exchange in which "the United States would achieve its 'manifest destiny' by seizing what was left of the collapsing Spanish empire, thus itself becoming a global empire" (Franklin 150). Read in this light, the slaves' message to the Spanish crew—"Follow Your Leader"—indicating the corpse of the former slaveowner, Don Alexandro, might also be read as Melville's message to American readers of his day, whose fervor for empire seemed to follow the failed European examples.

At first glance, Melville's decision to narrate the story through Delano's befuddled perceptions seems a strange vehicle for political commentary. But it is by demonstrating Delano's error about the basic relationship between the African "cargo" and the Spanish crew of the *San Dominick* that the text indicates the error of Delano's other judgments as well. Captain Delano originally perceives Babo (in the narrator's language) as "a black of small stature, in whose rude face, as occasionally, like a shepherd's dog, he mutely turned it up into the Spaniard's. Sorrow and affection were equally blended" (187). In this passage, Delano identifies Babo first and foremost by his race, achieving synecdoche in his conversion of an adjective describing Babo's skin into a noun describing his entire person. In this identification and in comparing the African to "a shepherd's dog," Delano thoroughly dehumanizes Babo. If empathy functions through "metaphors of personal identification" (Miall and Kuiken 231), these are metaphors of radical alterity. Nevertheless, as the text eventually reveals, Delano completely misreads Babo, whose face is neither muted, nor sorrowful, nor affectionate. By the end of the story, Babo's head is reconceived as a "hive of subtlety" (257)—containing a brain that outwitted his armed Spanish captors.

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[9] Rodolfo Acuna describes the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo and the Mexican Cession—which amounted to 55% of Mexico's pre-war lands—in *Occupied America: A History of Chicanos* (New York: HarperCollins, 1988: 18-21).

Unlike *The Heroic Slave*, *Benito Cereno* does not offer readers more than a glimpse into the consciousness of its enslaved African characters. Babo, Atufal, and their fellow mutineers do not emerge as fully developed human characters, even though the narrative employs this limited characterization as a critique of white supremacist logic. Therefore, Melville's text does, in a sense, reproduce the very lack of empathy that it critiques. Dana Nelson argues that

> Babo's story, told through Delano's eyes and through Don Benito's deposition, objectifies Babo as fully as the sentence of the Lima Court. The narrative perpetuates the same *structural* exclusivity of white male subjectivity in its own necessarily limited portrayal of Babo's motives and goals, and ultimate humanity. (*Word* 130)

And yet, through its acknowledgement of the slaves' ingenuity and its depiction of the mutual damage of slavery on both slaves and masters, the text offers a critique of white supremacism and a challenge to readers who embrace Delano's vision too willingly. The story may perpetuate the structure of white male exclusivity, but it does so as a demonstration of the dangers of such a worldview.

Jacobs's Direct Appeal for Empathy

Like the works discussed above, Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861) draws upon the lives of actual people and events, but unlike those other texts, *Incidents* recounts the author's own story. Because she chose to change the name of her own character (to Linda Brent) as well as those of her white masters and mistresses, the text drew a somewhat confused early critical reaction, which was overshadowed and eventually muted by the unfolding events of the Civil War. As Jean Fagan Yellin notes, many nineteenth-century readers believed *Incidents* to be "an antislavery novel that [Linda Maria] Child had written in the form of a slave narrative," and "by the twentieth century both Jacobs and her book were forgotten" (Yellin xxvii). The Civil Rights Movement and the women's

movement brought Jacobs's narrative back to the attention of historians and literary critics, and the addition of Jacobs's letters to the Post Archive at the University of Rochester allowed Yellin and others to demonstrate that Harriet Jacobs was indeed the author of the text.

Jacobs's first-person narrative, like most slave narratives and most autobiographical texts more generally, invites the reader to enter into the autobiographical "I."[10] Originally written for mostly white northern audiences, North American slave narratives sought to promote the abolitionist cause by encouraging white readers to bridge the chasm of radical alterity and to see the racial Other as a fellow human—that is, by eliciting readerly empathy. Indeed, empathy was an indirect goal and a structuring vision of every slave narrative, if only as a means to an end. Consider, for example, the English Society for the Abolition of Slavery's slogan "Am I Not a Man and a Brother?"—and Sojourner Truth's revised version, "And arn't I a woman?" (qtd in Foner & Branham 228). These were the central questions that slave narratives repeatedly posed.

1787 engraving, Library of Congress, reproduced from
http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/tserve/nineteen/nkeyinfo/cwnorth.htm

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[10] As I will discuss in Chapter Four, Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson have argued that the autobiographical "I" actually consists of four different "selves": the real or historical *I*, who "lives or lived in the world"; the narrating *I*, who "wants to tell, or is coerced into telling, a story about himself"; the narrated *I*, or the "protagonist of the narrative, the version of the self that the narrating 'I' chooses to constitute… for the reader"; and the ideological *I*, by which the narrative characterizes or is informed by "the material location of subjectivity… [which is] historically and culturally situated" (59-62).

Like other narratives by formerly enslaved women, Jacobs's narrative echoes Sojourner Truth's question, but its highly personal, introspective tone and its candid depictions of sexual behavior distinguish it from more conventional slave narratives. *Incidents* resembles *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in its direct appeals to (especially female) readers and its depiction of the incongruity of slavery with Christian motherhood. But in place of Stowe's graphic scenes and sensational action sequences, Jacobs provides a sustained and understated portrait of slavery, with its daily dangers, denials, heartbreaks, and unfulfilled yearnings. Like the protagonists of *The Heroic Slave* and *Benito Cereno*, Linda Brent resists the system of slavery through her own ingenuity and by exploiting the misperceptions of her white master. But unlike Melville's Babo, Linda's mind is opened to the reader through her detailed recollections and impressions, and unlike Douglass, Jacobs describes characters with sufficient individuality and psychological depth to allow readers to enter imaginatively into their world. Written in the years leading up to the Civil War and anticipating all the bloodshed and social upheaval the subsequent years would entail, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* poses one of the most compelling direct appeals for readerly empathy seen in American literature to its time.

Earlier in this chapter, I analyzed Stowe's depiction of Eliza crossing the Ohio River—in nearly superhuman fashion, with her child, Harry, in her arms. The style of Stowe's narration in that scene is markedly different from that of Jacobs describing Linda Brent's "wild," "desperate," and nearly "impossible" feat of surviving for seven years while mostly confined within a space in which she could not even stand upright. In a chapter titled "The Loophole of Retreat," the narrator/protagonist describes her hiding spot:

> A small shed had been added to my grandmother's house years ago. Some boards were laid across the joists at the top, and between these boards and the roof was a very small garret, never occupied by any thing but rats and mice…. The garret was only nine feet long and seven wide. The highest part was three feet high, and sloped

down abruptly to the loose board floor. There was no admission for either light or air…. The air was stifling; the darkness total…. The rats and mice ran over my bed; but I was weary, and I slept such sleep as the wretched may, when a tempest has passed over them…. The heat of my den was intense, for nothing but thin shingles protected me from the scorching summer's sun…. But when winter came, the cold penetrated through the thin shingle roof, and I was dreadfully chilled. (114-116)

Unlike Stowe's action-packed sequence, with its immediate, present progressive action verbs ("stumbling—leaping—slipping—springing"), Jacobs's narrator speaks primarily in the passive voice ("A small shed had been added…. Some boards were laid…. I was dreadfully chilled"). The passage remains firmly in the past tense and relies heavily on the linking verb "was." The only real action that occurs in the passage is that of the rats and mice that run over her bed, as Linda Brent lies nearly immobilized in her tiny "garret." Jacobs's sentences often feature short, consecutive phrases of similar length: "The rats and mice ran over my bed; but I was weary, and I slept such sleep as the wretched may, when a tempest has passed over them." This language reflects the monotonous rhythms of an extended period of waiting for an unknown and unpredictable solution—the relentless waves of tedium and despair.

Linda's suffering is made palpable for the reader, not by the use of sensational language, but in the most ordinary terms. Her statement that "the air was stifling; the darkness total" uses no formal complexity or sophisticated syntax to communicate her message. However, through this simple description, one can imagine the stifling (most likely hot, and lacking in oxygen) air in one's lungs. The deprivation of visual stimuli—"the darkness total"—in addition to the foul, rebreathed air, would no doubt contribute its own spirit-crushing weight to the protagonist's oppressive situation. Compared to this simple but powerful language, Stowe's exclamations and her comment that Eliza "saw nothing, felt nothing" except "dimly, as in a dream" seems to render the sufferer as a mere spectacle, emptied out of seeing, feeling subjectivity and flattened into two-dimensional Otherness. In contrast, Linda sees nothing because she is veiled in *actual* darkness; her "dream" is all too

real, and she makes it real to the reader. In its anti-spectacular depiction of suffering, *Incidents* communicates to the reader what *Uncle Tom's Cabin* never manages to convey: that the poor unfortunate slave is simply human, *like you*.

Jacobs's text frequently juxtaposes enslaved African Americans with free white counterparts, emphasizing their "natural" or inherent similarities before disclosing their divergent fortunes, expectations, and outcomes. These juxtapositions often focus on family relationships, underscoring the repressed knowledge of white southerners that black slaves were quite often family members as well. For example, Linda Brent characterizes her mother's (white) mistress as "the foster *sister* of my *mother*; they were both nourished at my *grandmother's breast*…. They played together as children; and, when they became *women*, my *mother* was a most faithful servant to her whiter foster *sister*" (6-7; emphasis added). The two characters are presented as doubles or mirror-images; the picture of the two girls simultaneously "nourished at my grandmother's breast" suggests an overlapping of identity, a relationship like that of twins. Jacobs's depiction of these two women, separated by the racial logic of the slave South but also connected by strong family bonds, draws heavily on their shared gender (and that of their nurse, or Brent's grandmother). The short passage above includes seven words indicating female gender, and many of these words also imply family connection. The only reference to race in the passage, however, is the word "whiter," which itself undermines a binary definition of "black" and "white" and suggests shared ancestors. This passage presents a dilemma of alterity, for the race of the "whiter" sister makes her Other to Linda, Linda's mother, and Linda's grandmother, while the image of two nursing babies suggests an inseparable bond that racial logic cannot put asunder. Nevertheless, slavery dictates that the foster sisters' fates must diverge. Linda recalls,

> I once saw two beautiful children playing together. One was a fair white child; the other was her slave, and also her sister. When I saw them embracing each other, and

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heard their joyous laughter, I turned sadly away from the lovely sight. I foresaw the inevitable blight that would fall on the little slave's heart. (29)

Jacobs's text repeatedly juxtaposes "black" and "white" characters to demonstrate that "the Other" is a social construction that ignores the real ties that bind all humans, and to highlight the unfairness of their disparate outcomes.

Incidents also illustrates how frequently the racial codes of antebellum white southerners violated the bonds of traditional family relations. Mrs. Flint, according to the narrator, "seemed to think that slaves had no right to any family ties of their own" (38). Linda describes another young slave girl with a "mulatto child, of course not acknowledged by its father," who desired to be married: "The poor black man who loved her would have been proud to acknowledge [the white father's] helpless offspring" (38). Here, as in the description of Linda's grandmother nursing her mother's "whiter foster sister," black slaves are revealed as siblings and parental figures to white southerners and their children, both acknowledged and unacknowledged. In the case of the "helpless" mulatto child and the willing foster father, Jacobs portrays empathy as a family relation, even if her definition of "family" is expansive and flexible. Identifying "the Other" as a fellow human was a mode of survival and resistance in a system that did not acknowledge one's own humanity, and for slaves, the family was a provisional unit of support and fellow-feeling, always vulnerable to white power but also capable of reconstituting itself as circumstances allowed.

Not all the characters in Jacobs's text are portrayed as worthy of empathy. Linda describes Dr. Flint as a "vile monster" who inspires her "disgust and hatred" by "[filling] my young mind with unclean images" (27). His repeated sexual advances render Linda an object of desire (on his part) and loathing (on his wife's part). The text describes this relation as an inevitable outcome of a system that allows and overlooks the rape of women old and young. The narrator insists that the consequences were terrible not only for the enslaved, but also for

the wives of slaveowners: "The young wife soon learns that the husband… pays no regard to his marriage vows…. Jealousy and hatred enter the flowery home, and it is ravaged of its loveliness" (36). Dr. Flint represents the rapacious white slaveowner whose actions violate the most fundamental moral principles. Linda cannot conceive of Flint as a fellow human; but his "monstrous" alterity is a function of his behavior, not his race or gender.

Indeed, Mr. Sands is a white southern slaveowner with whom Linda willingly enters into a sexual relationship, and whom Jacobs portrays as a mostly sympathetic character in the text. "It seems less degrading to give one's self, than to submit to compulsion," she writes. "There is something akin to freedom in having a lover who has no control over you, except that which he gains by kindness and attachment" (55). Jacobs's description of this relationship is nearly unprecedented in North American slave narratives, as well as nineteenth-century autobiographies, especially those written by women. In the text, Linda expresses a measure of remorse for behavior that she knows some readers will condemn: "I know I did wrong. No one can feel it more sensibly than I do. The painful and humiliating memory will haunt me to my dying day" (55-56). Nevertheless, she argues that "the wrong does not seem so great with an unmarried man, as with one who has a wife to be made unhappy," (55) and she argues that "the slave woman ought not to be judged by the same standard as others" (56). In revealing the duress under which she acted and the rationale by which she chose to enter the affair, Linda allows the reader to understand her motives and makes a compelling case that it was the lesser of two evils. Nevertheless, in her humble admission of wrongdoing and her direct appeal to "pity me, and pardon me, O virtuous reader!" (55), she makes it very easy for the reader to comply.

In her response to the affair, and Linda's subsequent pregnancy, Linda's grandmother acts as a textual model of empathy (and sympathy), much like Mr. Listwell in *The Heroic*

Slave. Upon first learning of Linda's condition, Marthy calls her granddaughter "a disgrace to your dead mother," and she tears the mother's wedding ring from Linda's finger, ordering her to "Go away… and never come to my house, again" (56-57). But when Linda begs for her "pity," Marthy "looked at me lovingly, with her eyes full of tears. She laid her old hand gently on my head, and murmured, 'Poor child! Poor child!'" (57). Marthy's response to Linda's behavior offers a model for readers to follow. In her original response, she judges Linda based on the Christian values that her granddaughter's behavior transgresses. But in her reconsideration, she deems her daughter a "poor child"—one exposed to licentious ideas and behavior before she was able to respond to them as an adult, and whose only recourse to avoid a rapacious master was to have an affair with another man. Marthy's response to Linda demonstrates how a virtuous reader might also judge her behavior.

Just as Dr. Flint remains an "Other" in the text, Mrs. Flint never acts in a way that indicates fellow humanity. Linda recalls that

> I had imagined if I died… that my mistress would feel a twinge of remorse that she had so hated 'the little imp,' as she styled me. It was my ignorance of that mistress that gave rise to such extravagant imaginings. (19)

Linda is unable to identify with Mrs. Flint, whose hard-heartedness renders her irredeemably Other. The mistress's hatred seems to engender the narrator's contempt. Linda faults Mrs. Flint partly because of the mistress's sins of omission. "She might have…counsel[ed] and [protected] the young and the innocent among her slaves; but for them she had no sympathy" (31). A better woman might have attempted to protect young girls, to act as a maternal protector. However, Brent recalls her former mistress more charitably. Though the woman had failed to grant Linda's freedom when she died, she muses, "looking back on the happy days I spent with her, I try to think with less bitterness of this act of injustice" (8). The

reader, entering into Jacobs's first-person narrative, is implicitly encouraged to "think with less bitterness" as well.

Jacobs's text repeatedly emphasizes the dehumanizing commodification of slaves as "things" and "property." When Linda's uncle Benjamin escapes to the north, she is thankful that his "white face" prevented strangers from recognizing him as a slave, or else "the *thing* [would have been] rendered back to slavery" (24; author's italics). When her father dies, Linda recalls,

> I thought I should be allowed to go [see him,] but I was ordered to go for flowers, that my mistress's house might be decorated for an evening party. I spent the day gathering flowers and weaving them into festoons, while the dead body of my father was lying within a mile of me. What cared my owners for that? he was merely a piece of property. (10)

Linda's anguish and outrage is apparent through her description of being ordered to weave flowers "while the dead body of my father was lying within a mile of me." Indeed, this powerful line is followed directly by the seemingly bloodless comment that "he was merely a piece of property." The disconnect between Linda's strong emotions and the description of her father's body as a piece of property creates cognitive dissonance for the reader and provides a strong critique of slaveowners' logic.

All of Jacobs's characters are "othered," in a sense, by her use of pseudonyms for real people from her own family and past—including herself. This renaming is both a creative act, demonstrating the author's control over her story and her characters, and a way of othering her past self, as if to say that her former actions and sentiments should not be held against her current, writerly self. In an 1857 letter to Amy Post, Jacobs wrote that "there are some things that I might have made plainer I know – Woman can whisper – her cruel wrongs into the ear of a very dear friend – much easier than she can record them for the world to read" (264). This explanation serves as a rationale for othering the self; by renaming her "I"

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in the text, Jacobs allows herself to "whisper her cruel wrongs" into the ears of millions, without merging the narrative self with the writerly self.

Conclusion

Saidiya Hartman argues that empathy, or the imaginative "projection of oneself into another in order to better understand the other," actually functions by "obliterat[ing] otherness" because one substitutes one's own imagined experiences for the actual suffering of the other (19). In her illustrative discussion of John Rankin's 1837 *Letters on American Slavery*, Hartman describes how Rankin's envisioning of his own family torn apart and subjected to abuse becomes a self-centered, masochistic pleasure of sorts. "Rankin begins to feel for himself rather than for those whom this exercise in imagination presumably is designed to reach" (19). Indeed, Rankin's text does embark on an oddly imaginative journey into a fantasy world in which his family is transplanted into slavery and then separated, rather than focusing on the actual suffering of actual slaves. Therefore, Hartman privileges sympathy—a feeling-for or feeling-with the suffering of Others—over empathy, the imaginative identification with the Other that potentially denies the subjectivity or selfhood of the Other by merely substituting one's self in the Other's place. Hartman is right to warn against "the dangers of a too-easy intimacy… at the expense of the slave's suffering" (20). However, as Douglass and Jacobs seemed to realize, true empathy does not erase the Other, but encourages the empathizer to embrace the shared humanity of Self and Other. In this sense, empathy can "obliterate otherness," but in a constructive, not a destructive, sense.

The four works discussed in this chapter demonstrate that empathy (by various other names and descriptions) began to emerge as a central theme in American literature during the decades leading up to the Civil War, as questions of race, rights, and identity became linked to the most fundamental notions of what "America" meant, and for whom. Narrative

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empathy in American literature emerges out of the genres of the sentimental novel and the slave narrative, but it stresses new modes of relation to the Other: recognizing his or her individuality, understanding his or her thoughts and emotions, and identifying with him or her as a fellow human. These were the primary goals of the antebellum slave narrative, insofar as slave narratives were written with white audiences in mind, for the express purpose of supporting the abolitionist cause. Similarly, many early works of African American fiction featured textual models of empathy for white readers to follow. These texts insisted on the dignity, intelligence, and individuality of the characters they offered for readerly empathy; unlike many antebellum texts by white authors, they generally avoided flattening characterizations or caricatures of the figures they depicted. Finally, they emphasized gendered and national identities as sites of shared humanity, demonstrating the belief that empathy required a particular locus of commonality, an explicit node of identity around which the Other could be recognized as a fellow human—whether it be Christian motherhood, "manly" American struggles for freedom, multiethnic white fraternity, or female perseverance in the face of injustice. In the next chapter, I will move ahead to the decades surrounding the turn of the twentieth century in order to examine how antebellum depictions of racial Others expanded into a discourse on immigrant identity and ethnic alterity against a backdrop of nativist and xenophobic American attitudes. Just as early practitioners of narrative empathy attempted to reconfigure racial Others as fellow humans, writers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries sought to promote a more inclusive notion of American identity by eliciting empathy for ethnic and immigrant Others.

Chapter Three

EYEING THE OTHER: TRANSGRESSIVE LOVE AND AUTHORIAL
EMPATHY IN TURN-OF-THE-CENTURY FICTION

This chapter will focus on three novels from the late nineteenth and early twentieth

centuries, all of which sought to promote a more inclusive notion of American identity by

eliciting empathy for ethnic and immigrant Others. All three novels were written by women;

one wrote from the perspective of a white, native-born American who had become a strong

proponent of Native Americans' rights and whose children had tragically died; another was a

Mexican-American woman whose family had suffered from land-grabs and legal persecution

in the wake of the Mexican-American War, and yet she had married a white officer from the

U.S. Army; the third wrote as a white, southern-born transplant to the Midwest, whose

lesbian orientation likely influenced her choice to write from the perspective of a male

narrator who had loved and lost an unforgettable immigrant girl. The chapter will also dive

into the murky waters of authorial empathy, reconsidering the conventional post-structuralist

wisdom that readerly agency requires or results from "the death of the author" and arguing

for the renewed relevance of biographical literary criticism.

The literary project of depicting and eliciting empathy for the Other becomes further

complicated when the "Other" in question is involved in a romantic relationship with the

narrator or another character of categorical difference. In Helen Hunt Jackson's 1884 novel

Ramona, the eponymous heroine (of mixed racial descent, but adopted and raised by a

Mexican-American family) falls in love with Alessandro Assis, the son of the Temecula

Indian chief. Through the secret courtship, forbidden marriage, and series of tragedies that

the couple experiences, Jackson's novel attempts to reveal the universal human characteristics of Ramona and Alessandro, rendering both characters "visible" and therefore recognizable as fellow humans—to each other and (possibly/presumably) to the reader.[1] Similarly, María Amparo Ruiz de Burton depicts the difficulty of intercultural romance in *The Squatter and the Don* (1885), which chronicles the embattled courtship between Mercedes Alamar, a wealthy native *California*[2] of Spanish descent, and Clarence Darrell, the son of poor white settlers. Like *Ramona*, Ruiz de Burton's novel demonstrates the possibility of transcending racial and ethnic boundaries through love and empathy, but it also highlights the ways in which recalcitrant family members may challenge this outcome, and it suggests that in certain circumstances socioeconomic or "class" differences may be harder to overcome than racial or ethnic differences. Finally, Willa Cather's 1918 novel *My Ántonia* illustrates how sexual desire may serve as an impediment to narrative empathy or may require a coded language of suggestion that tends to obscure empathy in the text. Because it reconfigures sexual alterity as ethnic difference, Cather's novel invites readers to peer through (and to recognize) the "male mask" of the narrator.[3]

All three of these "transgressive texts"[4] call into question the authors' respective stances toward their subject matter, as well as their own gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, language proficiencies, religious affiliations, and political agendas. For reasons on which I

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[1] As I will discuss later in this chapter, psychiatrists, psychologists, and neurobiologists have recently come to appreciate more fully the extent to which human empathy and romantic love rely upon the physiological ability to *see* the other.

[2] María Amparo Ruiz de Burton defines the *Californios/as* as "native Californians of Spanish descent" (325)—an intriguingly oxymoronic description for the descendents of Spanish colonists who became major landowners in the California territory before the Mexican-American War of 1846-1848.

[3] I borrow the term "male mask" from Sharon O'Brien's article "'The Thing Not Named': Willa Cather as a Lesbian Writer," which I discuss in pp. 167-168 and elsewhere.

[4] I discuss Shelley Fisher Fishkin's definition of "transgressive texts" and Jennifer Ho's helpful generalization of Fishkin's definition in pp. 178-179.

will elaborate, these works of fiction belie the critical convention—espoused by the New Critics and many post-structuralist critics—that any attention to the author as an entity beyond and discrete from the literary text succumbs to the "intentional fallacy" and devolves into biographic reductionism. Rather, I will argue that a careful consideration of the authors' identities and intentions can enable a more holistic critical approach to literary texts, attending to all three aspects of the rhetorical situations whereby authors "speak" to readers through their texts and elucidating the imaginative processes of their own narrative empathy.

Racialism, Empathy, and Romance in *Ramona*

Helen Hunt Jackson's *Ramona* is a book full of Others. The identity of the narrator, including his or her name, race, and ethnicity, remains undisclosed throughout the novel, though s/he often offers extended commentary about the plot, the characters, and the historical setting of the events that unfold. However, the frequently ethnographic tone of the narration, the sustained focus on female characters and interactions, and the narrator's imperfect understanding of Mexican and native cultures makes it difficult to avoid the assumption that the narrator is white and female, like the author. The narrator relates the story of Ramona, a mixed-race foster child who is raised by the Mexican-American Moreno family until she elopes with Alessandro Assis, the son of the Temecula Indian chief. The novel's empathetic depictions of Ramona and Alessandro's romance, as well as their ensuing struggle to survive and flee from violent, land-grabbing white settlers, establish these non-white protagonists as both victims and heroes.

Though the novel develops its non-white characters into rounded individuals as the story progresses, the narrator often relies on racialized descriptions when introducing them. In his first appearance in the novel, Alessandro sits alone under the willow trees, awaiting the

dawn. In this passage, the narrator describes the Indian's lack of astronomical knowledge in a tone that is purportedly generous, but actually proves to be self-serving:

> It was one of those rare moments in which one can without difficulty realize the noiseless spinning of the earth through space. Alessandro knew nothing of this; he could not have been made to believe that the earth was moving. He thought the sun was coming up apace, and the earth was standing still,—a belief just as grand, just as thrilling, so far as all that goes, as the other: men worshipped the sun long before they found out that it stood still. Not the most reverent astronomer, with the mathematics of the heavens at his tongue's end, could have had more delight in the wondrous phenomenon of the dawn, than did this simple-minded, unlearned man. (48)

While this passage does not mock Alessandro's "primitive" belief that the earth sits immobile and the sun revolves around it, the narrator is established as one who understands the modern world of science and technology—presumably along with the reader. Those who "can without difficulty realize the noiseless spinning of the earth through space"—a category that seems to include the reader—are distinguished from Alessandro, who "could not have been made to believe that the earth was moving." The apparently open-minded claim that Alessandro's belief is "just as grand, just as thrilling" as the correct theory about the earth's movement through space actually emphasizes and reinscribes the narrator's scientific superiority. By comparing the intellect of a "simple-minded, unlearned man" to that of a modern astronomer, the narrator establishes Alessandro as a member of a primitive group, a noble savage whose innocent delight in the "wondrous phenomenon of the dawn" is to be looked upon kindly and generously by the more knowledgeable narrator and reader.

Even before the Temecula Indians appear and are identified as Others, the Mexican-American Moreno family is characterized as such. Señora Gonzaga Moreno, the widowed matriarch of the family estate, is introduced as looking like "a sad, spiritual-minded old lady, amiable and indolent, like her race, but sweeter and more thoughtful than their wont" (3-4).[5]

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[5] Denise Chávez comments that "it was hard for me to move past [this] statement… [which] appeared, to me, to be a racial slur" (xiv). Chávez is right to note that the text contains repeated characterizations that rely on

Soon afterwards, the narrator describes the Moreno household as representative of "the half barbaric, half elegant, wholly generous and free-handed life led there by Mexican men and women of degree" during the early nineteenth century (13). "It was a picturesque life," the description continues, "with more of sentiment and gayety in it, more also that was truly dramatic, more romance, than will ever be seen again on those sunny shores" (13). This is not the voice of an insider. Even though its nostalgic tone seems to regret the passage of *Californio* culture into historical obscurity, this scene-setting narration establishes the world of the Morenos as tragically and romantically alien—doomed to demise, but wonderful in its theatrical strangeness.

While Indians and Mexicans are established as Others early in *Ramona*, white Others are not far behind. The Morenos speak often about the American "thieves" that have stolen their land, and their heartfelt dismay is sympathetically rendered. When her son Felipe wears his deceased father's military uniform to a commemorative event, Señora Moreno charges him to "let the American hounds see what a Mexican officer and gentleman looked like before they had set their base, usurping feet on our necks!" (10). Over the course of the novel, white characters are often drunk, violent, and untrustworthy, while non-white characters (especially Ramona and Alessandro) lament losing their lands and their livelihoods to such ignoble creatures. Even the poor white Hyer family members, who kindly rescue Ramona, Alessandro, and their infant daughter during a snowstorm, are characterized as uneducated, crude, and shiftless, and their Tennessee dialect is often difficult to decipher.

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racialist logic. However, upon closer inspection (and a full reading of the novel), it becomes clear that the narrator does not support this apparent description; s/he goes on to note that this would be a "mistaken impression," and the subsequent revelation that the Señora is far from "amiable," "indolent," or "sweet" belies the apparent slur against Mexican-Americans with which she is introduced.

One might argue that every character in Helen Hunt Jackson's novel is an Other in some sense.

Even Ramona, the novel's tragic heroine, is marked by difference. Ramona is raised as a foster child, and mystery surrounds her birth. Readers learn in Chapter 3 that Ramona is the child of Angus Phail, a Scottish immigrant who unsuccessfully courted Señora Moreno's sister (also named Ramona), and the unidentified Indian woman that he married. The secret is known by Señora Moreno and a handful of other characters, but Ramona herself remains uninformed of her past until midway through the novel, after she has already decided to elope with Alessandro. Some members of the Moreno household presumably never learn of Ramona's racial difference. But Ramona is also rendered "Other" by her pale skin and blue eyes when she goes with Alessandro to live in a variety of Indian villages, exemplifying one of Jackson's major themes: alterity is always contextual, and the Other exists only in the eye of the beholder.

Not only are Jackson's characters insistently Othered; the plot of *Ramona* is driven by the demands of difference. Señora Moreno forbids Ramona to marry Alessandro because he is an Indian (despite the fact that Ramona herself is of mixed Indian descent); this edict leads to the couple's departure and subsequent diasporic wanderings. The Indian villages in which they reside are repeatedly repossessed by white settlers who have purchased the "legal" rights to the land from the federal government in Washington. In the text, racial and ethnic differences insistently compel movement: the systematic dislocation and forceful removal of native peoples from their ancestral homes. Even the inaccessible mountaintop retreat to which the couple flees is ultimately invaded by a white "ruffian" who shoots Alessandro, exclaiming, "That'll teach you damned Indians to leave off stealing our horses!" (309).

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But *Ramona* can also be read as a series of vignettes that collectively celebrate and elicit empathy. Early in the novel, the influence of empathy can be seen at work on Juan Canito, an elderly *Californio* who serves as the Morenos' head shepherd until he is crippled by an accident during the sheep shearing. During one of his first interactions with Alessandro, Juan Can engages in an intergroup rivalry regarding who is the best at shearing sheep:

> ''Tis a poor shearer, indeed, that draws blood to speak of. I've sheared many a thousand sheep in my day, and never a red stain on the shears. But the Mexicans have always been famed for good shearers.'
> Juan's invidious emphasis on the word 'Mexicans' did not escape Alessandro. 'And we Indians also,' he answered, good-naturedly, betraying no annoyance; 'but as for these Americans, I saw one at work the other day, that man Lomax, who has settled near Temecula, and upon my faith, Juan Can, I thought it was a slaughter-pen, and not a shearing. The poor beasts limped off with blood running.' (55)

While Juan Can intends to assert the superiority of Mexican sheep shearers over their Indian counterparts, Alessandro redirects his critique toward a mutual outgroup, or class of Others: the whites who threaten both groups' lands and livelihoods. The unidentified narrator emphasizes the cleverness of Alessandro's strategy by noting that as Juan Can walked away, he "lost the sight of a smile on Alessandro's face, which would have vexed him still farther" (55). This smile suggests that Alessandro's strategy was intentional and at least partly successful. By invoking a common enemy, Alessandro removed the venom from Juan Can's antagonistic rhetoric, and the unidentified narrator seems to approve of his clever strategem.

Juan Can's preconceptions about Indians do not change immediately. When he smells the dinner that the Morenos' chef Marda has prepared for the Indian shearers, he fulminates, "if that wasteful old hussy isn't getting up a feast for those beasts of Indians! There's mutton and onions, and peppers stewing, and potatoes, I'll be bound, and God knows what else, for beggars that are only too thankful to get a handful of roasted wheat or a bowl of acorn porridge at home" (70). In his ire, Juan Can maligns the Temecula Indians as impoverished

and unworthy of finer things, unlike himself and the other members of the Moreno household.

But after Alessandro remains at the Moreno estate to minister to the ailing Felipe (Señora Moreno's only surviving child and heir), Juan Can slowly revises his assessment of the chief's son. He tells Señora Moreno, "I do marvel where the lad got so much knowledge, at his age. He is like an old hand at the sheep business. He knows more than any shepherd I have,—a deal more; and it is not only of sheep…. I knew not that there were such Indians; surely there cannot be many such" (85). While Juan Can apparently reserves some negative judgments about Indians in general, he no longer considers Alessandro merely as a member of that rival group. In fact, his newfound respect for Alessandro directly contradicts his early assertions about the supremacy of Mexican shepherds and shearers. Moreover, his reference to Alessandro as "the lad" downplays the young man's racial difference and references him instead by the universal category of age. Alessandro's youth is mentioned here to emphasize not Juan Can's own seniority, but rather the impressiveness of Alessandro's knowledge "at his age." Although the narrator makes it clear that Juan Can has his own ulterior motives for commending Alessandro—he believes that Alessandro's service during his own convalescence will protect his position from another Mexican rival—the language of his praise suggests that it is at least partly heartfelt. Juan Can no longer considers Alessandro merely a member of a rival group—the "beasts" he had so recently maligned—but also a fellow shepherd and *ranchero* whose interests, reputation, and fortune are linked to his own. The old Mexican shepherd had come to see "the Other" as a fellow human.

The most obvious instances of intercultural empathy in *Ramona* occur during the courtship, relationship, and married life of Ramona and Alessandro. The two first meet when Alessandro's band of sheep shearers comes to help shear the Morenos' herd; at his first sight

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of Ramona, Alessandro is transfixed. Unseen, he gazes at her, like a "beautiful vision," and

his senses "[seem to be] leaving him" (47). The sight of Ramona renders Alessandro

speechless and senseless, like the "wild creatures of the forest" (47), emphasizing his alterity

and vulnerability—and her apparent unattainability. In this primal scene of their relationship,

neither communication nor recognition is possible. Ramona first becomes aware of

Alessandro during the family's "sunrise hymn" the next morning.[6] Himself a Catholic, like

his father, Alessandro can not resist "striking in" with the Moreno household, and "at the first

notes of this rich new voice, Ramona's voice ceased in surprise; and throwing up her

window, she leaned out, eagerly looking in all directions to see who it could be" (50).

Therefore, it is Alessandro's song that initiates her awareness of him and her interest in him.

When he sings again in the chapel during Sunday Mass, Ramona "heard the first note, and

felt again the same thrill" (54). In response to her query, Felipe tells her that the young Indian

with the "superb voice" is Alessandro, "old Pablo's son… a splendid fellow" (54). But it is

not until Felipe falls ill during the sheep-shearing that the two speak, and their first words are

significant. During the general excitement following Felipe's fainting spell atop the roof of

the shearing shed, Ramona cries, "Oh, how will he ever be lifted out!" (57). Alessandro

replies, "I will lift him, Señora," and proceeds to bring Felipe safely down (57). But upon

hearing Juan Can call Ramona "Señorita," Alessandro repeats the word: "Señorita!" (58).

This interpellation prompts Ramona to ask, "You are Alessandro, are you not?" (59).

Alessandro responds, "Yes, Señorita… I am Alessandro" (59). It is the sound of Alessandro's

"rich new voice" that initially wins Ramona's attention; it is the knowledge that she is

unmarried that prompts his impulsive interjection, and it is his hailing that compels her to

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[6] Denise Chávez notes that "it was traditional for hymns to be sung at dawn in the [Catholic] missions" of
Mexican California (*Ramona* 364, note 2).

recognize him by name—an identification that conveys both empathy and personal interest, acknowledging him as an individual worthy of knowing. His response registers all these changes (with surprise) and reasserts his own sense of self: "I am Alessandro" (59).

The romance of Alessandro and Ramona is not a speedy or torrid affair; they come to know each other intimately during weeks spent by the bedside of the ailing Felipe, to whom Alessandro persists for some time in believing that Ramona is "betrothed, no doubt" (62). Nevertheless, he sends for his violin, knowing that both Felipe and Ramona will appreciate his music. When he tells Ramona that his subordinate José has travelled to Temecula and back to bring the violin, she states that she wishes she could have thanked him—and that the Señora Moreno could have paid him. Wounded, Alessandro tells her, "It is paid, Señorita. It is nothing. If the Señor Felipe wishes to hear the violin, I will play" (74). This statement brings about a sudden change in Ramona: "for the first time, she looked at him with no thought of his being an Indian… so strong was the race feeling, that never till that moment had she forgotten it" (74). It is the recognition of Alessandro's hurt pride that first shocks Ramona into considering him as an equal. No longer the young Indian brave with the striking voice, he suddenly emerges for her as a fellow human, with emotions comparable to her own.

Ramona and Alessandro's early courtship consists primarily of meaningful glances and gazes, though their readings of each other are sometimes inaccurate. When they see each other in the chapel, Ramona correctly identifies Alessandro as "the Indian who sang" (51). But Alessandro, viewing Felipe "turned towards her, smiling slightly, with a look as of secret intelligence," mistakenly believes that "Señor Felipe has married. She is his wife" (51). After he learns that she is actually unmarried, Ramona communicates her growing interest in Alessandro in part through facial expressions. Handing Alessandro a platter of food for his men, Ramona warns him,

'Take care, Alessandro, it is very full. The gravy will run over if you are not careful. You are not used to waiting on table'; and as she said it, she smiled full into Alessandro's eyes,—a little flitting, gentle, friendly smile, which went near to making him drop the platter, mutton, gravy, and all, then and there, at her feet. (71)

Alessandro is moved by Ramona's smile and her "full" eye contact, which communicates both empathy and the stirrings of romantic interest. Likewise, she is moved by his eyes, through which she perceives his uniqueness and his virtuous character: "I never saw such eyes as Alessandro has…. When he fixes his eyes on me, [I] feel a constraint. There is something in them like the eyes of a saint, so solemn, yet so mild. I am sure he is very good" (80). For both Ramona and Alessandro, the eyes of the other command attention and convey crucial information about their mutual romantic interest.

But soon afterwards, Ramona comes across Alessandro and Margarita, the Morenos' young Mexican servant, who has taken a liking to the chief's son. As Ramona approaches the two, she sees Margarita grasping Alessandro's hand and gazing into his face with a "half-saucy, half-loving expression" (82). Alessandro's body language is more indifferent; he stands with "his back against the fence, his right hand hanging listlessly down" (81). But when he discerns Ramona's presence, Alessandro "snatche[s] his hand away" and turns to her with an "anguished, shame-smitten, appealing, worshipping look" on his face (83). The narrator comments that perceiving Alessandro's facial expression revealed the truth "like a flash of light into Margarita's consciousness" (83). The young maid recognizes Alessandro's devotion to Ramona from that momentary facial expression, which in turn triggers her own "jealous rage" (83). But Ramona, still unsure of Alessandro's emotions, feels her heart "hot and unhappy" from the encounter, and when he approaches her to explain, "she lower[s] her eyes" (83). By avoiding eye contact in this scene, she signals her unhappiness at finding him with Margarita; she has misread the situation, and she misunderstands his intentions.

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Distraught, Alessandro attempts to explain what has transpired, but when he

approaches Ramona, he cannot find the words to express himself. "I wished to say—," he

begins, and then pauses (84). But Ramona suddenly discovers that

> she knew all he wished to say. But she spoke not, only looked at him searchingly.
>   "Señorita," he began again. "I would never be unfaithful to my duty to the Señora,
> and to you."
>   "I believe you, Alessandro," said Ramona. "It is not necessary to say more."
>   At these words a radiant joy spread over Alessandro's face. He had not hoped for
> this. He felt, rather than heard, that Ramona understood him. He felt, for the first
> time, a personal relation between himself and her. (84)

By reading the nonverbal cues and understanding the context of Alessandro's approach,

Ramona finds that she understands him, even without hearing his words. Having just been

observed with Margarita, he feels the need to explain himself to Ramona, and Ramona senses

his passion through his posture, his facial expression, and his nervous agitation. Likewise,

her expression of belief communicates more than the words alone: not only does she believe

his explanation of the incident; she understands without needing him to speak the words. The

"personal relation" that springs up between them is the result of an understanding that

transcends language and cultural differences, based on empathy and communicated

primarily through eye contact and facial expressions. The "radiant joy" that spreads over

Alessandro's face at her words signals that empathy has given rise to romantic love.

Ramona and Alessandro's romance does not develop unnoticed; indeed, their

courtship plays out as a theatrical performance with a thoroughly engaged textual audience.

In addition to the jealous Margarita, who surveils their interactions in the hopes that Señora

Moreno will discover them, the ailing Felipe witnesses the steady progress of their

relationship. For his part, Alessandro always sits "when Ramona [is] there, in the spot which

best commanded a view of her face" (103). There are therefore "three watchers of Ramona,"

and the narrator notes that "if there had been a fourth [Señora Moreno], matters might have

turned out differently" (90). But the Señora cares little for Ramona—as she tells Father Salvierderra, "One cannot love by act of will" (89). While Alessandro watches Ramona because he loves her; the Señora fails to watch her because she loves her not. With overt and covert audiences privy to every glance that passes between Ramona and Alessandro, their courtship consists of a drama of watching, an extended "mindreading" exercise with potentially life-altering results.

Once she becomes aware of his affection, Ramona begins to watch Alessandro secretly from her room. Abandoning her morning prayers, she kneels "gazing at him" through the window, from which she feels she can look freely (102). Not long thereafter, Margarita's wish is fulfilled when Señora Moreno discovers the two young lovers together and banishes Ramona to her room. But the adoptive matriarch is too late to prevent their romantic attachment. Just before she had come upon the couple, Ramona

> had said, "I know you love me, Alessandro, and I am glad of it," and had lifted her eyes to his, with all the love that a woman's eyes can carry; and when he threw his arms around her, she had of her own accord come closer, and laid one hand on his shoulder, and turned her face to his (115).

Through this final gesture, Ramona essentially pledges her love to Alessandro, although she does not utter the "three little words" until much later in the text (234). Despite the watchers that surround them, her eyes are able to communicate "all the love" of which they are capable, and in turning her face to his, Ramona signals her empathetic desire to be one with him. They elope soon afterwards, despite Señora Moreno's best attempts to prevent this outcome.

The Look of Love: Eyes, Empathy, and Oxytocin

The intersection of empathy and romantic love raises interesting questions, which are perhaps better answered by social scientists than by literary critics. Does love require

empathy and/or vice versa? If the two relations overlap, where does one end and the other begin? Are the roles of love and empathy essentially the same between couples of similar race, ethnicity, religion, and socioeconomic status and those separated by divides of perceived difference, or does empathy play a greater role in "mixed" couples? Clinical psychologist Arthur P. Ciaramicoli writes that "empathy, more than any other human faculty, is the key to loving relationships and the antidote to… loneliness, fear, anxiety, and despair" (12).

Evolutionary psychologist Robin Allott has examined the roles of love and empathy in determining "fitness" for survival and reproduction. Allott writes that "the capacity for love [historically results from] a number of other evolving capacities—language, empathy, self-awareness, [and] consciousness" (361). Allott concludes that empathy is both a crucial "precursor of love"—a similar but lesser degree of unity and fellow-feeling between two humans—and an "essential precondition for love"—without which love would not be possible (354). He is careful to acknowledge that the two emotional relations are distinct, yet "love can hardly start or continue without empathy" (358). In contrast, Allott finds that "there is no necessary link between love and sexual desire or sexual behavior" (358). "Empathy [makes] possible the visible, or visual, conversation between two persons, mirroring each other, most obviously demonstrated in the smile reflected, back and forth, by which the essence of love, the change in the neural representation of oneself to incorporate a model of the other, takes place" (367). Allott and Ciaramicoli agree that love requires empathy— though, as I will discuss later in this chapter, the reverse is not always true. For couples who bridge divides of racial or ethnic difference, such identification with the "Other" as a fellow human may be more difficult or more unusual, but romantic relationships between members of the same racial, ethnic, or cultural group require a similar breaking-down of barriers

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between Self and Other. Indeed, it seems unlikely that any experience of romantic love would be possible without the cognitive and emotional basis of empathy—regardless of racial or ethnic difference.

Child psychiatrist Bruce D. Perry and science journalist Maria Szalavitz have shown that the neurological bases of empathy and romantic love are closely related. In the early 1970s, pharmacologists Henry Dale and Peter Klopfer identified oxytocin as "the hormone of mother love," because of its role in childbirth and nursing to promote the bonding of mother and child (Szalavitz & Perry 61). The chemical is also released in male and female humans (as well as many other species) during sexual intercourse. Szalavitz and Perry note that unlike other brain chemicals involved in sexual pleasure, such as opioids and dopamine, oxytocin does not itself cause "any kind of high or joy"; rather, it enables "mammals to make the connection between a particular individual and pleasure," forming the basis for enduring social bonds (30). Laboratory tests have revealed that prairie voles—a species of field mice that engage in monogamous mating behavior much more frequently than other, closely related species—have "a high concentration of oxytocin receptors in brain regions involved in the experience of pleasure" (62). Indeed, when administered oxytocin externally, the mice formed monogamous pairs more frequently, even when they did not engage in sexual intercourse. But blocking the rodents' oxytocin receptors produced "social amnesia," leading to more promiscuous mating behavior and reduced long-term coupling (62). Szalavitz and Perry conclude that while opioids and dopamine regulate sexual attraction and pleasure, oxytocin is the neurological vehicle of "passion for [one's] own true love," just as it promotes the loving attachment of (neurotypical) human mothers to their newborn children (30).

Oxytocin is also involved in human empathy. The central nervous system includes the (counterintuitively named) sympathetic ("fight-or-flight") nervous system, fueled by adrenaline and triggered by stressful or dangerous situations, as well as a corresponding "parasympathetic" circuitry that causes most healthy individuals "to find friendly social contact soothing" (75).[7] Szalavitz and Perry write that the parasympathetic system might well be called the "empathetic system," because "it allows the relaxation necessary for social connection and uses the bonding chemical oxytocin as one of its chemical messengers" (75). Not surprisingly, this social connection is largely perceived and perpetuated by examining facial expressions. Over thousands of years of evolutionary development, the human brain "developed the capacity to read nonverbal cues, many of which are communicated via changes in facial expression" (32). Szalavitz and Perry explain that observing a smiling face triggers a small "neurochemical 'reward'"—the brain automatically associates a friendly face with pleasure. But a "polite grin" or a sarcastic sneer will not produce this pleasant result. Therefore, a smile is perceived largely through the eyes of the other: "we know by looking into someone's eyes [if] they are smiling genuinely" (33)—or at least our brains think they know. Just as infants bond with their parents through sustained visual contact and come to judge social situations based on their parents' facial expressions, empathy and love are "largely played out on the stage of the face" (42). The authors conclude that "we love because we can empathize" (4).

In *Ramona*, the joy that "spread[s] over Alessandro's face" and the love that Ramona's "eyes… carry" when she "turn[s] her face to his" are not merely effusions of

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[7] Stephen Goldberg notes that "the sympathetic system as a whole is a catabolic system, expending energy, as in the fight or flight response to danger, e.g. increasing the heart rate and contractility and shunting blood to the muscles and heart. The parasympathetic system is an anabolic system, conserving energy, e.g. in slowing the heart rate and in promoting the digestion and absorption of food" (60).

emotion. They are highly complex forms of nonverbal signaling, developed over millenia of human brain development, which rely on parasympathetic nervous responses and neurological processes of which Ramona and Alessandro would have been entirely unaware. The look of love is at once a sign of self-awareness, a message of identification, a gesture of nonviolence, an expression of affection, and a chemically reinforced suggestion of sustained future pleasure. Helen Hunt Jackson's novel suggests that she recognized and acknowledged the deeply meaningful forms of interpersonal communication that could take place in a single glance, providing an empathetic basis for romantic love.

Embattled Empathy in *The Squatter and the Don*

In her 1885 novel, María Amparo Ruiz de Burton tells another story of transgressive romance—between Mercedes Alamar, the youngest daughter of wealthy Mexican-American landowners, and Clarence Darrell, the son of poor white settlers "squatting" on the Alamars' estate.[8] The novel is, as Rosaura Sánchez and Beatrice Pita point out, a combination of two quest stories: a romantic quest for love across racial and cultural boundaries as well as a historical quest "for land and justice" (7). The (white) Darrell family comes to California in search of a homestead; William Darrell stakes his claim to 320 acres on the vast Alamar *rancho* near San Diego. Mr. Darrell tells the other squatters, "I don't want to jump anybody's claim; I want a fair deal" (73)—fair, that is, to all except the Alamars, who actually owned the land, according to the laws of Mexican California before the Mexican-American War. After the United States won the war, as the novel repeatedly points out, new laws allowed white settlers to lay claim to the lands of the *Californios*—by "squatting" on the estates of

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[8]As Mrs. Darrell asserts to her husband early in the novel, "whenever you take up government land… you are 'settlers,' but not when you locate claims on land belonging to anyone else. In that case, you must accept the epithet of '*Squatter*'" (56).

"native Californians" of Spanish descent and by killing any cattle that wandered onto their

"claim" (65, 325). But after Clarence makes a fortune speculating in mining stocks, he

secretly arranges to buy the Darrell family's claim from Don Alamar, legitimizing his

family's residence there and rendering them no longer "squatters" in the legal sense. This

action endears him to Don Alamar, and Clarence's romance with Mercedes ensues.

As with Ramona and Alessandro, the first kindling of romantic interest between

Clarence and Mercedes is sparked by eye contact—but in this case, physical contact also

plays a significant role. Having arranged with Victoriano to "discuss some business" with

Don Alamar so that he can purchase his family's land, Clarence waits down on the veranda

for the Don. To his surprise, Mercedes chases her little dog through the doorway and collides

with him:

> a girl rushed out, coming against him before she could check herself…. She felt two
> strong arms holding her….
>   [As she looked] up to see the face above them, their eyes met. Hers expressed
> surprise, his merriment. But a change in their expression flashed instantaneously, and
> both felt each other tremble, thrilled with the bliss of their proximity. Her face was
> suffused with burning blushes. She was bewildered, and without daring to meet his
> eyes again, stammered an apology…. (93)

In this, their first meeting, Clarence and Mercedes do not merely become aware of each

other: her body collides with his, "coming against him"; he holds her with "strong arms," and

both feel "thrilled" by their unexpected contact. But the real dramatic action takes place in

their facial expressions, as both change "instantaneously" from (his) merriment and (her)

surprise to something else entirely. That something else is not explicitly described, but Ruiz

de Burton suggests that their expressions come to mirror each other, becoming one and the

same as they "tremble" together. The narrator states that "their expression" changed

instantly—the plural possessive pronoun *their* modifying the singular noun *expression*. This

choice of words suggests that Mercedes' and Clarence's distinct initial reactions to the

incident become shared and singular in the critical moment when their eyes meet. In this moment, the mutual "thrill" of their encounter is registered, read, and understood by each through the eyes of the other. This eye contact renders both characters vulnerably legible, disclosing heartfelt desires and anxieties—hence Mercedes does not risk a second glance; she averts her eyes.

A split second before this collision occurred, Mercedes had attempted to prevent it, painfully twisting her ankle. As the rest of their first encounter is spent reading each other's eyes and face, in order to form initial judgments about the other's mental state, this injury becomes the focus of their exchange. Seeing a "pallor… come to her face," Clarence says, "I know you are suffering. What can I do? I am so sorry!" (93). Mercedes demurs, but when she attempts to walk on the ankle "a slight contraction of the brows betray[s] her pain" (94). This "slight" change of facial expression does not escape Clarence. Acting impulsively, he picks Mercedes up and carries her to a chair on the veranda, then begs her pardon: "Forgive my lifting you without your permission. I knew you would not give it, and I knew also that you were suffering" (94). During the mere minute or two that they have spent together, Clarence has already detected her pain as well as her pride and sense of propriety. From subtle changes in her facial expressions as well as her body language when she attempts to walk, he has deduced not only her physical state but also what he believes to be her psychological disposition, in order to surmise what she will do next. This is "mindreading" or "theory of mind" cognition, as Lisa Zunshine, Sanjida O'Connell, and others describe it.[9] Clarence subconsciously processes a thousand subtle clues in order to understand Mercedes' thoughts and to predict what she will do next.

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[9] For a more complete explanation of this concept, please see my discussion of "mindreading" on pp. 43-45.

Mercedes has also been quickly sizing up Clarence. At first she is not sure whether to be "grateful or offended" at his action, as Clarence had expected (94). She notes that "his voice was soft, caressing, pleading, but his eyes seemed to her to emit rays full of attractive, earnest force which she felt had great power. They dazzled her, and yet those eyes were so mild, so kind" (94). Like Ramona, Mercedes is spellbound by the eyes of the young man who will eventually become her lover, and she judges his character favorably based on their "mild," "kind," and "earnest" gaze. But she is also impressed by Clarence's strength and audacity: "who could this strong young man be, so bold, and yet so gentle, so courteous and yet waiting for no permission to take so positively hold of her, to carry her bodily half the length of the piazza" (94). She desires to look again into his eyes, but she is hesitant to do so, for she fears that she will not be able to resist their "magnetic" force (94). Only when Don Alamar is carrying Mercedes off to her room do the couple's eyes meet again, "transmitting that strange thrill to both" (96). Like *Ramona*, *The Squatter and the Don* emphasizes the significance of eye contact and facial expressions as the building blocks of trust, empathy, and romantic love.

During their brief acquaintance, which leads quickly to romance, Clarence and Mercedes do not appear to spend much time pondering the ethnic and cultural differences that divide them. The text does not provide evidence of Clarence's concerns about Mercedes' difference, or of Mercedes' concerns about Clarence's difference. Rather, the drama of embattled empathy for the Other resides primarily in the negotiations between the young lovers and their family members who resist or openly oppose the relationship. Mercedes' sister Carlota shudders at "the idea of an Alamar marrying a squatter! For squatters they are, though we dance with them" (117). Likewise, her sister Rosario comments, "I fear I will not be reconciled to the idea of Mercedes being a daughter-in-law of old Darrell" (117). In order

to separate the couple, Mercedes' mother arranges for her to take an extended trip to New York, by way of San Francisco. But Clarence requests the Don's permission to follow her, and the old man instructs him to "go and try your luck" (120).

The drama surrounding the Alamar women's responses to Clarence pursuing Mercedes turns largely around the issue of land ownership. Knowing that his father would be outraged to learn that his son had purchased the family's land, Clarence originally asks the Don to conduct the transaction in secret. But this stratagem damages his standing with the Alamar women, for even though the Don insists that "the Darrells are not squatters" (110), Mercedes' sisters continue to refer to them as such. George Mechlin, the new husband of Mercedes' sister Elvira, convinces Clarence to explain the truth to Mercedes and Elvira while the four are together as passengers on the steamer to San Francisco. Upon hearing that Clarence owns the Darrell family's land, Elvira responds, "I am so glad to hear that!" (131), and Mercedes urges Clarence to have Don Alamar inform her mother. As George explains to Clarence, "Spanish girls are trained to strict filial obedience" (129); hence, Mercedes could not return his love until her parents—particularly her mother—approved. Fortunately, when Doña Josepha learns that Clarence is not a squatter, she immediately apologizes "for the very wrong, very unjust opinion I have had of you. Believe me, it gives me great pleasure to know that I was mistaken" (168). These immediate changes of heart on the parts of the Alamar women reveal that it is Clarence's perceived class, rather than his race or ethnicity, which initially renders him an Other in their eyes. Once they learn of his wealth and his perceived offense of "squatting" is vindicated, Clarence is welcomed into their company with open arms, and Doña Josepha grants him her blessing to court Mercedes.

But the Alamar women are not the only obstacle to the couple's transgressive relationship. As an unelected representative of the squatters on the *rancho*, Mr. Darrell

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frequently maligns the Don and condones the most egregious attacks against the Alamars'

land and cattle. When he finally learns that Clarence has purchased the family's plot without

consulting him, Mr. Darrell insultingly accuses Don Alamar of using his daughter to entice

the purchase: "you paraded your daughter (like a pretty filly for sale) before my son, to get

his money!" (230). Mr. Darrell then attempts to horsewhip Don Alamar, but Alamar's son

Gabriel lassos him in a tight *reata* and escorts him back to his recently constructed house.

Mr. Darrell's words and actions have dire consequences: Doña Josepha withdraws her

permission for Mercedes to marry Clarence, and again the two are separated. For his part,

Clarence is disgusted by his father's words and actions, and Mr. Darrell adds insult to injury

by kicking him out of the house, announcing, "you are too *greasy* for both of us to live under

the same roof" (249). Mercedes concludes that the couple "had better postpone our wedding"

(254), and Clarence despairs that their union will ever be possible.

If certain members of both families resist Clarence and Mercedes' relationship, others

are more empathetic, and in the end their conciliatory influence is stronger than that of those

who oppose the marriage. Despite the constant offenses of the squatters on his land, Don

Alamar speaks kindly of "Americans," and he generally resists the inclination to return

hatred with hatred. As he tells Clarence,

> "Instead of hate, I feel great attraction toward the American people. Their sentiments,
> their ways of thinking suit me, with but few exceptions. I am fond of the Americans. I
> know that, as a matter of fact, only the very mean and narrow-minded have harsh
> feelings against my race." (165)

Although he has every reason to resent the (mostly white) American squatters who attempt to

take his land and cattle by force—and by the force of laws designed to enable such

behavior—Don Alamar abstains from maligning "the Americans." Even after Mr. Darrell's

offensive slurs against Mercedes, the Don does not wish the young couple to suffer the

consequences. "Because Darrell chooses to indulge in mean thoughts and atrocious

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language," he asks Mercedes, "is that a reason why you and Clarence should be made wretched for life?" (240). Even though Don Alamar will die before Clarence returns to marry Mercedes, his generous and forgiving mindset is ultimately adopted by the rest of the family.

Similarly, Clarence's mother, Mary Darrell, repeatedly rejects the racist and inflammatory language of Mr. Darrell and the other squatters. When Mr. Darrell venomously asks "why should these *inferior* people be more considered [by federal land grants] than the Americans," Mary replies, "'Inferior? What are you talking about? It is enough to see one of those Alamar ladies to learn that they are inferior to nobody'" (205). Later, when the squatters insinuate that Clarence has been bribed with the daughter of the Don, Mrs. Darrell enters their meeting, announces that she has "a few words to say," and then continues:

> "All those among you, gentlemen, who think that Don Mariano Alamar induced my son Clarence to purchase the land from him are much mistaken; and all those who think Don Mariano made a false entry of a land sale, do him an injustice…. The land was bought and paid for at *my* request. If there is any blame, or crime, or guilt in the matter, *I* am the criminal—*I* am the guilty one…. I do not mean to criticize anybody's actions or opinions, but from my point of view, I say, those laws which authorize you to locate homesteads upon lands claimed as Mexican grants, those laws are wrong, and good, just, moral citizens should not be guided by them." (235)

Though Mrs. Darrell's words do not deter the squatters from pursuing their claims, they do eventually cause Mr. Darrell to see the error of his ways. When Clarence returns to marry Mercedes, after years of self-imposed exile brought about by his father's behavior, Mr. Darrell begs his pardon: "I did you a great wrong…. I murdered the Don, and he was the best man I ever saw…. I was a monster" (331). Mr. Darrell is only partly correct in the confessional claim that his actions "murdered" the Don—who, on his deathbed, blamed instead "the sins of our legislators" (304). But his change of heart is a tribute to the power of empathy, particularly the sustained empathy of Mrs. Darrell for the "Californians" who had been wronged both by the U.S. government and by the squatters who unfairly appropriated their land.

In one sense, the plot of *The Squatter and the Don* turns around empathy for the Other and the transgressive romance that empathy makes possible. Despite their families' racial, ethnic, linguistic, cultural, and class differences, Clarence and Mercedes are able to see in each other not only friends and equals or fellow humans, but also soulmates. The long and troubled process through which their marriage becomes possible is a testimony to the difficulty of love that bridges divides of difference and the consequent challenges that recalcitrant family members can present to such unions. The novel therefore presents a progressive vision of the possibility of recognizing the shared humanity of the Other, even when the Other is a political or economic rival. It also subverts the dynamic all too common in American literature, whereby the white American perspective is the primary site of empathy for a non-white Other or Others.

But even as Ruiz de Burton's novel celebrates this ameliorative empathy, it also reinscribes another category of difference—of class, or socioeconomic status. As we have seen, the Alamar women object to Clarence not because he is a white, English-speaking "American," but because they believe him to be a "squatter." In addition to the presumed offense that all squatters posed to land-owning Mexicans after the Mexican-American War, this title was also a class-based epithet, roughly equivalent to the southern term "poor white trash." Clarence's fortunes in the novel rise and fall based on two critical indices: first, by his net worth—which skyrockets from a $2,000 bequest to a million-dollar portfolio early in the narrative (102) to a reported value of $12 million by the end of the novel (336)—and second, by the other characters' gradual recognition of this newfound wealth. Clarence's increasingly respectable character and his "nobility"—which George Mechlin and others frequently note—are neatly aligned with his rising fortune. Indeed, in Ruiz de Burton's novel, financial windfalls conveniently accompany debonair behavior and courtly acts of romantic love.

Shortly after Clarence "appealingly" requests and receives Doña Josepha's blessing for his courtship of Mercedes (170), he learns that the ore mine he owns is a "splendid" prospect, with "millions in it" (171-172). Similarly, Clarence's initial return to woo Mercedes, which prompts his brother Everett to comment that "Clary is so much in love" (216), is prefaced by the revelation that his mine is "in bonanza" (214). Shortly after the couple is married and Clarence invites the entire Alamar family to live with them in San Francisco (332), we learn that he is worth $12 million (336). The narrative repeatedly suggests that Clarence's good character and his luck in love are closely tied to his net worth.

If Clarence's newfound fortune and his accompanying nobility mark him as an "Other" worth embracing, other characters in the novel are not so fortunate. Two categories of villains are repeatedly singled out for the narrator's scorn: first, the poor white squatters who attack and malign the Don, and second, the corrupt officials who enable such behavior. When describing the first category, the adjective "low" is often employed to indicate both socioeconomic class and "nature," or innate quality—sometimes also suggested by cartoonish names. For example, the narrator introduces John Gasbang, a squatter, thus: "the broad, vulgar face of Gasbang, with its square jaws, gray beard, closely clipped, but never shaved, his compressed, thin, bloodless lips, his small, pale, restless eyes and flat nose, Darrell soon recognized…. Years, moreover, had not improved his low nature" (69). This is not subtle characterization: Gasbang's unshaven face, bloodless lips and pale, restless eyes conjure up a species not quite human. As his name suggests, Gasbang's temper is characterized as quick, explosive, and distasteful; nothing that he says or does elsewhere in the text ever complicates or undermines this character typing. Indeed, outside of the Darrell family, the squatters on the Alamar estate are uniformly described as vulgar, mean, and unreasonable; no considerations of their aspirations or the economic privations that may have

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led them there are ever offered. Moreover, the repeated descriptions of these characters' ugly features, in stark contrast with the beautiful and striking protagonists, suggests that physical attractiveness generally distinguishes the noble from the ignoble, the high-quality from the "low." Ruiz de Burton's squatters help to delineate a physiognomy of virtue and vice that appears to be rooted in class-based hierarchies; when such characters do attain financial and social success—as when Gasbang becomes "a pillar of the church" and a wealthy San Diego resident (306)—the narrator suggests that such inversions of the "natural" hierarchy constitute crimes against the cultural elite: once a squatter, always a squatter. Hence, Ruiz de Burton's novel offers a counterpoint to the American mythology of the self-made man in the land of opportunity. Whereas characters such as Gasbang might function as heroes in the rhetoric of Jacksonian democracy and the American Dream, in this text they represent the rise of ill-gotten wealth and the cultural decline that accompanies such *nouveaux riches*. Ruiz de Burton's squatter-citizens are not celebrated for their upturns in fortune; rather, they remain thoroughly Othered by the text.

The second category of villains in *The Squatter and the Don* are the corrupt and greedy officials who allow squatters to appropriate Mexican land grants and who defeat the Texas Pacific Railroad.[10] These officials range from local caricatures of San Diego administrators—such as Judge Gryllus Lawlack, who is controlled by the drunken and inept lawyer Peter Roper for some unspecified service or blackmail, as his name suggests (310)— to Governor Leland Stanford, an actual historical figure who appears briefly in the novel, only to dismiss Don Mariano's petition to support the Texas Pacific Railroad (292). Like the

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[10] As Sánchez and Pita explain, the so-called "Big Four"—Leland Stanford, Collis P. Huntington, Charles Crocker and Mark Hopkins—monopolized the rail service to California with their Central Pacific Railroad line, which terminated in San Francisco, stoking the economy of northern California and depressing the economies of southern cities such as San Diego from the mid-1870s through the 1910s (27-28).

squatters, these characters serve the novel's political and ideological message, but they are depicted as flat and inscrutable role players; no psychological depth redeems them from the utter alterity of comic book villains. Governor Stanford is given a villain's signature line: "there will always be misery in the world, no matter who causes it" (296). In case readers harbor any uncertainty about Stanford's moral status, Mr. Mechlin concludes by describing his monopoly as a "soulless, heartless, shameless monster" (296). Ruiz de Burton's novel spares no critique of self-serving public officials who speed the financial ruin of *Californios* such as the Alamar family.

Though readers may respond to this novel in any number of ways, it is likely that many will find Ruiz de Burton's characterizations too flat and heavy-handed. Though the romantic narrative, with its accompanying web of relationships between the Alamar and Darrell families, is often compelling, it is not seamlessly integrated with the historical narrative: plot-based chapters are interspersed with passages that outline historical grievances in adamant and unqualified terms, often with only slight connection to the novel's characters and plot. Midway through the novel, the narrator pontificates on the "moral stagnation" of American legislators for a page and a half before returning to the plot with the mechanical transition, "these were George Mechlin's thoughts as he sat, with his uncle, in the gallery of the House of Representatives" (190-191). As the novel progresses, the editorial segments grow more lengthy and less obviously integrated with the romantic plot, sometimes standing alone as full chapters. Don Alamar, a sage and qualified voice for most of the novel, dies with a melodramatic deathbed rant about "the sins of our legislators" (299-304), and a chapter bemoaning the social elevation of corrupt San Diego officials ends with the narrator's prouncement that "San Diego is at the bottom of a bag, the mouth of which Mr. Huntington has closed and drawn the strings tight" (314). Even Clarence's long-awaited and climactic

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return to the Alamar estate is overshadowed by a lengthy editorial about how "BUSINESS means inhumanity to one another; it means justification of rapacity; it means the freedom of man to crowd and crush his fellowman; it means the sanction of the Shylockian principle of exacting the pound of flesh" (335). In her desire to convey these critiques of American democracy and capitalism, Ruiz de Burton at times allows the novel's message to overwhelm its narrative, apparently forgetting that the narrative is the essential vehicle for the message. Her heavy-handed delivery of these political critiques may prevent contemporary readers from engaging in the narrative as thoroughly as they might have, had she left some of this moralizing to their imaginations.

The Squatter and the Don depicts a society in which class and socioeconomic status are neither hereditary nor stable, but are nevertheless predictive of characters' fortunes and indicative of whether or not they merit narrative empathy. In Ruiz de Burton's novel, little humanity is afforded to the poor or those who lack social graces; rather, narrative empathy appears to be reserved for the wealthy, the "noble," and the well-mannered. When these categories do not coincide, the narration makes it clear that "natural" social hierarchies are being subverted, usually through unjust machinations and illicit means. Though the Alamar family's dwindling fortune belies their genteel background, Clarence's newfound wealth comes fortunately to the rescue, and through his marriage to Mercedes, the cultural elite remains safely above and beyond the clutches of the squatting, laboring masses. The novel seems to suggest that intercultural empathy, though inevitably complicated by miscommunications and recalcitrant family members, may be easier to achieve than empathy for those of a different socioeconomic status.

Ethnic Others and Transgressive Desire in *My Ántonia*

Unlike *Ramona* and *The Squatter and the Don,* Willa Cather's novel *My Ántonia*
describes a transgressive romance that never quite comes to fruition, despite the close,
longstanding, and sexually suggestive relationship of Jim Burden and Ántonia Shimerda. The
novel is narrated by Jim, a white male adult recalling his youthful experiences in Nebraska—
where he moves at age 10 after both of his parents have died—but in the introduction, an
unidentified female narrator introduces Jim as a childhood friend with a "naturally romantic
and ardent disposition" and a "sympathetic, solicitous interest in women" (49). This
authenticating characterization adds some credibility to Jim's subsequent descriptions of
Ántonia and the other (mostly ethnic immigrant) women who populate his narrative.
However, Jim's nostalgic and sexually suggestive recollections of Ántonia and her friend
Lena Lingard at times seem self-serving and lacking in empathy, and his relationship with
Ántonia is foreclosed from the start by the prefatory revelation that he has not seen her in
many years.

Literary critics such as Eve Sedgwick, Judith Butler, Sharon O'Brien, Timothy Dow
Adams, Marilee Lindemann, and Jonathan Goldberg have observed that *My Ántonia* can be
read as a "closeted" text in which same-sex desire between women is recast in the context of
heterosexual relationships.[11] Jim's remembered love for Ántonia is represented as an
impossible dream because Cather's text reconfigures sexual alterity as ethnic difference; the
queerness of homosexual desire becomes encoded as the cultural and socioeconomic

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[11] See Sedgwick's "Across Gender, Across Sexuality: Willa Cather and Others," XYZ; Butler's "'Dangerous Crossing': Willa Cather's Masculine Names," XYZ; O'Brien's "'The Thing Not Named': Willa Cather as a Lesbian Writer," *Signs* 9.4 (Summer 1984): 576-599; Timothy Dow Adams' "My Gay Ántonia," *Journal of Sexuality* 12.3-4 (Oct 2010): 89-98; Lindemann's *Willa Cather: Queering America* (New York: Columbia UP: 1999); and Goldberg's Willa Cather and Others (Durham: DukeUP, 2001). Lisa Marcus has credited Sharon O'Brien with "officially out[ing] Willa Cather" in her 1987 biography, *Willa Cather: The Emerging Voice* (New York: Oxford UP, 1987). See Marcus, "*Willa Cather and Others*, and: *Willa Cather: Queering America*" (review), *American Literature* 74.3 (Sept 2002): 656-658.

differences between immigrant and native-born Americans. This queer reading of Cather's novel explains both the familiar strangeness of desirable immigrant women and the apparent irresoluteness of its otherwise decisive narrator. While Jim attempts to critique the social norms of his midwestern frontier community, he conforms to them nevertheless. In the fictive world of Jim's narrative, the queerness of immigrant Others simultaneously represents both the impossibility of openly gay and lesbian relationships and the dream of queering straight America, by which the foreignness of homosexual love might one day become familiar.

In some ways Jim remains a cultural outsider throughout the text, for the narrative begins with his arrival in a strange place and culminates in his departure. Born in Virginia, Jim initially perceives Nebraska as a cultural territory that is not yet fully formed: "not a country at all, but the material out of which countries are made" (54). Though Jim's socially established and financially stable grandparents lend him a quasi-insider status by proxy, he nevertheless begins his narrative with a litany of oddities—reflecting not the oddness of ethnic or immigrant Others, but of Nebraska life with his own grandparents. "I had the feeling that the world was left behind, that we had got over the edge of it," Jim recalls (54). His grandmother's phrase "down to the kitchen" strikes him as "curious," as Virginians would say "out in the kitchen" (55). He notes that his grandparents' house is composed of "plaster laid directly upon the earth walls, as it used to be in dugouts," and he observes with barely suppressed displeasure that "the floor was of hard cement" (55). Because his grandparents' home is already strangely *unheimlich* to Jim, the proximity of ethnic Others hardly registers as unusual in his new environment. His own cultural alterity as a southerner in the midwestern frontier renders Jim an almost indifferent observer of ethnic difference; he

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stands both within and without the mainstream white community that views the immigrants as alien and non-normative.

Jim's narrative is full of immigrants, but their alterity becomes less emphasized as the novel progresses; indeed, he notes that despite the white city dwellers' dismissal of foreigners as "ignorant people who couldn't speak English," the foreign farmers "were the first to become prosperous," and the children of the "hired [immigrant] girls" who once worked in town as servants eventually wound up "better off than the children of the town women they used to serve" (158). The Shimerdas are recent immigrants from Bohemia, but their arrival on the same train as Jim suggests a shared experience of the strange new land. Jim's first welcome in Nebraska comes from Otto Fuchs, an Austrian immigrant who works for his grandfather and who picks Jim up from the Black Hawk train station (52). Jim initially finds the Russian immigrants Peter and Pavel especially exotic, as "Russia seemed to me more remote than any other country…. Of all the strange, uprooted people among the first settlers, those two men were the strangest and the most aloof" (67). But when Jim accompanies the Shimerdas to visit the Russians, he finds them "very hospitable and jolly" and their house "very comfortable"; Peter serves his visitors home-grown watermelons and plays them lively tunes on his harmonica (69). For the most part, immigrant characters become less strange rather than more so as Jim's narrative proceeds. His account might therefore be read as a process of acquiring "transcultural intelligence"—which Timothy Marr describes as "the weft of intercourse through which what is foreign becomes enmeshed with the familiar" (190).

During a subsequent visit to Peter and Pavel's house, Jim overhears Peter telling Mr. Shimerda a personal story from the old country (in Russian); Ántonia translates it for him later. After serving as groomsmen in a friend's wedding, Peter and Pavel had driven the bride

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and groom back to their village on a sled (or "sledge"). When the sled was overtaken by

wolves, Pavel attempted to throw the bride over the side in order to save himself and Peter.

During the struggle that followed, Pavel knocked the groom off the sled and "threw the girl

after him" (81). But rather than judging Peter and Pavel harshly, Jim empathizes with their

symbolic rejection of heterosexual marriage. Peter and Pavel's "unspeakable act" had caused

the two to become exiled from their community, and they emigrated to America to elude the

social stigma that would otherwise have hounded them. Though this admission might seem to

mark the two as irreconcilably Other, Jim does not draw this conclusion. Rather, he later

states that before falling asleep at night "I often found myself in a sledge drawn by three

horses, dashing through a country that looked something like Nebraska and something like

Virginia" (83). Jim's response to Peter's story is not to find Pavel's actions inscrutible or

inhuman; rather, he envisions himself on the sled, imaginatively occupying the position of

the Other. What wolves pursue him or what fellow passengers he might be induced to

sacrifice, Jim does not say. Nevertheless, in this liminal space between wakefulness and

dreams, Jim seems to identify himself as a cultural outsider—a stranger from another land,

like Peter and Pavel—and like theirs, his consciousness remains split between the old country

and the new one.

From the start, the narrator's account of Jim and Ántonia's relationship is charged with

sexual tension and symbolism, and the terms of their encounters are asymmetrical, marked

by unequal power relations and uneven exchanges. Just as the adult narrator Jim controls the

language in which their relationship is recalled and represented, in his narrative the young

Jim has the words that Ántonia wants and needs. The Burdens never make any attempt to

learn or speak the Shimerdas' native tongue; rather, Jim provides English answers to

Ántonia's unspoken or unspeakable questions. And while the narration rarely describes his

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own appearance or body language, it dwells extensively on Ántonia's physical presence and attitudes. On the occasion of his family's first goodwill visit to the Shimerdas' home, the narrator recalls Ántonia's "pretty" appearance, documenting her eyes—"big and warm and full of light"—her cheeks—"of rich, dark color"—and her hair—"brown… curly and wild-looking" (62). At the time she is fourteen years old and he is only ten. The narrator's depiction of the scene that follows characterizes Ántonia as flirtatious and aggressive, even wonton, in contrast with the young and unwilling Jim:

While Krajiek was translating for Mr. Shimerda, Ántonia came up to me and held out her hand coaxingly. In a moment we were running up the steep drawside together….
 When we reached the level and could see the gold tree-tops, I pointed toward them, and Ántonia laughed and squeezed my hand as if to tell me how glad she was that I had come. We raced off toward Squaw Creek and did not stop until the ground itself stopped…. We stood panting on the edge of the ravine…. The wind was so strong that I had to hold my hat on, and the girls' skirts were blown out before them. Ántonia seemed to like it….
 We sat down and made a nest in the long red grass…. Ántonia pointed up to the sky and questioned me with her glance. I gave her the word, but she was not satisfied and pointed to my eyes. I told her, and she repeated the word, making it sound like 'ice.' She pointed up to the sky, then to my eyes, then back to the sky, with movements so quick and impulsive that she distracted me, and I had no idea what she wanted. She got up on her knees and wrung her hands. She pointed to her own eyes and shook her head, then to mine and to the sky, nodding violently.
 "Oh," I exclaimed, "blue; blue sky."
 She clapped her hands and murmured, "Blue sky, blue eyes," as if it amused her. While we snuggled down there out of the wind she learned a score of words. She was quick, and very eager. We were so deep in the grass that we could see nothing but the blue sky over us and the gold tree in front of us. It was wonderfully pleasant. After Ántonia had said the new words over and over, she wanted to give me a little chased silver ring she wore on her middle finger. When she coaxed and insisted, I repulsed her quite sternly. I didn't want her ring, and I felt there was something reckless and extravagant about her wishing to give it away to a boy she had never seen before. (63-64)

The layered narration of this scene reflects the sexual desire for the young Ántonia—whom he later admits to having been "very much in love with" (230)—projected by the remembering male narrator onto the consciousness of the young Jim, who claims he "had no idea what she wanted" (64). This anachronistic projection of the older narrator's sexual knowledge onto his youthful self is an example of what Gérard Genette calls *narrative*

metalepsis—"any intrusion by the extradiegetic narrator or narratee into the diegetic universe [of the text, which in turn] produces an effect of strangeness" (234-235). In Jim's narration, the use of sexually charged terms such as "coaxingly" and "panting" combine with unmistakable sexual symbolism to suggest that Ántonia's primary intent is to seduce the young boy. After leading him to the edge of an abyss, she stands panting, her clothes are nearly blown off her body, and they sink into a pleasant grassy nest, where they gaze at a golden phallic figure and she attempts to give him her "ring." Jim's recollected concern about Ántonia "wishing to give it away to a boy she had never seen before" also suggests a patriarchalist desire to protect the young girl's virginity, inspired by the worry that she might "give it away" too cheaply. Indeed, this suggestion foreshadows later developments in the narrative, as Ántonia eventually becomes pregnant and is quickly abandoned by the child's father, Larry Donovan.

But a careful reading of Ántonia's actual actions in this scene reveals that her primary impetus is her desire to learn English, and this motive is misconstrued as sexual desire by the older narrator. Although she leads Jim "coaxingly" to a private spot out of sight, Ántonia actually gives no other indication that she wants anything more from him than an English lesson. Her interest in Jim's eyes is not described as sustained eye contact or a loving gaze, but rather a means of inquiring about the color *blue*, with which she then conveys a crude simile—lacking the words "the," "is," "like," and "your," she compares Jim's eyes to the sky. Ántonia attempts to give Jim her silver ring after she "had said the new words over and over," as if to exchange one form of currency for another. Jim finds this offering "reckless and extravagant," suggesting that he does not appreciate the value of English language proficiency as much as she does. But Ántonia recognizes that becoming fluent in English will be as crucial for the family's survival as material possessions; to her, the words are more

valuable than silver. As Helen Wussow explains, "it is through language that the women in Cather's novels are marginalized and denied access to positions of power and privilege in society…. Their speech is invariably mocked by male characters…. Throughout Cather's fictions, strong systems of discourse encapsulate and enclose the speaking other, the better to exclude her" (52-54). Ántonia seems to intuit this power relationship on some level, even as a young immigrant girl. Jim's refusal to accept Ántonia's ring, along with his adult reminiscences of this scene, demonstrate that he fundamentally misunderstands Ántonia's wishes, both in the "then" of the text, or "story time," and in the "now" of the narration, or "discourse time" (Prince 98). However, the verbal and nonverbal cues of the recollected scene reveal Ántonia's unsuccessful attempt to communicate how highly she values Jim's friendship and instruction as a native speaker from this foreign land.

This interplay of verbal and non-verbal communication also demonstrates the difficulty of intercultural empathy. Jim recalls his confusion: "I had no idea what she wanted" (64). Not only are Jim and Ántonia unable to communicate through a shared language; they seem almost unable to see each other. Though Ántonia is able to inquire about and learn the word "eyes," both her gestures and her phrase "blue sky, blue eyes" indicate the unavailability of sustained eye contact with Jim. She repeatedly points from Jim's eyes to the sky, and for clarification, she "pointed to her own eyes and shook her head"—seemingly instructing him to look away rather than to meet her gaze. Moreover, Ántonia's observation that Jim's eyes are the color of the sky is accompanied by a negative assertion: her own are not. Her observation about their respective eye colors is attended by the suggestion of racial or ethnic difference, emphasizing the children's differences rather than any shared or common attributes. Once Jim is able to decipher Ántonia's comment about his eyes, the two situate themselves so that "we could see nothing but the blue sky over us and the gold tree in front

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of us" (64). This difficult conversation about Jim's eyes does not lead to actual eye contact; both characters seem to feel more comfortable gazing at the sky rather than looking at each other. Jim and Ántonia do not immediately perceive a social bond with each other; their lack of eye contact indicates a shortage of trust and fellow-feeling. Empathy develops more slowly for this young couple than it does for Clarence and Mercedes, or for Ramona and Alessandro.

Just as Jim's relationship to Ántonia is linguistically asymmetrical, his early interactions with Ántonia and her family are conducted along the uneven axis of charity, with Jim (and his grandparents) always generously giving and Ántonia (and her family) always gratefully receiving. Although the Shimerdas offer the Burdens numerous gifts in return, like Ántonia's ring, they are never appreciated. When Jim expresses curiosity in Mr. Shimerda's "queer" gun from the "old country," Mr. Shimerda explains that it once belonged to a very rich man, who gave it to him for playing at his wedding, and that one day he would give it to Jim. "I was glad that this project was one of futurity," the narrator recalls. "There never were such people as the Shimerdas for wanting to give away everything they had" (73). Jim and his grandmother find the Shimerdas' gifts ridiculous because of their poverty, even while they envision themselves as charitable benefactors because of their own gifts. During one visit to the Shimerdas' home, Jim and Mrs. Burden bring a hamper of food and a sack of potatoes. In return, Mrs. Shimerda gives them a teacup full of some unidentified Bohemian delicacy, explaining that it is "very good" and that the small quantity would grow "very much when cook" (91). Back at their house, Mrs. Burden comments that the substance "might be dried meat from some queer beast" and throws it into the fire (92). Years later, Jim realizes that the gift was dried mushrooms, "gathered, probably, in some deep Bohemian forest" (92). But the Burdens do not trust the Shimerdas' charity or their culinary judgments; they feel more

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comfortable as the providers of food and gifts rather than the recipients. Only Mr. Burden relates to the Shimerdas on a level or symmetrical basis. When Mr. Shimerda pays the Burdens a Christmas visit, Jim and Mrs. Burden are disconcerted by the unfamiliar Catholic gestures and devotions that their guest performs. After praying silently and thanking the family for their generosity, Mr. Shimerda "made the sign of the cross over me, put on his cap and went off in the dark" (98). Rather than emphasizing the strangeness of this unfamiliar ritual, Mr. Burden anticipates and answers their unspoken questions with the simple pronouncement, "The prayers of all good people are good" (98).

Life on the frontier is not easy for the Shimerdas. After a winter of privations and soul-sickness at his family's living conditions, Mr. Shimerda commits suicide. Jim recalls Ántonia's grief: "'Oh, Jimmy,' she sobbed, 'what you tink for my lovely papa!' It seemed to me that I could feel her heart breaking as she clung to me" (111). By the next spring, Ántonia's arms have "burned… brown" from plowing the fields, and her cotton dress no longer fits her (115). Though she boasts that "I can work like mans" and claims that "school is all right for little boys," Jim sees her crying in secret (116). Though the narrator sometimes recalls his displeasure at Ántonia's rough, manly, or peasant-like manners, he also demonstrates a certain level of empathy for her family's plight and for her limited possibilities.

The relationship between the Burdens and the Shimerdas is not always civil. When Jim rides over with Jake, a hired hand, to reclaim a loaned horse collar from the Shimerdas, an argument ensues between Jake and Ambrosch, the oldest Shimerda boy. Ambrosch attempts to kick Jake, and Jake knocks Ambrosch to the ground. This argument prompts a short-lived feud between the families; Ántonia states, "I never like you no more, Jake and Jim Burden" (119), and for a time the families have no interaction. This incident confirms Jake's darkest

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suspicions about "foreigners"; he tells Jim, "you can't trust them to be fair…. They ain't to be trusted" (120). But Mr. Burden puts an end to the feud by inviting Ambrosch and Ántonia to come work for wages at the Burdens' farm, telling Jim and Mrs. Burden that "it will be a good time to end misunderstandings" (122). Here and elsewhere in the text, Mr. Burden serves as a figure of empathy. Without calling attention to the virtue of his role, he consistently finds common ground between mutually perceived Others; he works to reconcile opposed parties otherwise inclined to resolve into enemy camps; in short, he emphasizes shared humanity over categorical differences.

The dynamic between Jim and Ántonia changes when the Burdens move from the countryside to the town of Black Hawk and Mrs. Burden finds Ántonia a job working for their new neighbors, the Harlings. In Black Hawk, Ántonia comes to represent for Jim a group of young women that he categorizes loosely as "country girls" and also (because of their terms of employment in the town) as "hired girls." Therefore, in a sense, she suffers a loss of individuality in Jim's recollected consciousness after her move to Black Hawk, which he remembers as "a clean, well-planted little prairie town" (128). At the same time, the narrative reveals a consuming obsession with these girls, of which Ántonia and her friends Lena Lingard and Tiny Soderball are always the representative examples: Book II, which describes Jim's life in Black Hawk, is titled "The Hired Girls." Once in town, Ántonia is reinvented as "Tony," and she and Lena become the most desired dancing partners at the Saturday night dances. Jim notes that even the socially respectable young men of Black Hawk would "drop in late and risk a tiff with their sweethearts and general condemnation for a waltz with 'the hired girls'" (156). But even as Jim's narration registers Ántonia's newfound desirability in Black Hawk, his categorical references to her also mutes her individuality. If becoming a "hired girl" renders Ántonia less strange in white midwestern

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society, it also limits her possibilities and delineates the social roles she can be expected to fill.

Although the narrator attempts to position himself as a critic of the town-dwellers' biases and hypocrisies, the text suggests that Jim falls swiftly in line with the town's prevailing ideologies. In hindsight, the narrator expounds on the virtues of the (primarily immigrant and ethnically Other) "country girls" over the (presumably white and native-born) "city girls":

There was a curious social situation in Black Hawk. All the young men felt the attraction of the fine, well-set-up country girls who had come to town to earn a living…. Physically they were almost a race apart, and out-of-door work had given them a vigor which, when they got over their first shyness on coming to town, developed into a positive carriage and freedom of movement…. The daughters of Black Hawk merchants had a confident, uninquiring belief that they were "refined," and that the country girls, who "worked out," were not…. I thought the attitude of the town people toward these girls very stupid…. The country girls were considered a menace to the social order…. The respect for respectability was stronger than any desire in Black Hawk youth. (156-158)

Jim claims to find this "social situation" very "curious" and the Black Hawk residents' attitudes "very stupid." In chiding the other "Black Hawk youth" (presumably meaning the town's young men) for their prioritization of "respectability" over "desire," the narrator suggests that he does not share their prejudices or their carefully regulated conventionality. Indeed, this seems to be the central message of Cather's novel: that narrow, nativist definitions of who constitutes a "real American" tend to ignore or overlook the cultural outsiders who actually exemplify the American spirit—the plucky, indefatigable persistence and self-reliance of those who come with nothing and refuse to be turned away. But Jim's actions in the novel do not support the narrator's social critiques; his great revolt against the town's staid conventionality consists of attending a few dances at the Firemen's Hall. After one rousing dance, he attempts to kiss Ántonia goodnight, to which she objects: "Why, Jim! You know you ain't right to kiss me like that. I'll tell your grandmother on you!" (170). Instead of taking this opportunity to profess his love for her, Jim demures, and later he

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muses, "I looked with contempt at the dark, silent little houses about me as I walked home, and thought of the stupid young men who were asleep in some of them. I knew where the real women were, though I was only a boy; and I would not be afraid of them, either!" (170). Nevertheless, he makes no further effort to pursue Ántonia, and when his grandmother confronts him about attending the dances, he apologizes, saying "if it hurts you, that settles it. I won't go to the Firemen's Hall again" (171). Though the reminiscing narrator attempts to distinguish his younger self from the "stupid young men" who followed the social norms of white, native-born Black Hawk society, his actions are no different than those of the shallow, conventional neighbors that he derides. More than he likes to admit, Jim is easily influenced by the values and prejudices of the timid, xenophobic midwestern town.

Jim's move to Lincoln to attend the University of Nebraska finally enables him to transgress the social boundaries that separate him from the "hired girls." During his sophomore year, Jim is surprised by a visit from Lena Lingard, and they begin spending a good deal of time together, attending plays at the local theater and enjoying "delightful Sunday breakfasts together at Lena's" apartment (198). The nature of their relationship is ambiguous; though the narrator claims he was "in love with Lena" (202) and that "she always kissed one as if she were sadly and wisely sending one away forever" (205), he also describes their relationship as "playing"—"I played with Lena…. if she had not me to play with, she would probably marry and secure her future" (202-203). Likewise, Jim's collegiate mentor remarks, "you won't recover yourself while you are playing about with this handsome Norwegian" (202). On one hand, Jim seems to recognize that they are fundamentally compatible: "Lena was at least a woman, and I was a man" (196). But when Jim decides to follow his mentor to Harvard, Lena reassures him that she was not interested in marriage anyway. Though his time with Lena in Lincoln allows Jim to overcome the Black

Hawk stigma that surrounds the "hired girls," he never seems to consider Lena as an equal partner or a serious marital prospect. He is only "playing" with her, and she seems to recognize that he remains socially unavailable.

Jim and Lena's relationship demonstrates most forcefully how drastically the narrative changes when read through a queer critical lens. If Jim is not a man at all—if "he" represents a woman who adopts a man's persona, then his statement that "Lena was at least a woman, and I was a man" takes on new meanings. It is, simultaneously, an aspirational statement—she wants to be a man, or to be seen as such; an anti-essentialist statement—for who can say that she should not be a man; a performative statement—in their relationship, she plays the man; and a precise statement of the conditions of impossibility that surround their relationship, a statement of what can never be. Likewise, their "playing" comes to signify the restrictions of heteronormative society. Far from the carefree "play" of children or of casual lovers, "Jim" and Lena's "play" can be read as a tragically doomed love affair. Well do they realize, as do the other members of their community, that they will "probably marry" in order to "secure [their] future"; otherwise, as Jim's professor tells him, "you won't recover yourself."

Though his description of their activities contains few explicit references to sexual behavior, Lena and Jim's relationship is frequently perceived by other characters as improper, construing their behavior as morally deviant as well as transgressing conventional boundaries of class and ethnicity. These characters suggest that Jim, as a member of the cultural elite, would not be interested in Lena for any reason other than sexual gratification.[12]

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[12] The remembered events of Jim's life in Nebraska transpire during the last two decades of the nineteenth century; during this time, most students at the University of Nebraska were from families of considerable wealth and social standing. As Howard Walter Caldwell explains in his 1902 study *Education in Nebraska* (Washington: Government Printing Office), "most of the students are mature in years, and are in attendance for the sake of the education to be obtained. A very large proportion are self-supported, hence feel that they must

On her first visit to his room, Lena comments that "the old woman downstairs didn't want to let me come up very much" (192), suggesting that Jim's landlady did not consider her proper company for a young scholar. Lena's neighbor, an old Polish violin instructor, confronts Jim and demands, "Am I to understand that you have this young woman's interests at heart? That you do not wish to compromise her?" (201). Mr. Ordinsky seems to find it hard to believe that Jim might actually be interested in Lena, an immigrant girl, beyond the purpose of "compromising" her sexually. He then charges Jim to observe *noblesse oblige*—the Old World notion by which those of noble rank are considered responsible for the care of their subordinates. Like Jim's scholarly mentor, these observers assume that Jim and Lena's relationship is morally suspect and potentially detrimental to both parties. Ultimately, this cultural pressure is too powerful for Jim and Lena to resist. Perhaps both characters knew from the start that the differences that divided them were too great for their mutual attraction to overcome. Lena's manner of kissing Jim "as if she were sadly and wisely sending [him] away forever" (205), in hindsight, was merely prescient.

The nostalgic desire for Ántonia and Lena that Jim's narrative registers is certainly transgressive, insofar as the "hired girls" are Othered by mainstream white society in Black Hawk and its surrounding countryside, but his empathy for their characters in the text remains partial and at times seems self-serving. Does the adult narrator recollect his childhood friendship with Ántonia in order to acknowledge her status as a fellow human, or is his account the result of a long-cherished and self-serving sexual fantasy? Is the love he professes for both young women genuine, or is it merely an expression of sexual attraction? In considering these questions, we might recall Allott & Ciaramicoli's mutual observation

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get the most out of the time and means at their command" (61). Most graduates went on to pursue careers in education, law, business, or religious ministry.

that while love seems to require empathy, "there is no necessary link between love and sexual desire or sexual behavior" (Allott 358). Correspondingly, there is no necessary link between empathy and sexual desire, though the two are not mutually exclusive. It is certainly possible to love another human being while simultaneously desiring and empathizing with that individual. But even when desire and empathy coincide, that empathy does not always imply genuine concern for the other. As Ciaramicoli makes clear, the sexual seducer may employ empathy merely in order to serve his or her own interests and designs. Ciaramicoli acknowledges that "empathy can be used to exploit people's emotions and direct their behavior in order to take advantage of them," as demonstrated by the sirens attached to Nazi dive-bombers and the use of empathetic conversation by salespersons (7-9). He acknowledges that empathy is "a particularly potent weapon when people are feeling vulnerable or desperate" (117). Ciaramicoli distinguishes between *authentic empathy*— "motivated by a genuine concern for others and a desire to help them"—and *functional empathy*—"primarily concerned with what other people can give you (or what you can manage to weasel out of them)" (126). As discussed in my Introduction, this project refers to *benevolent* (rather than "authentic") *empathy* and *self-serving* (rather than "functional") *empathy*.

With this distinction in mind, we can consider whether Jim's stated concern for Ántonia and Lena is ultimately more benevolent or more self-serving. The narrator claims to have been in love with Ántonia, and he speaks highly of the immigrant "country girls" like her who go on to greater prosperity and livelihood than their city counterparts. Nevertheless, Jim leaves Ántonia and Lena behind, both mentally and physically, first when he leaves for college in Lincoln and again when he proceeds to law school at Harvard. Indeed, these separations seem a foregone conclusion from the very introduction. Was Jim's alleged love

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for these women grounded in the benevolent empathy that love requires? Did he ever come to see them as fellow-humans and individuals rather than representative members of a group of outsiders? Did his own conception of self expand and change in order to accommodate them as meaningful components of his identity? In the section that follows, I will argue that though the extent of his love remains unclear, Jim's relationships with Ántonia and Lena are indeed instances of authentic empathy when read through the cipher of same-sex attraction. As Sharon O'Brien has argued, Jim Burden serves as a "male mask" for a female narrative presence which is both an extension of the female author and an "unnamed, absent presence in the literary text" (593, 576). But this argument will require us to consider the role of the author in the production of narrative empathy.

Authorial Empathy and the Narrative Other

Up to this point, this dissertation has primarily focused on two points on the rhetorical triangle—the text and the reader—without considering in much detail the third point: the author. Examples of empathy are easier to identify in texts and readers, even if it is difficult to measure precisely. But authorial empathy is more difficult to isolate, because our interactions with authors (as readers and literary critics) are generally one-sided and mediated by the texts—rarely do we have the opportunity to respond to authors or to study them in person. Generally, readers and critics can only infer an author's "message" or "meaning" or "intent" from his or her literary works. Even when interviews with the author or comprehensive author biographies are available, questions remain about the extent to which we should "trust" these sources or attribute meaning to a literary text based on sources external to the text itself.

Questions of authorial intent and the "author-function" have long been discussed and debated. In 1946, New Critics William Kurtz Wimsatt, Jr. and Monroe C. Beardsley sought

to sideline considerations of the author from critical debates, arguing that "the design or intention of the author is neither available nor desirable as a standard for judging the success of a work of literary art" ("Intentional" 1374-1375). Wimsatt and Beardsley, both Yale graduates and colleagues of Cleanth Brooks, believed that like a newborn child, a literary work is "detached from the author at birth and goes about the world beyond his power to intend about it or control it" (1376). In a later essay, the two defined more clearly what they called the "intentional fallacy"—the belief that a work of literature can or should be judged by the author's statements or opinions about it. "The Intentional Fallacy is a confusion between the poem and its origins… [which] ends in biography and relativism" ("Affective" 1388). Instead of worrying about the author, these scholars argued that literary criticism should focus exclusively on the text. "If the poet succeeded in doing [what he intended to do], then the poem itself shows what he was trying to do" ("Intentional" 1375). Otherwise, they imply, the poet's intentions are not relevant; a poem or literary work that requires clarification regarding intent is simply a poorly-wrought urn. "Critical inquiries," the two concluded, "are not settled by consulting the oracle" (1387).

In his 1968 essay "The Death of the Author," Roland Barthes also denounced critical considerations of authorial intent: "the *explanation* of a work is always sought in the man or woman who produced it, as if it were always in the end, through the more or less transparent allegory of the fiction, the voice of a single person, the *author* confiding in us" (1466). According to Barthes, those who seek such explanations place arbitrary limits on literary works by attempting to *explain* them as obvious or inevitable products of lives lived, reducing the marvel of artistic creation to a mundane transcription of life to art. In the decades following the publication of Barthes' essay, his view of biographical criticism as simplistic and wrong-headed became a widely-accepted form of conventional wisdom among

post-structuralist literary critics. Michel Foucault proposed that critics should consider "the author" not as a mythical creator or originary entity, but rather as a "function of discourse" with historically and culturally specific characteristics. Readers and critics, he argued, construct "the author-function" in ways that have varied widely over time—from eras in which authorship was considered insignificant to the present day in which "every text of poetry or fiction [is] obliged to state its author and the date, place, and circumstance of its writing" (1629). These identifications provide a (presumably false) sense of coherence throughout the entire corpus of an author's work; they determine "the meaning and value attributed to the text"; they make it possible for the literary work to become intellectual property, earning royalties for the author and potentially subjecting him to punishment, "to the extent that his discourse [is] considered transgressive" (1628). Instead of focusing on authorial identity, creativity, originality, and authenticity—which he called "these tiresome repetitions"—Foucault proposed a new set of critical questions, such as "What are the modes of existence of this discourse?" and "Where does it come from; how is it circulated; who controls it?" (1636).

But even if one separates the idea or function of the author from the author's historical, corporeal presence—the "flesh-and-blood author," as James Phelan calls it (3)—questions of authorial identity and intentions remain central to the critical enterprise. The misleadingly titled "intentional fallacy" is not in fact a logical fallacy or a simplistic critical approach, though it can be employed in ways that unnecessarily shut off debate or creative critical readings. In order to account fully for the workings of narrative empathy, the author's experiences, abilities, and intentions cannot and should not be ignored. As Phelan puts it, "texts are designed by authors in order to affect readers in particular ways," and readers' responses indicate both the author's designs and the "efficacy of those designs" (4). Phelan

emphasizes the variable yet structured relationships between authors and readers: "my experiences as a reader matter a great deal and so do yours—but both mine and yours are responsible to the text as it has been constructed by an author who guides us to experience it in one way or another" (ix). To ignore the author is to deny the social, cultural, and political circumstances that surround the production of a literary text as well as the cultural work that the author sets out to achieve.

Though it is more difficult to locate and measure, authorial empathy can be identified through both textual and extra-textual methods—that is, through a metacritical analysis of the work itself as well as the consideration of outside sources.[13] These other sources may come directly from the author, in the form of footnotes, paratextual elements, interviews, autobiographical writing, or other works of literature that resurrect or comment on previous characters, plots, or themes. Suzanne Keen notes that contemporary novelists often associate the very practice of fiction writing with the act of empathizing. She cites numerous psychological studies suggesting that "novelists may emphasize aspects of empathy as part of the creative process and as a goal of their fiction writing in part because they are more empathetic themselves than the average person" (*Empathy* 125). Keen also proposes that "the activity of fiction writing may cultivate novelists' role-taking skills and make them more habitually empathetic" (127). In other words, writers may tend to be more empathetic in the first place (hence, they engage in the imaginative work of writing), and/or the act of writing may cause them to become more empathetic individuals. On a more empirical note, authors

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[13] Metacritical investigations may take into consideration, for example, the particular roles that certain "Othered" characters play, their outcomes in the text, the extent to which their voice is "heard" through direct quotation, and the ways in which they are directly or indirectly characterized. While these analyses may seem like the stuff of ordinary criticism, I would argue that they require a more nuanced and targeted consideration than normal criticism employs, and that the outcomes may belie the way that characters are apparently treated by authors. In addressing such questions, I follow the logic of Toni Morrison's *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*.

often express the hope that their work will elicit readers' empathy for figures of difference and promote a more empathetic world.[14] This stated desire to generate readerly empathy might be called (with apologies to Wimsatt and Beardsley) *intentional empathy*. But analyzing this authorial attempt, as mediated through literary texts and manifested in readers' responses, is a difficult proposition.

Keen proposes that many authors engage in what she calls *strategic empathizing*: "a variety of authors' empathy, by which authors attempt to direct an emotional transaction through a fictional work aimed at a particular audience" (*Empathy* 142). She proposes three broad categories of this attempted projection: *bounded strategic empathy*, which "occurs within an in-group, stemming from experiences of mutuality, and leading to feeling with familiar others"; *ambassadorial strategic empathy*, which "addresses chosen others with the aim of cultivating their empathy for the in-group, often to a specific end"; and *broadcast strategic empathy*, which "calls upon every reader to feel with members of a group, by empathizing our common vulnerabilities and hopes" (142).

Keen is right to note that many novelists (as well as writers of other genres, such as poetry and autobiography) produce literary texts with the hope—whether explicit or implicit—that the texts will elicit and encourage empathy in their readers. She also indicates (like Phelan) that authors may guide readers' responses through textual clues (such as narrative descriptions of characters' psychological states) as well as paratextual elements (such as prefaces or afterwords that promote social or political goals), not to mention extra-textual guides such as interviews or commentary about the "meaning" or "purpose" or "message" of a particular literary work. However, Keen's categories seem reductive for

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[14] For example, Sue Monk Kidd, author of the best-seller *The Secret Life of Bees* (2002), states, "I want my words to open a portal through which the reader may leave the self, migrate to some other human sky and return 'disposed' to otherness" (qtd in Keen *Empathy* 124).

several reasons. First, with their emphasis on group membership (and inter-group communication), these categories seem to reinforce tribalist conceptions of "otherness" that narrative empathy often strives to subvert. Thinking of authors as members of various identity groups who communicate primarily or intentionally with other categorical groups of people—either "bounded" within their own identity group or as "ambassadors" to some other group—undermines the view of narratives as a medium in which fellow humanity can be expressed and communicated. Do authors always write with a particular "target audience" in mind? Does it matter that they have little control over who reads their work, in their own time or in later, unforeseen eras? Should authors' preconceptions of their intended audiences (however "accurate" or "inaccurate") be the privileged ground for the analysis of narrative empathy? This seems an unnecessarily top-down approach, one that seems to validate some of the New Critics' and post-structuralists' critiques of reductive focus on authorial intent. If I pick up a fourteenth-century Italian poem and imaginatively identify with its speaker as a fellow human, is this evidence of successful or "accurate" strategic empathy? If so, was that authorial empathy (by the long-dead poet) bounded, ambassadorial, or broadcast? The silliness of such questions belies Keen's author-centered approach.

I would argue that narrative empathy should not be considered as reducible to a response that can be simply prompted or "broadcast" to readers. Keen's model too glibly condenses the complex medium of literary narrative into a mere message that can be communicated more or less accurately. She explains (with extreme understatement) that "novelists do not exert *complete control* over the responses to their fiction" (xii; emphasis added), that authors "sometimes evoke empathy unintentionally" (137), and that readers may conclude that "the author's perspective is simply wrong" (140). Keen categorizes these unpredictable or unintended responses—all of which point to the unexplored complexity of

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the literary narrative form—as *empathic inaccuracy*, or "a strong conviction of empathy that incorrectly identifies the feeling of a literary persona" (137). She might have also included the lack of an empathetic response on the part of the reader as an "inaccurate" or counter-narrative response. If empathic "accuracy" construes an empathetic reaction on the part of the reader that mirrors the intentions of the author, it would seem that "accuracy" would require a sliding scale (or set of scales) in order to account more fully for the complexity of literary narratives. Moreover, using the rubric of "accuracy" to gauge a complex cognitive and affective response such as empathy seems reductive. If one reads a short story involving an act of violence in which several characters are engaged in varying roles, what is the proper or "accurate" response? We might also question why some readers will respond differently than others to the narrative, how the narrative voice and structure will elicit various responses, how each character is characterized, and how readers' responses will vary over the course of the narrative. A literary narrative is not tantamount to a phone call in which the author communicates a simple message. Empathic "accuracy" and/or "inaccuracy" seem like rough-hewn tools with which to measure the complex and dynamic process of narrative empathy, especially when they attempt to account for the entire rhetorical triangle of author, text, and reader. Authorial empathy needs to be analyzed on its own terms, not merely in comparison to readerly empathy or as a demonstrable "cause" and "effect."

In order to analyze the complexity of how literary "meaning" is conveyed between author and reader, it might be useful to consider a text in which the narrator's attitudes and perceptions do not align with the author's. Eudora Welty's 1963 short story "Where Is the Voice Coming From?" is narrated through the voice of a sociopathic, white supremacist assassin, based on the actual (but still unidentified, at the time of the story's publication) killer of African American civil rights leader Medgar Evers in Jackson, Mississippi.

Although the narrative voice of the story is chillingly malicious and inhumane, Welty clearly authors the story from the perspective of one who abhorred such violence. How then should one judge the authorial empathy involved in this text, or its attempted transmission to readers? Should the narrator's racism, or his lack of respect for human life, be held against Welty? Should the killer's own imaginative ventrilo-quization of the fictional victim be considered an insightful demonstration of the "dark side of empathy" (127), as Ciaramicoli and Ketcham call it? Should it count toward Welty's credit that she strived to imagine the mind of one for whom she felt so little in common—or that, in light of the murderer's actual identity, she painted such an accurate picture? Texts like Welty's point up the complexity of literary narratives. One might argue that Welty-as-author empathized in a sympathetic or "authentic" manner with the flesh-and-blood Evers, whose murder roused her to write against such crimes of hate. Yet at the same time, in her almost telepathic channeling of Byron De La Beckwith, Welty also empathized in some fashion (presumably without approving of his attitudes or actions) with the assassin. Such a text prompts the question: *Is it still empathy if one imaginatively identifies with the way someone thinks but despises it?* Likewise, readers of Welty's story may find themselves chilled by the perceived comprehension of how the narrator's mind works, as he simultaneously imagines (with pathological and murderous intent) the mental state of Medgar Evers. To inhabit this narrator's persona, as Welty's first-person narrative apparently instructs readers to do, is to exercise a form of empathy with the killer, even if one resists and dislikes the identification. Therefore, narrative empathy does not necessarily require readers to approve of the narrator; nor is it necessarily a pleasant experience. It is possible to discern and empathize with an author's (super-narrative) persona independently of the story's narrator. To read "Where Is the Voice Coming From?" as an empathetic reader is, I would suggest, to disavow the ideology of its narrator, even though

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the story requires a certain empathy with the narrator in order to communicate its message. Welty invites her readers to identify with the assassin-narrator in order to condemn his actions and reject his worldview.

The three novels that I have discussed in this chapter belong to the category of "transgressive texts," and I would suggest that these types of literary works might be especially fruitful for analyzing varying levels of authorial empathy. In a 2002 essay entitled "Desegregating American Literary Studies," Shelley Fisher Fishkin questioned whether "black and white writers who find themselves next to each other on [an English department syllabus would] enter into a rich and complex cultural dialogue, or [whether they would] remain divided from one another by the essentialist paradigms that are the inheritance of a segregated curriculum?" (121). Fishkin believed that examining "transgressive texts"—"texts in which black writers create serious white protagonists, and white writers black ones"— could lead to analysis that transcends "the old binaries and identity politics" (121). More recently, Jennifer Ho has proposed that Fishkin's category might be meaningfully expanded to include all "texts in which the identity of the author does not correspond to the identity of the main protagonist or main characters of the work in question" (206).

Such works of literature are not always catalogs of empathy (authorial, textual, or otherwise), as Fishkin, Ho, and others readily acknowledge. Any account of transgressive texts must also include the stereotypical and racist depictions found in blackface minstrelsy and other forms of derisive imitation. Moreover, transgressive texts that depict members of groups who have been historically exploited or discriminated against by "mainstream" or dominant cultures may face charges of cultural appropriation or paternalism, as recent controversies over Kathryn Stockett's novel *The Help* (2009) and its subsequent film adaptation aptly demonstrate. Nevertheless, the troubled ground of "cross-racial mimesis"

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(Ho 219) offers critical challenges and opportunities for interpreting the extent of imaginative identification with the Other on the part of the "transgressive" author. Discussions of such texts should not be limited to those that address racial or ethnic differences between authors and their narrators or protagonists; cross-gender mimesis and other forms of narrative difference should also be considered.

Toni Morrison's critical treatise *Playing in the Dark*, which considers the historical roles of "Africanist" characters in white-authored texts, provides a helpful rubric for considering the nature and extent of authorial empathy in transgressive texts. Morrison writes that in both literature and life, "a real or fabricated Africanist presence was crucial to [white writers'] sense of Americanness" (6). Her study examines "how Africanist personae, narrative, and idiom moved and enriched the text[s] in self-conscious ways, to consider what the engagement meant for the work of the writer's imagination" (16). Writing the Other, Morrison suggests, is a deep expression of the white American self-image; depicting black alterity is a narrative strategy for defining the white self—or, as Morrison puts it, "the subject of the dream is the dreamer" (17). Throughout American literature, Morrison found black characters to constitute "a dark and abiding presence that moves the hearts and texts… with fear and longing… a darkness from which our early literature seemed unable to extricate itself" (33). But while figures of blackness were everywhere to be found in white authors' texts, their presence was rarely acknowledged as a central or defining subject. Rather, the "Africanist character" often served as "surrogate and enabler… enabl[ing] white writers to think about themselves" (51). The dialogue of black characters was often "construed as [alien]… made deliberately unintelligible," rendered "a marker and vehicle for illegal sexuality, fear of madness, expulsion, self-loathing" (52). Taking an example from Twain, Morrison argues that "the agency for Huck's struggle is the nigger Jim, and it is absolutely

necessary… that the term *nigger* be inextricable from Huck's deliberations about who and what he himself is—or, more precisely, is not" (55). Morrison's study suggests that authorial empathy for textual Others might be gauged by the roles that Others are allowed to play in texts and the extent to which they emerge as individual human beings, above and beyond the flattening logic of stereotypes.

Returning to the texts examined earlier in this chapter, while Helen Hunt Jackson's *Ramona* at times relies on racialist characterizations, and while her depictions of Latino/a and Native American characters are at times clumsy, contemporary critics seemed to feel that she ultimately moved beyond these flaws to create rounded and dynamic characters. In his Introduction to the 1888 Spanish edition of *Ramona* (which he had himself translated), Cuban-American writer José Martí wrote that

You can't help saying a silent 'Thank-you!' as you shut the book; you can't help instinctively reaching for the hand of an author who, with greater art than Harriet Beecher Stowe, has done for the Indians, and perhaps for others as well, what Beecher Stowe did for the blacks in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*…. Just as [Harvard historian George] Ticknor wrote the history of Spanish literature, Helen Hunt Jackson, with greater fire and awareness, has perhaps, in *Ramona*, written our novel" (358).

As Jennifer Ho argues, the writer's political and philosophical commitments are crucial in determining the efficacy of such works: "transgressive texts, whether written by authors of color or white writers, bear a social responsibility and a commitment to the principles of social justice and antiessentialism" (218). Denise Chávez, a contemporary Latina critic, writes that in reading *Ramona*, she responded primarily with indignation at Jackson's "hyperboles, simplistic and stereotypical extractions, reductions, and incomplete histories," but ultimately, she too came to admire the novel's "eerie immediacy and strength of voice. I often believed I was in the characters' heads" (xv). And though Chávez wishes that "more of these voices, these galvanizing narratives, came from within the very communities that need

their words of truth," she acknowledges that Jackson's ultimate motive seemed to be her genuine desire "to alleviate human suffering" (xxi).

Despite her novel's occasional cultural illiteracies and its initial suggestions of racialism, Helen Hunt Jackson's treatment of textual Others suggests a high degree of authorial empathy. Alessandro, Ramona, and the other members of the Moreno household emerge as individuals with varied and nuanced personalities. Indeed, the characters who are most insistently Othered in the text are white characters—such as "Aunt Ri" Hyer, the generous Tennessee matron who comes to Ramona and Alessandro's aid but speaks in almost indecipherable dialect; Mr. Hartsel, the owner of the general store, who is too drunk to pay for Alessandro's violin when Alessandro desperately needs cash; and Jim Farrar, the "ruffian" who finally murders Alessandro over an unfair accusation of horse theft. These characterizations authenticate Jackson's novel as a truly transgressive text—one that not only focuses on characters who are categorically different from the author, but also consistently depicts characters of the author's own race as rapacious, irresponsible, and unintelligible. That Alessandro dies before the novel's denouement, following the familiar trope of the "vanishing Indian," counts as a demerit against Jackson's otherwise strong record of authorial empathy. In this sense, Alessandro seems to serve (despite his prominent role in the novel's plot) as a type of "surrogate" or "enabler," to recall Morrison's terms; his fate follows Uncle Tom's. But Ramona does not end the novel mournfully widowed (and hence "punished" by the author for her transgressive romance) or conveniently remarried to a white American. Rather, she marries Felipe Moreno, the Mexican foster-brother with whom she grew up. While this union bears suggestions of incestuous desire, the narration makes it clear that Ramona never feels the same ardor for Felipe that she once felt for Alessandro: "well for Felipe that he did not know, never could know, the Ramona that Alessandro had known"

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(352). Instead, this resolution introduces into the novel what should be viewed as yet another transgressive romance. Although Ramona was raised by the Moreno family, readers are informed early in the novel that she is the daughter of a white man and a Native American woman. Therefore, her final union with Felipe is arguably more "transgressive" (at least racially speaking) than her previous union with Alessandro, with whom she shared some native ancestry. Such questions involve subjective scales of alterity and normativity, but the fact that Ramona ultimately marries Felipe and moves to Mexico seems to confirm the transgressive nature of Jackson's narrative.

In judging Jackson's authorial empathy, we should violate the "intentional fallacy" and take note of some relevant facts from the author's life, as well as her other published works. Before writing *Ramona*, Jackson gained literary fame (or notoriety) for publishing *A Century of Dishonor* (1881). This nonfiction work summarily outlined the histories of a number of Native American tribes and their respective dealings with European settlers, including a full chapter on "Massacres of Indians by Whites."[15] Jackson mailed a copy of her book, "bound in blood-red cloth," to every member of Congress at her own expense (Mathes xii). The book sought to show that "it has been—to our shame be it spoken—at the demand of part of the [American] people that all these wrongs have been committed, these treaties broken, these robberies done, by the Government" (30). Jackson published this exposé after repeatedly attempting to petition the Minister of the Interior, Carl Shurz, to redress the wrongs that she had witnessed. The book's lengthy appendix includes correspondence with Shurz as well as her description of his character as "wicked, insincere, and hypocritical" (qtd in Mathes xi). We might also take into account Jackson's stated intentions for writing *Ramona*. On May 4,

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[15] *A Century of Dishonor* includes chapters on the Delawares, the Cheyennes, the Nez Percés, the Sioux, the Poncas, the Winnebagoes, and the Cherokees. Her final chapter on Indian massacres also addresses the Moravian Indians and the Apaches.

1883, Jackson wrote to her friend Thomas Bailey Aldrich (then editor of *The Atlantic*

Monthly), "if I could write a story that would do for the Indian a thousandth part what *Uncle*

Tom's Cabin did for the Negro, I would be thankful for the rest of my life" (*Indian* 258).

Jackson's nonfiction writing, her correspondence, and her advocacy for changing federal

policy towards Indians reveal the extent of her authorial empathy and her intention of

evoking empathy in her readers with the goal of effecting social and political change.

By one measure, María Amparo Ruiz de Burton demonstrates even greater empathy for

the protagonists of her transgressive text: her narrative does not kill them off. Clarence and

Mercedes survive and prosper despite flouting the restrictive rules of their respective

cultures. This suggestion that transgressive romances might succeed without tragic

consequences may derive in part from her own life experiences. As Sánchez and Pita explain,

the author became (in)famous as "the Maid of Monterey" for marrying Captain Henry S.

Burton, a U.S. Army officer, shortly after the Treaty of Guadaloupe Hidalgo officially ended

the Mexican-American War (11). Winifred Davidson, a contemporary California newspaper

reporter, described the marriage as a union of "natural enemies" during a time of war (qtd in

Sánchez and Pita 11). The couple returned to the East Coast at the beginning of the Civil

War, and Burton was promoted to the rank of Brigadier General for his leadership during the

war. But he also contracted malarial fever during the conflict, and he died in 1869, leaving

Ruiz de Burton "a thirty-seven year-old widow with two children" (Sánchez and Pita 12). To

be sure, in *The Squatter and the Don*, the death of Don Alamar leaves Doña Josepha

widowed and embittered; she pronounces at the end of the novel that "the guilty rejoice and

go unpunished" while "the innocent suffer ruin and desolation" (336). But Ruiz de Burton's

choice of separating this biographical loss from the story of her protagonists suggests that she

did not wish to emphasize in her fiction the unhappiness that followed from her own

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transgressive romance. Rather, Clarence and Mercedes are left happy, healthy, and quite rich at the end of *The Squatter and the Don*. This emplotment demonstrates a strong sense of authorial empathy for their situation as intercultural lovers who risked the proscriptions of both Mexican-American and white American society.

The novel's central preoccupation with the attempts by white settlers or "squatters" to seize Mexican land with the aid of unjust laws and judicial proceedings is also informed by Ruiz de Burton's life experiences. After her husband's death, she returned to San Diego to settle his estate and to fight for her family's Mexican land grant title for the Jamul Ranch. Sánchez and Pita state that the title "was finally validated in 1875, but by then the land was heavily mortgaged; Ruiz de Burton then petitioned for a homestead and finally in 1887 secured title to part of the Jamul Ranch—about 986.6 acres" (14). The title was ultimately approved by the California Supreme Court in 1889. Whereas Ruiz de Burton revised the text of her own transgressive romance to give it a happier ending in the novel, she seems to have revised the narrative of struggle for the family's land in a more negative direction. In *The Squatter and the Don*, the surviving Alamars are left in San Francisco, living off the generosity of Clarence, who offers to purchase their presumably worthless land title. This conclusion underscores Ruiz de Burton's statement that San Diego has been "ruined by the greed of the heartless monopolists" whose actions have spread a "blight… over Southern California, and over the entire Southern States" (342-343). Her characters suffer a more ruinous loss than she suffered in real life, and the novel ends by villifying Ruiz de Burton's political enemies. Her authorial empathy for the protagonists of her transgressive text is undermined by her hyperbolic denunciations of the text's villainous Others.

The critical importance of authorial empathy and authorial intent is nowhere so evident as in *My Ántonia*. As scholars have recently established, Willa Cather's sexual orientation and

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the parallels between her personal experience and those of Jim Burden's character are crucial to fully understanding the complicated narrative persona of *My Ántonia*. Sharon O'Brien writes that Cather's work reveals, on one hand, "the modernist writer endorsing allusive, suggestive art and inviting the reader's participation in the creation of literary meaning"—but on the other hand, "she is the lesbian writer forced to disguise or to conceal the emotional source of her fiction, reassuring herself that the reader fills the absence in the text by intuiting the subterranean, unwritten subtext" (577). Based on archival research, O'Brien has documented that Cather "arrived in Lincoln [at the University of Nebraska] in 1890 dressed as William Cather, her opposite-sex twin" and that she fell deeply in (apparently unrequited) love with Louise Pound, a beautiful and brilliant classmate who later became the first female president of the Modern Language Association (580). In one amorous letter to Pound, Cather lamented that friendships such as theirs should be considered "unnatural," signing the letter "William" (582).

Considering these biographical facts—which Barthes, Wimsatt, and Beardsley would prefer to exclude from critical consideration—it becomes clearer that the structure of Cather's frame narrative, in which an anonymous female narrator introduces Jim Burden as a proxy or embedded narrator, is more than a formal oddity. Jonathan Goldberg writes that Cather's "masculine double, Jim Burden… [has] the burden of supporting her" in this intentional "disidentification" (22). O'Brien considers Cather's fiction a "masquerade" in which "her lovers remained heterosexual, her narrators—enraptured by sensual and maternal women—male" (594). The reason for these conventions was clear to O'Brien: "the male mask allows Cather to explore a woman's passion for another woman" (593). Indeed, this queer reading of *My Ántonia* explains many tensions that otherwise seem to detract from the narrative: why Jim disagrees with the town's prejudices but ultimately conforms to them;

why he finds greater freedom at the college town, away from friends and family; why the

objects of his attraction seem always out of reach, like impossible dreams in the late-

nineteenth century midwest.

Many recent critics of Cather's fiction have focused on a 1922 essay that she titled "The

Novel Démeublé"—"the unfurnished novel." The essay opens with Cather's claim that "the

novel, for a long while, has been over-furnished" (43), and it proceeds as a manifesto for

literary substance that can be communicated without being explicitly disposed—a prototype

for what Hemingway would later call the "iceberg method." Midway through the essay,

Cather writes that

whatever is felt on the page without being specifically named there—that, one might say, is
created. It is the inexplicable presence of the thing not named, of the overtone divined by the
ear but not heard by it, the verbal mood, the emotional aura of the fact or the thing or the deed,
that gives high quality to the novel or the drama, as well as to poetry itself. (50)

O'Brien reads this "unnamed, absent presence"—"the thing not named"—as the specter of

same-sex desire and undisclosed identity, the "inexplicable" subtext of Cather's fiction (576).

Likewise, Goldberg reads "the overtone divined by the ear but not heard by it" as a metaphor

for the "sympathetic vibrations" of "racialized others, or [for]… lesbian, male homosexual,

and heterosexual difference" (xv). These critical speculations about Cather's identity, her art,

and her authorial intentions do not seem reductive or limiting of her fictional text's possible

meanings. Rather, they offer readers new critical angles and considerations with which we

might explore the nuances of her text with greater precision and a more informed spirit of

inquiry. Rather than closing off critical conversations with a hasty retreat to biography, such

interventions demonstrate that questions regarding authors' lives and intentions might prompt

new and revealing readings of literary texts.

This chapter has examined the fictional narratives of three writers whose personal

experiences and political commitments shaped their work and continue to structure our

reception of their texts into the twenty-first century. The chapter that follows will examine how three autobiographical narratives from the Progressive Era similarly draw upon both personal and public histories in order to demonstrate how their authors merit readerly empathy and consideration as fellow humans, during a period in which America's public discourse and official policies grew increasingly tribalist and exclusionary, and nativist notions of national belonging threatened to carry the day.

Chapter Four

NARRATIVE EMPATHY IN PROGRESSIVE ERA AUTOBIOGRAPHIES:
THE LIVES OF OTHERS

Despite its purportedly faithful record of historical events (both private and public), an

autobiographical account nevertheless remains a narrative, and like all narratives, it represents a

collaboration between memory and the imagination. Although their relationships with verifiable

facts are presumably different (however one might define a "verifiable fact"), fictional and

autobiographical narratives share a suite of formal elements: narrators, characters, chronologies,

settings, plots, conflicts and resolutions, mood and voice—Genette defines these last two

categories as the "regulation of narrative information" based on "distance" and "perspective,"

and "the narrating instance," respectively (162, 213). For the literary critic, autobiographical

narratives present many of the same problems and questions as fictional narratives: Who does

what to whom, and in what order? What details does the narrator choose to include or omit?

How does the protagonist characterize her past self and the other characters in her account?

What conflicts occur, and how are they resolved? What rhetorical strategies does the narrator

utilize for dramatic or emotional effect? In this chapter, I address the autobiographical works of

three Progressive Era authors: Frederick Douglass, Edith Maude Eaton, and Mary Antin. During

a period of American history marked by (often violent) attempts to exclude non-European

immigrants, to suppress black voting, and to enforce racial segregation through lynchings and

other, more subtle forms of racial discrimination, these writers' autobiographies appealed for

readerly empathy and expressed a deep-seated desire for fuller inclusion in human society.

Autobiographical narratives implicitly function as appeals for readerly empathy, even if the author never intended for them to be read by anyone else. The implied reader of every autobiography is an imagined witness to the author's life, invited to experience vicariously the "life and times" that the book or essay purportedly records.[1] Sidonie Smith notes that the act of self-composition is not unique to the autobiographer's art: "every day… in front of precise audiences (even if an audience of one), people assemble, if only temporarily, a 'life' to which they assign coherence and meaning and through which they position themselves in historically specific identities" (17). This assignment of "coherence and meaning" in order to position oneself into "historically specific identities" is a way of directing readers to *See me as I (think I) am; understand me on my own terms*. It is a call for empathy; an appeal for the reader's imaginative identification with the autobiographer's past and/or present self.

When successful, the autobiographical appeal enables readers to see the world through the author's (remembered and/or imagined) perspective: to view important events in the life of a "self" through the autobiographer's preferred lens and camera angle—from a specific moment of recollection and signification. Of course, readers may resist this appeal or reject it altogether: reading the life writing of another is no guarantee of readerly empathy. Readers may also take a critical perspective on the record an autobiography constructs, suspicious that the author has misrepresented the "truth" of certain events and/or has skewed characterizations in his or her favor. But reading an account of another's life often proves to be a powerful experience, and unless the text is poorly crafted, the narrator is unconscionable, or the reader is emotionally or ideologically unavailable, the reader is generally inclined to perceive narrative events from the writer's perspective, at least to some extent. Indeed, since most autobiographical texts are

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[1] Wolfgang Iser proposes that literary texts employ "a variety of cunning strategems to nudge the reader… into making the 'right' discoveries" (xiv). The *implied reader*, according to Iser, exists in the interstices between these textual "strategems" and actual readers' responses to them.

inscribed as first-person narratives, they offer multiple avenues for readerly empathy. Readers may imaginatively identify with the narrator ("narrating *I*"), the character of the past self ("narrated *I*"), the writer ("authorial *I*,") or some fusion of these disparate elements that we imagine to be the autobiographer's essential self. Smith and Watson argue that we should also consider the autobiography's "ideological *I*," or the (explicit or implicit) range of possibilities of which the author understood herself to be capable at the cultural moment of writing. "Every autobiographical narrator is historically and culturally situated," they write, and therefore "we need… to situate the narrator in the historical notion of personhood and the meaning of lives at the time of writing" (62).

The autobiographer's perspective is a discrete and finite view of a life, in time-stamped retrospect. As James Olney writes, an autobiography is "a point of view on the writer's own past life" (42). Life writing "is more than a history of the past… it is also, intentionally or not, a monument of the self as it is becoming, a metaphor of the self at the summary moment of composition" (35). The rendering of one's past life into narrative therefore tends to take on a certain teleology; the narrative arc suggests the autobiographer's explanation: *This is how I came to be who I am today*. Olney argues that some autobiographers record their lives with "little or no self-awareness, little or no criticism of the assumed point of view" (43). He dubs these writers "autobiographers of the single metaphor" (43). But other autobiographers demonstrate a critical self-awareness regarding their craft, and in their texts "the manner really cannot be separated from the matter… the style is the book and the man" (43). Updating this language to the present day, we might define Olney's notion of "duplex" or double autobiography as life writing that is aware of its own constructedness, suspicious of its own self-positing. "While it is true to say that one can see with no other eyes than one's own," he writes, "it is also true to say that one can, after a manner, see oneself

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seeing with those eyes: one can take a point of view on the point of view one has taken" (43). The three autobiographical texts I examine in this chapter demonstrate in various ways that their authors were able to "see [themselves] seeing with those eyes." Indeed, their critical self-awareness was due in part to the inherent injustices of American society for women, immigrants, and people of color.

Frederick Douglass, Edith Maude Eaton, and Mary Antin all lived and wrote during the so-called "Progressive Era" of American history, which is often periodized as the years between 1880 and 1920. Douglass (1818-1895) belonged to an earlier age than Eaton (1865-1914) and Antin (1881-1949), but he remained an influential writer, diplomat, and public figure until his death. These three writers published autobiographies around the turn of the twentieth century, a tumultuous period of technological advances including the first transatlantic radio signal (1901), the fixed-wing aircraft (1903), the color photograph (1907), the mass-produced automobile (1908), and the "talking" motion picture (1910).[2] The development of the modern electric grid, the incandescent lightbulb, the radio, and the telephone also occurred during this period, though each achievement represented a series of advances that spanned multiple years. It was also an era marked by "progressive" political causes: the temperance movement, which ultimately led to the ratification of the 18th Amendment in 1919; the women's suffrage movement, which led to the passage of the 19th Amendment in 1920; and various political reform movements which sought to expose government fraud and corruption, often associated with "muckraking" journalism. This was a heady time of dizzying changes. The distinguished Harvard historian Henry Adams (1838-1918), looking back on his life from the early twentieth century, wrote that "in essentials like

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[2] See Stephen van Dulken, *Inventing the 20th Century: 100 Inventions that Shaped the World* (New York: New York UP, 2002).

religion, ethics, philosophy; in history, literature, art; in the concepts of all science, except perhaps mathematics, the American boy of 1854 stood nearer the year 1 than to the year 1900" (53). Elsewhere Adams commented that "if science were to go on doubling or quadrupling its complexities every ten years, even mathematics would soon succumb. An average mind had succumbed already in 1850; it could no longer understand the problem in 1900" (496). This era stands out in history for its rapid succession of technological advances, and for the world wars those advances helped to facilitate.

It was also a period of American history notable for rampant racism, nativism, and xenophobia, as I will discuss in the three sections that follow. The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, which was extended by the Geary Act of 1892 and made "permanent" in 1902 (but eventually repealed in 1943), helps set the historical stage for autobiographies from the so-called "Progressive Era." In 1911, the U.S. Congress published *The Reports of the Immigration Commission*, a 41-volume collection of studies accomplished over a three-year period that exemplifies "the growing anxiety about immigration in the period immediately before World War I" (Brown 16). These years also witnessed the apex of racial lynchings and other KKK activity, mostly but not exclusively focused in the American South. Gruesome lynchings in Marion, Indiana and Duluth, Minnesota demonstrated that racism was never confined to any single geographical region (Apel & Smith 21, 72). D.W. Griffith's 1915 film *The Birth of a Nation* provides another telling example of this period's simultaneous technological advances and reactionary racial politics: the film is notable for its many "progressive" or groundbreaking cinematic techniques as well as for its white supremacist ideology. Benshoff and Griffin note that *Birth* "celebrate[s] the birth of the Ku Klux Klan" but also represents "a breakthrough in epic, emotionally manipulative moviemaking" (79). To the category of groundbreaking but overtly racist films we might also add two of Thomas

Edison's earliest motion pictures, *The Watermelon Contest* (1896) and *Sambo and Aunt Jemima* (1897). The "Progressive Era," in short, was not always as progressive as this designation would suggest.

The final decade of the nineteenth century, in fact, was a bloody and brutal period of American history. With the federal protections of the Reconstruction era long since abandoned, efforts to intimidate and disenfranchise blacks in the South (and elsewhere) were rampant, and even black voters' once-trusted allies in the Republican party seemed ready to accept their disenfranchisement as inevitable. In an 1892 speech entitled "Lynch Law in the South," Frederick Douglass observed that "this revival of lynch law… shows that prejudice and hatred have increased in bitterness with the increasing interval between the time of slavery and now," though he considered the rise in racial animosity a by-product of black Americans' improving fortunes: "the Negro meets no resistance when on a downward course. It is only when he rises in wealth, intelligence, and manly character that he brings upon himself the heavy hand of persecution" (*Selected Speeches* 748). Only a few years later, Du Bois would write that "the problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color-line" (13). He might well have pluralized that line, for African Americans were not the only embattled minority facing discrimination, prejudice, and systematic failures of justice.

Douglass, Eaton, and Antin all wrote from the subject position of cultural outsiders, even though all three authors had distinguished themselves and achieved various measures of professional success before they recorded their life stories. Each writer had experienced repeated injustices in the name of white supremacy and racial tribalism. While the three texts I analyze in this chapter seem to have different presumed audiences (or implied readers), all three clearly address white (or "Gentile") readers, at least in certain passages. In this sense, they all speak to "outgroup" readers—those who do not share the racial or ethnic identity of

the author—though a cultural outsider's "outgroup" is, by other logic, a sort of "ingroup"—
the mainstream reader. Douglass explicitly addresses white readers at strategic points in his
text; Eaton seems to address readers of all races from an outsider position, since she implies
that few readers will share her particular racial status as a "Eurasian" or Chinese North
American; Antin primarily addresses white Christian (Gentile) readers.

These three autobiographers also take interesting positions vis-à-vis their former
selves: their narrators treat their "past-self" protagonists with varying amounts of emotional
and intellectual distance. Considering all three texts, Douglass's and Antin's narrators seem
most comfortable with their current identities, but while Douglass's narrator is grave and
respectable, Antin's is exuberant almost to excess. Both Douglass's and Antin's narrators
seem greatly distanced from their former selves, but for very different reasons: Douglass's
"narrating I" is separated from his childhood self by over 70 years of life experience, while
Antin seems to have intentionally distanced her youthful "narrating I" from her fairly recent
childhood self in the old country. Eaton, by contrast, seems to collapse her "narrating I" into
her childhood self; the double present tense of her narration blurs the temporal distance
between *then* and *now*. Yet if she does not "Other" her past self to the extent that Douglass
and Antin do, she also seems unable to move past the recurring childhood traumas that she
describes: the narrator remains thoroughly Othered. Whereas Antin's text attempts to disguise
or deny the damage that she suffered through the long process of emigration, immigration,
and assimilation, Eaton's autobiographical voice remains stuck in the traumatic moments that
she repeats and relives through her text. In Eaton's retelling, she is always Othered, even
within her own family, for neither of her parents shares the biracial identity that plagues her
and her siblings. All three of these Progressive Era autobiographers "Other" the self in various
ways and for varying purposes. Their texts invite readers of all racial, ethnic, and gendered

backgrounds to experience first-hand how it feels to be the Other, and each writer expresses a deep-seated desire for fuller inclusion in the human family.

"A Man Among Men": Implicit Appeals for Empathy in Douglass's Autobiographies

Frederick Douglass's final autobiography—the expanded 1892 version of *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*—is many things: a literary life thrice reconsidered, a historical snapshot of American politics from the late nineteenth century, a manual for racial uplift written by one of the most famous and admired leaders of the African American community, and a slave narrative, adapted with the extensive hindsight of a man who had been legally free for the past forty-six years.[3] If all autobiographies are implicit appeals for readerly empathy, slave narratives make this appeal even more clearly because of their abolitionist purpose. Yet after the conclusion of the Civil War and the passage of the Fifteenth Amendment, as William Andrews notes, African American autobiographers "thought and wrote about themselves and their past in ways increasingly different from those that characterize antebellum autobiographies" (*To Tell* 18). In particular, their autobiographical impulses came to be motivated less by the need to denounce slavery and more from the urge to record their personal experiences, their paths from bondage to freedom. Elsewhere, Andrews has written that "after the Civil War, former slaves continued to record their experiences under slavery, partly to ensure that the newly-united nation did not forget what had threatened its existence, and partly to affirm the dedication of the ex-slave population to social and economic progress" ("Introduction" para. 1). In contrast to his earlier life writings, Douglass's final autobiography presupposes a multiracial readership whose life experiences vary widely but

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[3] Prior to this final autobiography, Douglass had published *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave* (1845), *My Bondage and My Freedom* (1855), and the first edition of *Life and Times of Fredrick Douglass* (1881). His freedom was purchased by English "friends" Anna Richardson, Ellen Richardson, and John Bright in 1846 (*Autobiographies* 1057).

who are nonetheless expected to know and respect the author. The 1892 text is therefore less an appeal for readerly empathy than a dutiful description of events that Douglass felt compelled to record, a dignified retrospection upon an exceptional American life.

Douglass's final autobiography, with its twice-revised accounts of enslaved life,[4] is divided into three sections, with the first devoted to "His Early Life as a Slave," the second to "His Escape from Bondage," and the third to "His Complete History to the Present Time." The first two sections—outlining Douglass's birth, childhood, escape from slavery, and career as an abolitionist and statesman—are unchanged from the previous edition, but the third section is entirely new.[5] Like the previous edition, the expanded *Life and Times* opens with an introduction by George Lewis Ruffin, the first African American graduate of Harvard Law School, who hails Douglass as "our most celebrated colored man" and "the most remarkable contribution this country has given to the world" (*Autobiographies* 473, 467).

It is difficult to read *Life and Times* without comparing it to Douglass's previous autobiographies, or to the many slave narratives that his life writings at once represent and resemble. From the outset, the latter text's tone is starkly different from his original publication. Compare the first two sentences of his 1845 *Narrative* to the corresponding sentences from the 1892 version:

> I was born in Tuckahoe, near Hillsborough, and about twelve miles from Easton, in Talbot county, Maryland. I have no accurate knowledge of my age, never having seen any authentic record containing it. (1845; *Autobiographies* 15)

> In Talbot County, Eastern Shore, State of Maryland, near Easton, the county town, there is a small district of country, thinly populated, and remarkable for nothing that I know of more than for the worn-out, sandy, desert-like appearance of its soil, the

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[4] Although he revised the final chapter of the 1881 text, Douglass did not change his account of life in slavery in the 1892 edition, as I discuss above.

[5] Because the 1881 edition is not collected in the Library of America edition of Douglass's *Autobiographies*, I have cited the electronic text available via DocSouth when applicable: <http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/douglasslife/menu.html>.

general dilapidation of its farms and fences, the indigent and spiritless character of its inhabitants, and the prevalence of ague and fever. It was in this dull, flat, and unthrifty district or neighborhood, bordered by the Choptank river, among the laziest and muddiest of streams, surrounded by a white population of the lowest order, indolent and drunken to a proverb, and among slaves who, in point of ignorance and indolence, were fully in accord with their surroundings, that I, without any fault of my own, was born, and spent the first years of my childhood. (1892; *Autobiographies* 475)

Not only does Douglass's final account contain much more information than his original text, it also speaks in a voice of authoritative knowledge. Whereas the young Douglass was quick to admit that "I have no accurate knowledge of my age"—he went on to add that slaves generally know "as little of their ages as horses know of theirs"—the elder Douglass not only knows the facts; he tells of his birthplace in a voice that disparages both the land itself (with its "laziest and muddiest of streams") and its inhabitants, both black and white. Moreover, the elder Douglass is no longer presented as an inevitable product of his environment, though he does suggest that some other residents of Talbot County might be explained as such. Instead, he was born there "without any fault of my own"; readers are expected to know that he has risen to prominence and prosperity through his own hard work and determination. The elder statesman no longer needed to claim ignorance, to apologize for his upbringing, or to explain his existence as a product of his youthful environment.

The implied reader of Douglass's autobiographies also changed over time: *Life and Times* makes it clear that Douglass is no longer writing exclusively for white readers; nor does he address white readers as an undifferentiated mass. In a Chapter titled "Retrospection" (which originally appeared in the 1881 edition), he writes,

To those who have suffered in slavery I can say, I, too, have suffered. To those who have taken some risks and encountered hardships in the flight from bondage I can say, I, too, have endured and risked. To those who have battled for liberty, brotherhood, and citizenship I can say, I, too, have battled. And to those who have lived to enjoy the fruits of victory I can say, I, too, live and rejoice. If I have pushed my example too prominently for the good taste of my Caucasian readers, I beg them to remember that I have written in part for the encouragement of a class whose aspirations need the stimulus of success. (913)

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This litany of experiential claims is addressed to readers of all races, sometimes separately (as in specific references to "Caucasian readers" or "those who have suffered in slavery") and sometimes collectively (as in "those who have lived to enjoy the fruits of victory," which would presumably include abolitionists of all races). Moreover, Douglass's list of shared experiences asserts common ground with certain readers, not based exclusively on racial identity, but rather on mutual history. Whereas his original *Narrative* took as its starting point the general condition of life in slavery and *My Bondage and My Freedom* added the new experience of life as a "freedman," *Life and Times* transitions into new material with this catalog of specific experiences: those of a man who has suffered greatly, who has taken great risks, who has battled for the rights of American citizenship, and who has emerged victorious.

But the last section of Douglass's autobiography—the thirteen chapters spanning the years 1881–91, added for the final edition—bears a much more measured tone than this ebullient transition. The author opens by recalling his sentiments upon publishing the 1881 edition: "I laid aside my pen with some such sense of relief as might be felt by a weary and over-burdened traveler when arrived at the desired end of a long journey" (938). He confesses that "writing for the public eye never came quite as easily to me as speaking to the public ear" and that advocating the interests of his "emancipated brothers and sisters who, though free, are yet oppressed" was "not altogether as agreeable to me as was my first mission"—the mission of "mak[ing] slavery odious and thus [hastening] the day of emancipation" (938–939). Far from the earlier pronouncements of an embattled but unbowed champion, these sound like the confessions of a weary leader at the end of a long and arduous career. Indeed, many of the events and obligations of the intervening decade had come as an unwelcome surprise: Douglass notes in conclusion that his appointments as American Minister Resident and Consul-General

to Haiti, as well as his role representing Haiti at the World's Columbian Exposition of 1892–93, were "equally unsought" (1045).

The former experience had been particularly distasteful, as Douglass's account makes clear. Having been appointed as the United States' chief ambassador to Haiti, he became embroiled in the attempt to secure an American naval station at Môle St. Nicolas, without receiving authorization from President Benjamin Harrison to negotiate directly with the Haitian government. Rather, Douglass was forced to stand by as Rear Admiral Bancroft Gherardi (USN) and a representative from a New York-based mercantile firm engaged in negotiations that were ultimately unsuccessful. William McFeely describes Gherardi as "a man of fierce, even sadistic temper and monumental arrogance" who was once reprimanded for unlawfully "flogging seamen" (347-348). In this sensitive diplomatic post, Douglass was obligated to collaborate with a mercurial flag officer whose negotiating tactics resembled Mr. Covey's. Small wonder that the Haitians eventually declined the U.S. request. Adding insult to injury, it was widely reported that the failure was due to Douglass's shortcomings: "It is said… that I wasted the whole of my first year in Haiti in needless parley and delay…. I am [also] charged with sympathy for Haiti" (*Autobiographies* 1027-1029). While Douglass concedes that the latter claim is warranted, he fervently denies that "my sympathy with Haiti stood between me and any honorable duty that I owed to the United States or to any citizen of the United States" (1029). "A statement more false than this never dropped from lip or pen," he claims (1030).

Douglass culminates the final writing of his life by republishing (as his final two chapters) two lengthy articles which originally appeared in *North American Review* in September and October 1891. These articles lay out Douglass's defense against what he characterizes as slanderous charges, based primarily on distrust and racial animosity. Hence

what might have been the glorious culmination of his final autobiography comes across as a disappointing anticlimax—a restatement rather than a reconsideration—though in a concluding paragraph, Douglass attempts to put a positive spin on these events, calling the Haitian appointment one of the "crowning honors to my long career and a fitting and happy close to my whole public life" (1045). Directly following his lengthy, transcribed accounts of the diplomatic debacle over Môle St. Nicolas, this conclusion seems less than convincing.

Had he been able to predict the events of 1889–91, Douglass might well have chosen to publish his final autobiography in 1888, when he and his second wife, Helen Pitts Douglass, had recently returned from a year-long tour of England, Ireland, Scotland, France, Switzerland, Italy, Greece, and Egypt.[6] His notes from these travels, contained in Chapters 8–9 of the final section, are truly remarkable, in part because they reveal the social and spiritual constraints that Douglass felt as a black man in America, even into his old age. Despite finding himself "among strangers" in Dublin, Douglass recalls that "these received me in the same cordial spirit that distinguished their fathers and mothers" (987). He repeatedly notes the kindnesses of strangers and hosts, as well as the freedom and inspiration that he experiences during these travels. Recalling Egypt's deserts, Douglass muses that

> in such loneliness, silence and expansiveness, imagination is unchained and man has naturally a deeper sense of the Infinite Presence than is to be felt in the noise and bustle of the towns and men-crowded cities. Religious ideas have come to us from the wilderness, from mountain tops, from dens and caves, and from the vast silent spaces…. No wonder that Moses wandering in the vast and silent desert… brooding over the oppressed condition of his people, should hear the voice of Jehovah saying, 'I have seen the affliction of my people'…. The heart beats louder and the soul hears quicker in silence and solitude. (1009–10)

These reflections, read after Douglass's extensive accounts of racial conflict and political intrigue, seem like a long-deferred reward for a lifetime of service and struggle. Their

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[6] Anna Murray Douglass died after complications from a stroke in 1882; Frederick Douglass married Helen Pitts in 1884 (*Autobiographies* 1072-73).

philosophical depth and cosmopolitan *Weltanschauung* stand in stark contrast to the humble origins that his first autobiography had described: the slave child on a rural plantation, clad in burlap sacks and raised in ignorance. Frederick Bailey had not only reinvented himself; he had ascended his own mountaintop.

Summarizing his travels abroad, Douglass wrote that "after my life of hardships in slavery and of conflict with race and color prejudice and proscription at home, there was left to me a space in life when I could and did walk the world unquestioned, a man among men" (1017). This conclusion—which one wishes, for Douglass's sake, could have completed his final autobiography—speaks to the hardships that he faced to the end of his days. Yet it is not merely the reference to hardships, but also the simple and understated expression of relief that Douglass savored, if only for a short "space in life," that may elicit readers' empathy most strongly. For this magisterial human being to express gratitude for the opportunity to "walk the world unquestioned, a man among men" says more about the injustice of American racial relations than the most adamant denunciations or the most painful confessions ever could. This statement demonstrates the rhetorical force of understatement, as well as the contagious nature of narrative positivity: impressed by the simple dignity of Douglass's concluding statement as well as the lack of bitterness in his references to hardships and conflicts, readers are likely to judge the autobiographer with similar generosity. His quiet summary of a life spent overcoming adversity—in a tone markedly different from his earlier, more adamant protestations—conveys to the reader a sense of the elder statesman's dignity and magnanimity.

Douglass's first autobiography depicts certain whites as sympathetic: his mistress, Sophia Auld, who treated him "as she supposed one human being ought to treat another" (40)—at least until her husband instructed her otherwise; the "little white boys" on the streets

of Baltimore, who "expressed the liveliest sympathy" for the young Douglass's plight (41);

George Cookman, the southern preacher who advocated Emancipation and "betray[ed] his

sympathy for us" (53). Douglass also praised Garrison's newspaper, *The Liberator*, for its

"sympathy for my brethren in bonds" (96), though he revised this characterization of

Garrison's work in subsequent writings.[7] These sympathetic whites are thrown into contrast

with numerous foils in the text: Sophia Auld with her husband Hugh; the sympathetic white

boys in the Baltimore streets with the murderous white laborers in the Baltimore shipyard;

George Cookman with Edward Covey, a much less "sympathetic" man of the cloth. The

Narrative even acknowledges the value of these most unsympathetic antagonists: "In learning

to read, I owe almost as much to the bitter opposition of my master, as to the kindly aid of my

mistress. I acknowledge the benefit of both" (38).

Douglass's autobiographies do not explicitly appeal for readers' sympathy, as Harriet

Jacobs does in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*—"pity me, and pardon me, O virtuous

reader!" (55). Rather, Douglass's appeal is premised in a notion of basic human equality. As

he puts the question to the "little white boys" in Baltimore, "You will be free as soon as you

are twenty-one, *but I am a slave for life!* Have I not as good a right to be free as you have?"

(41). This invitation to consider the fundamental unfairness of slavery is echoed throughout

the text, often through juxtapositions of Christian virtue with the moral depravity of slave

masters and overseers. "I love the pure, peaceable, and impartial Christianity of Christ: I

therefore hate the corrupt, slaveholding, women-whipping, cradle-plundering, partial and

hypocritical Christianity of this land" (97). Such denunciations offer readers a clear choice

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[7] In *My Bondage and My Freedom*, Douglass revealed the efforts of members of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society to "pin me down to my simple narrative," and he refers to William Lloyd Garrison as "my then-revered friend" (*Autobiographies* 367). Yet by the publication of the 1881 *Life and Times*, Garrison was restored to the status of a "revered friend," and Douglass notes that "these excellent friends were actuated by the best of motives, and were not altogether wrong in their advice" (CDLA 219).

between two value systems, facilitating what Fritz Breithaupt calls a "choosing of sides," which requires some degree of imaginative identification. As William Lloyd Garrison puts it in his preface to the 1845 *Narrative*, "Reader! are you with the man-stealers in sympathy and purpose, or on the side of their down-trodden victims?" (10). Yet Douglass's primary goal does not seem to be the reader's empathy with him *as an individual* so much as the reader's acknowledgment of him as a fellow human—"a man among men"—which his text specifically identifies with the abolitionist position.

Without rescinding the political message of his previous account, in *My Bondage and My Freedom* Douglass provides a much fuller and more individualized self-portrait, especially regarding memories of his childhood and his family members. In describing his early life on the plantation, Douglass expands the material from the first five chapters of his 1845 *Narrative*—including the death of his mother, descriptions of brutal overseers, and the whipping of Aunt Esther (previously Hester)—to fill the first nine chapters of *My Bondage and My Freedom*. Douglass remembers his grandmother, Betsey Bailey, at length: "Grandmammy was, indeed, at that time, all the world to me; and the thought of being separated from her, [for] any considerable time… was intolerable" (143). However, when he is around seven years old, the young "Fed" is indeed separated from his grandmother and sent to live on the plantation, leaving him with no family save his siblings, of whom he notes, "brothers and sisters we were by blood; but *slavery* had made us strangers" (149; author's italics). Some of his siblings attempt to comfort him—"my brother and sisters came around me, and said, 'Don't cry,' and gave me peaches and pears" (150)—but the young boy remains inconsolable. These chapters give readers new insights into the emotional life of a young child whose family ties are severed through the dehumanizing institution of plantation slavery. Because readers may be particularly inclined to empathize with a suffering child, this new

material—rendered with the specificity of an individual life rather than in the general terms of his first account—may elicit readerly empathy more powerfully than any of Douglass's other life writings.

In his 1881 *Life and Times*, Douglass made the rather surprising decision to omit much that he had added to the account of his childhood in *My Bondage and My Freedom*. He retains a brief mention of his grandmother, identifying her as a "good nurse," a "capital hand at making nets," and a "somewhat famous… fisherwoman" (476), but the discussion of Douglass's emotional attachment to "Grandmammy" is removed. Likewise, the discussion of his siblings disappears, except for a passing comment that the slave system "had no interest in recognizing or preserving any of the ties that bind families together" (476). While he cuts much of the personal content that his 1855 account had added, Douglass does preserve this intriguing admission: "There is, in "Prichard's Natural History of Man," the head of a figure… the features of which so resemble my mother that I often recur to it with something of the feelings which I suppose others experience when looking upon their own dear departed ones" (477). Thus Douglass omits references to actual family members and relationships while preserving this prosthetic mother figure: an anonymous image in an anthropological textbook. While the "recurring" action of gazing upon a photo of a stranger, only to remember (or imagine remembering) his own mother is itself deeply personal and emotionally charged, Douglass's decision to include this information in place of the previous recollections about the relatives that he did remember suggests a complicated relationship with his family history.

Frederick Douglass's autobiographies collectively reveal a life in progress, or at least a life reconsidered from four significant moments over the course of a lifetime. The tone of these texts varies from the strident (but formally restrained) *Narrative* to the looser, more personal, and more effusive *My Bondage and My Freedom* to the dignified, calculated, and

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understated *Life and Times*—steeped in American politics in its first iteration, but more expansive and philosophical in its final form. These texts serve as implicit calls for empathy, asking readers to perceive the world as the autobiographical subject does—or as the author recalls the autobiographical subject perceiving them, however long ago. Douglass's strategies for eliciting this empathy vary over time, influenced by historical events and personal developments which are often inextricable. But taking stock of his life writing in full, I would argue that Douglass's appeal is always firmly rooted in a notion of personal pride and dignity that is very much in keeping with nineteenth-century notions of American manhood. He is (and stakes his claim as being) a self-made, self-taught man; a fighter; a pioneer; a diplomat; a statesman; a man of letters; and, in time, a dutiful citizen, not only of the United States, but of the world. In what are arguably the most moving lines of his final autobiography, Douglass states his desire to finally (co)exist without adversity, "a man among men." This desire proved elusive, but like the rest of his work, it simultaneously represents the most ambitious dreams of the New World and its most egregious failures. To the 21st-century reader, regardless of race, gender, or nationality, it must be difficult to read those words and not to identify with the author, at least on some level. Douglass demands empathy through the power of example. He does not have to ask for it explicitly; nor would his writing compel it as forcefully if he had.

Reliving Dislocation: "Leaves from the Mental Portfolio of an Eurasian"

Edith Maude Eaton (better known by her *nom de plume*, Sui Sin Far) was born in Prestbury, England in 1865; she moved with her English father, Edward Eaton, her Chinese mother, Grace A. (Lotus Blossom) Trefusis Eaton, and four siblings—the number eventually grew to 13—to New York in 1872 and on to Montreal, Quebec soon thereafter (White-Parks *Sui* 10-18). She went on to become a literary champion of Chinese North Americans, writing articles and editorials for various newspapers in addition to the 38 essays and short stories that

were published in the 1912 collection *Mrs. Spring Fragrance*. In her autobiographical essay, "Leaves from the Mental Portfolio of an Eurasian," Eaton describes the cultural displacement and hostility with which she and her siblings often struggled due to widespread anti-Chinese sentiment and the complications of mixed-race identity. "Why couldn't we have been either one thing or the other?" Eaton recalls wondering. "Why is my mother's race despised?" (222). First published in *The Independent* on 21 January 1909, the essay was included by Amy Ling and Annette White-Parks in their 1995 collection *Mrs. Spring Fragrance and Other Writings*. The publication of this book marked the culmination of Eaton's return from literary obscurity, a process that began in the late 1970s and early 1980s with a number of articles and conference papers devoted to her work.[8]

The rediscovery of Sui Sin Far's work was part of a broader "recovery of Asian American literature" that coincided with a renewed interest in women's literature and feminist writers (Ling & White-Parks 11). Scholars of Asian American literature often distinguish her work from other pioneering authors and early texts that attempt to "'explain' Asia to the West and plead implicitly for racial tolerance," yet "do not condemn or challenge racist stereotypes of the Chinese" (Li 122–123). Unlike these "guided Chinatown tours," Eaton's stories and autobiographical essays engage directly with ethnic stereotypes and the damage they can cause. Annette White-Parks notes that Eaton "presents portraits of turn-of-the-century North American Chinatowns, not in the mode of the 'yellow peril' literature popular in her era but with an empathy that [distinguishes] her as the first to write from an insider viewpoint on Chinese in North America" (*Sui* 1). She has been named the "first Chinese-American

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[8] Ling and White-Parks cite a variety of conference papers, publications, and anthology entries on pp. 3-4 and 8 (note 15).

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fictionist" and "the godmother of Asian American fiction" (Solberg; Birchall para. 1).[9] For her

part, Eaton seems to have preferred the title "Chinese Eurasian," which more precisely

describes her mixed racial identity.

"Leaves" consists of a series of vignettes that move chronologically from Eaton's early

childhood in England through her experiences in New York, Montreal, the American Midwest,

Jamaica, San Francisco, and throughout California. As Annette White-Parks explains, "binding

in common all regions that she traversed… was a ruling Anglo majority in whose eyes words

like 'freedom,' 'equality,' even 'humanity' did not apply to people with skins darker than their

own" ("Reversal" 19). But aside from the recurring theme of racial prejudice and mistreatment,

Eaton's vignettes are episodic and disconnected; to borrow Genette's phrase, they lack the

"connective tissue" of summary (*ND* 97).[10] The essay's structure consists primarily of scenes

separated by what Genette calls "indefinite ellipses," or temporal gaps of unspecified duration

(*ND* 106). As the essay progresses, the breaks between sections grow more pronounced, and

some are actually punctuated with ellipses. This procession of scene after scene, in different

times and locations but always with similar outcomes, gives the essay a sense of uprootedness,

resignation, and inevitability. Joy Leighton argues that the essay demonstrates the inability of

writing to create an imaginary home for the dislocated artist: "writing, although a fecund space

for imagining domesticity, is not potent enough to write oneself out of exile" (13). Indeed,

[9] These titles function in part to distinguish Eaton from Yan Phou Lee, a Chinese student who came to the United States under the auspices of the Chinese Educational Mission in Hartford, Connecticut; Lee published the autobiographical text *When I Was a Boy in China* in 1887. Eaton's titles also distinguish her from her sister, Winifred Lillie Eaton (a/k/a Onoto Watanna), who published the first Asian American novel, *Miss Nume of Japan*, in 1899. Edith Maude Eaton's short stories, first published during the 1880s, make her the first Asian American to publish fiction, but not the "first Asian American novelist" or the "first Asian American writer."

[10] Genette categorizes four "canonical forms of tempo" or narrative "speed": the descriptive pause, the scene, the summary, and the ellipsis. These four forms are arranged in increasing order of the speed of their narration, or the relationship between "story time" and "narrative time." Description is the slowest form of narration, as "story time" approaches zero during the process of description. The scene is the next slowest form, followed by the summary, in which story time moves faster than narrative time, and the speed of ellipsis approaches infinity, as it takes up little to no narrative time to relate (*ND* 93-95).

"Leaves" consists of a series of displacements, linked together by a common antagonism toward the narrator/protagonist's mixed-race identity. For example, she recounts being called a "very interesting little creature" by a "white haired old man" in England, who examines her like a laboratory specimen (218). In New York, she and her brother are called "Chinky, Chinky, Chinaman, yellow-face, pig-tail, rat-eater" by a violent group of children (219), and in Montreal the "villagers" who first greet them murmur "Les pauvres enfants" and "Chinoise, Chinoise" (220). While the rancor of these comments varies considerably —the American antagonists are the most specific in their epithets, and they are the only ones who couple their words with punches and scratches—the end result of each scene is the same. The young "Miss Sui" learns in each case that she is a curious "Other" to be observed, attacked, or pitied; she never gains the full acceptance of her peers or her "countrymen," and often the scene precedes or precipitates (yet another) geographic and cultural dislocation. Amy Ling writes that "in this essay as in all her writing, [Eaton's] mission is to write wrongs, particularly… bigotry, which, as a Eurasian, she had experienced from both Asians as well as Caucasians" ("Revelation" 47).

The scenes of confrontation are narrated in a doubled present tense: the narrator's remembering is situated in the same tense as the events that she recounts. The essay begins with the sentence, "When I look back over the years I see myself, a little child of scarcely four years of age, walking in front of my nurse, in a green English lane, and listening to her tell another of her kind that my mother is Chinese" (218). Here the narrator's remembering ("I look back… I see myself") is described in the present tense, and the remembered event is rendered in the present progressive ("walking… and listening"). But that present progressive tense soon resolves back into the simple present: the nurse's interlocutor "exclaims" upon hearing this news, and then "turns around and scans me curiously from head to foot" (218). In subsequent vignettes, the introductory statement of recollection is often omitted, and the

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narrator uses a simple establishing statement to signal the new scene: "I am at a children's party" (218), or "I am living in a little town" (224), or "I am under a tropic sky" (225). When the introductory statements are included, they often characterize the remembered anecdotes as dramatic visualizations. "I see myself again, a few years older," begins one recollection (218). Another is suggestive of stage directions: "The scene of my life shifts to Eastern Canada" (220). These present-tense recountings of present-tense memories suggest that the past remains very real, and is easily summoned up and visualized by the adult narrator. The focalization switches so freely and so frequently between adult narrator and child character that the two seem to merge into one ageless figure, traveling willy-nilly through narrative time. Who is the "I" who states, "I am at a children's party," and does this statement denote a recollection or an ongoing event?

Several qualities of Eaton's essay render its implicit call for empathy especially effective. First, in depicting a litany of painful experiences that she endured as a child, the essay tugs on our heartstrings: child characters appeal strongly to readers' empathy because they are presumably powerless to defend themselves. We tend to attribute less agency to children, and correspondingly we may not consider child characters to be as responsible for their situations and circumstances as we would consider adult characters to be. Second, the essay presents a series of antagonists, which invite us (in Breithaupt's words) to "choose sides" with either Eaton's child character or those who harass and insult her. Few readers will be sadistic enough to identify with the tormenters. Third, the essay reveals the internal conflict that the young Eaton and her siblings experience: Are they Chinese or not? Why must they be hated? As another "Eurasian" child asks the "Miss Far" character (after she has grown to adulthood), "Why did papa and mamma born us?"—to which the narrator adds her own unanswered "Why?" (223). These conflicts, doubts, and tensions may appeal to readers'

empathy because most people can relate to the emotional experience of internal conflict, even if they have not experienced the particular challenges of biracial identity. The condition of uncertainty and self-doubt coveys an emotional "truth of experience" that potentially transcends the particularity of racial categories. Fourth, the essay reveals Eaton's suffering and weakness in ways that do not come across as bitter or angry. She confesses that her child character feels "so keenly alive to every shade of sorrow and suffering that it is almost a pain to live" (221). She also confesses hiding her physical weakness from her family "until I cannot stand" (221). These self-characterizations *seem* truthful because they do not portray her childhood self in a flattering light (she is weak; she can barely function in human society), but they also confess concealing her weakness from others. I do not mean to suggest that confessions of secrecy or dishonesty inevitably prompt readers' trust, or that self-deprecation is universally appealing. But the essay's understated revelations of pain and suffering are likely to come across as truthful, because they do not seem calculated to besmirch others or to cast herself in a more favorable light; the narrator does not identify any single antagonist as being culpable for her suffering. When one adds to these formal qualities the facts that Eaton's essay is written in the first person[11] and that its present-tense narration renders each scene all the more "immediate" to readers, Eaton's recollections of a painful childhood sound a compelling call for readerly empathy.

One scene toward the middle of the essay stands out for its theatrical staging and dramatic irony. The narrator recalls a dinner (as a young adult) with her former employer, "Mr. K.," and several other businessmen. The setting is a "Middle West town," and the other

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[11] A recent study found that first-person narration by an "in-group" member led to the most extensive "experience-taking" (which is tantamount to readerly empathy) by readers. However, the study surprisingly found that third-person narration led to higher levels of experience-taking when the character in question belonged to an "outgroup," which was operationalized in the study as a student from another university. See Geoff F. Kaufman and Lisa K. Libby, "Changing Beliefs and Behavior Through Experience-Taking," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 103.1 (2012): 1-19.

dinner guests are unaware of the ethnicity of "Miss Far."[12] The dinner conversation turns to

the "cars full of Chinamen" that had passed through town on the transcontinental railway that

morning (224). Mr. K. comments, "I cannot reconcile myself to the thought that the Chinese

are humans like ourselves. They may have immortal souls, but their faces seem to be so

utterly devoid of expression that I cannot help but doubt" (224). To this, the town clerk

replies, "Their bodies are enough for me. A Chinaman is, in my eyes, more repulsive than a

nigger" (224). These statements reveal the historical context of anti-Chinese sentiment; as

Jane Hwang Degenhardt has observed, "Chinese exclusion played a crucial role in

constructing the category of national citizenship" during an era in which "efforts to empower

women and blacks" necessitated a renegotiation of America's "boundaries of inclusion"

(655). White-Parks adds that this incident occurs within "the imperialist-racist climate of

North America at the turn-of-the-century…. It is the decade of the annexation of Hawaii,

when America hovers on the verge of a war with the Philippines, a period during which…

racism and expansionism joined hands and climaxed in the Spanish-American War" (18-19).

The anti-Chinese sentiment expressed in Eaton's essay is therefore a complicated by-product

of America's domestic anxieties about race and miscegenation in the wake of the

Reconstruction era, combined with quickly expanding notions of America's international

reach that anticipate its twentieth-century role as a global superpower.

  In reading the comments of Mr. K. and the clerk, one cannot help but imagine Eaton's

situation. There is no satisfactory course of action without a distasteful result. Should she

smile and remain silent, she would tacitly condone the bigoted speech—but should she

confront the offenders, she would make the situation even more unpleasant for herself, and

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[12] It is helpful to recall that during the actual incident upon which this vignette is based, Eaton would have been referred to by her English name, rather than the exotic-sounding "Miss Far."

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she might even lose her job. The narrator confirms this dilemma: "A miserable cowardly feeling keeps me silent…. The prospect before me is not an enviable one" (224). Yet when asked why she is "so quiet," she summons the courage to speak out:

> With a great effort I raise my eyes from my plate. "Mr. K.," I say, addressing my employer, "the Chinese people may have no souls, no expression on their faces, be altogether beyond the pale of civilization, but whatever they are, I want you to understand that I am—I am a Chinese." (225)

Surprised by this revelation, Mr. K. is silent for a moment before he stands up and says, "I should not have spoken as I did. I know nothing whatever about the Chinese. It was pure prejudice. Forgive me!" (225). The narrator comments, "I admire Mr. K.'s moral courage in apologizing to me; he is a conscientious Christian man, but I do not remain much longer in the little town" (225).

The scene described above includes several characteristic formal qualities which incline readers to identify and empathize with the narrator/character. As the essay progresses and the story time approaches the "present" of the narrating instance, the distinction between the adult narrator and the adult character becomes all the more trivial, and it is difficult to determine whether the narrative is focalized through the narrator or the character. In addition, the use of direct dialogue causes readers to experience the other characters' offensive comments first-hand, "hearing" them for ourselves, along with Miss Far's eventual reply. The use of dramatic irony serves to protract the scene and puts us more squarely in Miss Far's position: like both the narrator and the character, we know that she is half-Chinese, and so we wonder along with her both what she *should* do and what she *will* do. We therefore experience the tension between what seems right and what will actually happen, which is finally resolved with Miss Far's announcement. The suspense builds as the narrator provides us a glimpse into Miss Far's thought process, from the "miserable, cowardly feeling" that she experiences to her comment, "I have no longer an ambition to die at the stake for the sake of demonstrating the

greatness and nobleness of the Chinese people" (224). This admission, along with the slight

stutter that the text records ("I am—I am a Chinese"), makes it clear that even though she

ultimately decides to speak up, she does so reluctantly, almost against her will. This sense of

dissonance is likely to elicit empathy, because most readers can identify with a character who

is uncertain of how s/he should act in a difficult situation.[13] We are also aware of the social

"cost" of her admission, which interrupts the dinner with an awkward silence and forces an

apology from Mr. K. The narrator's concluding statement, "I do not remain much longer in

the little town," confirms that Miss Far's revelation makes it difficult for her to continue

living and working there. And once again, Eaton's biracial identity becomes the engine that

compels her from one location to the next, scene by scene, much like the transcontinental train

that carried the Chinese railroad workers toward their next stop. Yet, despite the unhappy

outcome of her revelation, the narrator's tone does not seem bitter or angry. She sounds

weary, and she laments that her "prospect" is "not… enviable" (224). But she does not vilify

Mr. K. for his comments; rather, she generously comments that she admires his "moral

courage in apologizing" (225). This generosity is likely to encourage similarly generous

treatment from Eaton's readers. In this passage, Miss Far's antagonists unknowingly insult

part of her racial identity, and she takes a principled stand against their bigotry, despite the

high cost that she realizes she will pay for doing so. Once again, the outcome of the vignette is

the same: Eaton's biracial identity renders her a cultural outsider and relegates her to yet

another (dis)location. Yet the dramatic irony and theatrical staging of the scene, together with

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[13] William Bartley argues that "wavering heroes and heroines interest us because their openness and indecisiveness is a mark of intelligence. This quality of intelligence grants them access to conflicting but equally attractive alternatives, which a mature, hardened consistency would close off to them" (14). The trope of the "wavering hero" that he references is traditionally identified as the protagonist in a historical romance, but as Bartley's application of the concept to the Spike Lee film *Do the Right Thing* reveals, the trope can also be found in other literary genres.

a variety of formal qualities that incline us to imagine ourselves in her position, are likely to

leave readers admiring her moral courage, rather than Mr. K.'s.

"Miss Far" is not the only character in Eaton's essay whose plight elicits readerly

empathy. She also describes a number of other "Chinese Eurasians" (mostly women) who

attempt to navigate their biracial identity in various ways. Many pass as Spanish, Mexican, or

Japanese, because at the time American prejudices against these groups were less inflamed

than the incendiary anti-Chinese sentiment. It is worth noting that many of the events

described in Eaton's essay were contemporaneous with or subsequent to the Chinese

Exclusion Act of 1882, which drastically reduced the number of Chinese immigrants allowed

by federal law and subjected Chinese residents who left the United States to potential denial

of reentry ("Chinese"). Initially written to remain in effect for only ten years, the statute was

extended by the Geary Act of 1892, made "permanent" in 1902,

and remained the law of the land until it was eventually repealed in

1943. As Howard Zinn writes, Chinese immigrants constituted

almost one-tenth of California's population by 1880, and they

"became the objects of continuous violence" (265). During the

proceedings concerning what would become the Chinese Exclusion

Act (H.R. 5804), Senator John Tyler Morgan (D–AL) warned the

other members of the U.S. Senate:

> You may think you can easily manage this question [of
> Chinese immigrants], but when you have drawn from the
> 450,000,000 of Chinese the lower and worst class of their
> people, and after you have, in the name of liberty, and
> manhood, and God, and religion flooded this country with
> that horde of pagan adventurers, you may flatter yourselves
> that you can manage it…. [Even if] every man in each
> branch of Congress and the President [should] concur that it
> was an absolute moral and social necessity to expel the
> Negro from this land, the power does not exist to do it; and

after you have got the Chinese here… the power will be wanted to expel them. You will then have to submit to an evil that you cannot overcome, neither can you avoid it. Your hands will have been tied by a fatal indiscretion, and woe betide the people when that day comes. (qtd in Gold 204)

According to the Alabama Senator's logic, the Chinese were as undesirable as blacks, and once they arrived *en masse* there would be no getting rid of them. This argument and others like it carried the day: the Senate approved the House bill, and President Chester Arthur signed it into law on May 6, 1882 (Gold 194).

Some of the women depicted in Eaton's narrative attempt to evade the prevalent anti-Chinese sentiment by inventing an artificial racial identity—essentially rewriting their own personal and family histories. "I meet a half Chinese, half white girl," writes Eaton. "Her face is plastered with a thick white coat of paint and her eyelids and eyebrows are blackened so that the shape of her eyes and the whole expression of her face is changed…. It is not difficult, in a land like California, for a half Chinese, half white girl to pass as one of Spanish or Mexican origin. This poor child does, tho she lives in nervous dread of being 'discovered'" (227). Did Eaton know from experience how simple it was to assume a different racial identity? The vignette with Mr. K. suggests that she was willing to allow others to believe that she was white, even if she did not explicitly claim that identity. The "girl" that Eaton describes above becomes engaged to a "young man" (presumably white), who does not know the young woman's race; when a "friend" compels her to reveal it, he exclaims, "Oh, what will my folks say?" (228). Yet the couple is married anyway, and they decide that it is not necessary to reveal her secret to his family: "Love is stronger than prejudice with him" (228). Through this anecdote, Eaton suggests that interracial empathy and love have the capacity to overwhelm the destructive force of racial tribalism, even though her shining example of racial tolerance is a white man who "allows" his future wife to pass as white (possibly for her entire life) among his own family members.

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Contemporary critics of Edith Maude Eaton's work have acknowledged that it is marked by some of the more unfortunate racial sensibilities of her time. Noting that Eaton did not speak any Chinese language and that she was brought up relatively ignorant of her mother's native culture, Ling and White-Parks warn that readers may note "a certain 'orientalism' in the author's tone" and may recognize that "she is as much outsider as insider to the Chinese North American community" (5). Joy Leighton describes Eaton's social position as a "double exile" from white and Asian communities alike (9). For example, when describing a battle (with her brother) against some neighborhood bullies in New York, Eaton writes that "the white blood in our veins fights valiantly for the Chinese half of us" (219). Readers may choose to interpret this statement as a metaphor for the inseparability of the "white blood" from the "Chinese half" of Eaton and her siblings, but her description suggests a more characteristic typecasting of Asian peoples and cultures as passive and objectified, in contrast with the active subjectivity of European peoples and cultures (the "white blood" that fights for the "Chinese half"). Readers may also hear in Eaton's statement distasteful echoes of the logic of Jim Crow and "blood quantum"—the notion that racialized "blood will tell" and will manifest itself in racially (stereo)typical behavior.

Eaton's text seems to presume readers of various racial and ethnic identities, but she was probably well aware that most people who would encounter the essay in its 1909 circulation would be white. At one point she notes that she feels less than fully welcome in the Chinese community: some "little Chinese women" question whether or not she would marry "a Chinaman," which the narrator follows with the intriguing statement, "I do not answer No" (223). This double negation conveys the ambiguity of Eaton's racial identity, her position "between camps" (to borrow Paul Gilroy's phrase), both racially and possibly regarding her sexual orientation. The statement is reminiscent of Melville's character Bartleby (himself a

figure of classed and possibly sexual alterity) and his repeated, memorable line: "I would prefer not to." Yet in Eaton's text, the "little Chinese women" respond by commenting that a Chinese man might not be "persuaded to care for [Eaton], full-blooded Chinese people having a prejudice against the half white" (223). Here the narrator inserts one of her strongest editorial claims: "Fundamentally, I muse, all people are the same. My mother's race is as prejudiced as my father's. Only when the whole world becomes as one family will human beings be able to see clearly and hear distinctly" (223-224).

In the concluding paragraphs of her essay, this strong narrative voice returns with another commentary that seems to link the previously disconnected vignettes, providing the "connective tissue" that originally seemed missing. Eaton writes:

> So I roam backward and forward across the continent. When I am East, my heart is West. When I am West, my heart is East. Before long I hope to be in China. As my life began in my father's country it may end in my mother's.
> After all I have no nationality and am not anxious to claim any. Individuality is more than nationality. "You are you and I am I," says Confucius. I give my right hand to the Occidentals and my left to the Orientals, hoping that between them they will not utterly destroy the insignificant "connecting link." And that's all. (230)

This conclusion is beautiful in its simplicity, its neutrality, and its magnanimity. Whether or not Eaton actually considered herself an "insignificant connecting link," her enduring work belies that characterization. It might seem obvious to state that "individuality is more than nationality," or race, or any other category of identification; yet to say so *as* Edith Maude Eaton in 1909, given the litany of her experiences in which race, ethnicity, and nationality repeatedly proved paramount (even seemingly causal, at times)—was visionary and prescient. As I sit writing this essay in 2013, Eaton's words still seem fresh and true. This was an early iteration of a progressive, cosmopolitan vision, a clarion call of empathy for Others, and in the "narrative present" of my own autobiographical act, it is still waiting to be realized.

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Othering the Self and Turning the Tables: *The Promised Land*

Born in Polotzk, Russia,[14] Mary ("Mashke") Antin traversed the European continent

and the Atlantic Ocean in 1894, arriving in Boston with her mother and five siblings at the age

of 13—her father had gone ahead three years previously (Chametzky 20, Salz xiii). Their life

in Russia had been characterized by fear, oppression, and seclusion: Jews in Polotzk lived

within a ghetto known as "the Pale," which was separated from surrounding society by both

physical and ideological walls. Antin describes the violent *pogroms* during which Russian

peasants "attacked [Jews] with knives and clubs and scythes and axes, killed them or tortured

them, and burned their houses…. People who saw such things never smiled any more, no

matter how long they lived" (10). Yet Antin also acknowledges that these walls existed partly

in the minds of the Jewish community, whose religious faith provided "the balm for all [their]

wounds": "this wall within the wall is the religious integrity of the Jews, a fortress erected by

the prisoners of the Pale, in defiance of their jailers; a stronghold built of the ruins of their

pillaged homes, cemented with the blood of their murdered children" (26). This double prison

provides the starting point for Antin's immigrant experience, and the foil against which she

measures her idea of America. Jolie Sheffer argues that "*The Promised Land* is stalked at

every turn by the effects of trauma—rupture, loss, and disorientation" (142). Antin's text is, as

Werner Sollors writes, "an autobiography of twoness, of divisions, and of ways to overcome

them. One half of the book is set in Russia and one half in America, and while Russia is

divided into oppressed Jews and Russians, America is separated into immigrants and citizens"

(xxix). The seduction of American citizenship, for Antin, was that it seemed attainable for

immigrants, unlike Russian citizenship for oppressed Jews. *The Promised Land* therefore

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[14] Also spelled Poltzk, Polotsk or Polatsk, the city is located in what is now northern Belarus, near the present-day Russian border.

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represents both an homage for the new country and a message to native-born Americans that immigrants could be just as patriotic—and just as American—as they were.

Like Edith Maude Eaton, Mary Antin immigrated to the United States in the late nineteenth century, became an outspoken advocate for immigrant rights, and recorded her life story through a number of autobiographical texts. Like Frederick Douglass's autobiographies, Antin's depict her life as a transformation from bondage to freedom, culminating in what she characterizes as the complete subjectivity of a patriotic American citizen: a fully-formed self, crafted according to her own terms. Many years later, having suffered what she later described as a "deep soul sickness" and reduced to poverty as a de facto divorcée, Antin would recant this early characterization, with its triumphalist grounding in national identity, as "patriotic hash" (Salz 88; qtd in Sollors xlv). Her change of heart also reflects the intervening horrors of World War II and the Holocaust, which she could not have imagined in 1912. But many subsequent critics of her work have unquestioningly adopted Antin's overstated condemnation of her own life-writing. Jules Chametzky describes the logic of the critiques: "the book's detailed and frequently loving view of Jewish life was often overlooked; one sociologist characterized it as part of 'a cult of gratitude,' and a few Jewish critics derided Antin for her intermarriage… even intimating that her sad end in loneliness and illness was due to these flaws" (18). These criticisms were not completely groundless: as its title suggests, Antin's autobiography describes America as a "promised land," a purported answer to God's Old Testament covenant with the Jewish people, who could allegedly claim American identity through a process of assimilation and secularization. "The story of Exodus was not history to me in the sense that the story of the American Revolution was," she writes (178). Antin's book suggests that immigrants could become fully American through the sloughing off of old ethnic and religious identities, by rejecting the old country and embracing the new through a

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combination of hard work, unceasing aspiration, and public (re)education. To contemporary readers, this narrative of what it means or requires to be(come) American will likely sound unnecessarily purgative, even dangerously like ethnic cleansing.

But rather than reading Antin's account as an unfortunate example of immigrant nativism or as a wrongheaded paean to assimilation, I argue that *The Promised Land* represents a remarkably successful attempt to elicit empathy for the Other. The book was a stunning success: it became an immediate bestseller, conferring celebrity status upon the author, and it provided enough income for Antin (then Mary Antin Grabau) to send her daughter Josephine to an exclusive boarding school (Salz 69-70). In 1914, Theodore Roosevelt wrote to Antin, thanking her for a copy of *The Promised Land* and stating that "it will occupy, as long as I live, one of the most honored places in my library" (Salz 152). This was the same Roosevelt who announced the following year that "there is no room in this country for hyphenated Americanism" ("Address"). Yet he went on to explain that "hyphenated Americans" did not simply refer to immigrants: "Some of the very best Americans I have ever known were naturalized
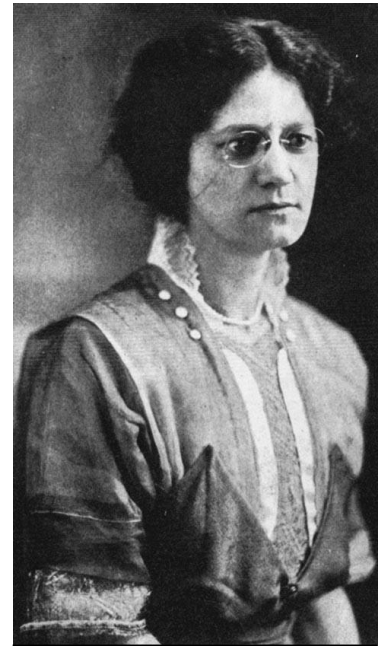
Image courtesy of the Jewish Women's Archive

Americans." (In this category he no doubt included Mary Antin.) The "hyphenated Americans" that Roosevelt invoked were those who emphasized their ethnicity or country of origin over their American citizenship—a concern which pertained most immediately to German Americans, with Europe in the early throes of the "Great War." In a different speech, also delivered in 1915, Roosevelt argued that "the worst thing that could befall this country would be to have the American nation become a tangle of jangling nationalities, a knot of German-Americans, Irish-Americans, English-Americans, and French-Americans. If divided

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in such fashion, we shall most certainly fall" ("Speech"). It is therefore no surprise that Roosevelt should honor the "100% Americanism" that Antin expresses in *The Promised Land*, just as he had lauded Israel Zangwill's play *The Melting Pot* in 1909. And Roosevelt was not alone. In the early twentieth century, Antin managed to convince a wide swath of the American reading public that she represented the "good immigrant," an endangered trope during a period dominated by nativism and xenophobia.

To argue that Antin was (largely) successful in her appeal for empathy is not to overlook the troublesome methodology of her appeal or the ideological price that it cost her. Indeed, Antin's text demonstrates Saidiya Hartman's warning that empathy is "precarious": "by virtue of this substitution [of the perceiving self for the Other] the object of identification threatens to disappear… in making the other's suffering one's own, this suffering is occluded by the other's obliteration" (19). In the case of an Othered self, we might revise Hartman's argument slightly to show how (readerly) empathy for the *narrating* Other may require the obliteration of the *narrated* Other. In *The Promised Land*, Antin attempts to write her way out of Otherness by proclaiming and performing her American identity, but only at the cost of fully Othering her old self and her life in the old country. That she was "successful" on both counts demonstrates the inhospitable environment in which American immigrants found themselves in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and the high price of "100% Americanism" for the newly arrived.

> I was born, I have lived, and I have been made over. Is it not time to write my life's story? I am just as much out of the way as if I were dead, for I am absolutely other than the person whose story I have to tell…. I could speak in the third person and not feel that I was masquerading. I can analyze my subject, I can reveal everything; for *she*, and not *I*, is my real heroine. My life I still have to live; her life ended when mine began. (1; author's italics)

So begins Antin's introduction to *The Promised Land*. She had indeed considered writing the book in the third person and assigning the "character" of her former self a pseudonym. In a

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1911 letter to Ellery Sedgwick, then editor of the *Atlantic Monthly*, Antin asked if he approved of using her own name on the title page but "a different name—Esther Altmann, as I have it—in the text… to take the edge off the boldness of my confessions [because] almost all of my heroes and heroines are living" (Salz 53).[15] In the end, they decided to use her real name, although the text occasionally switches to third-person narration. For example, in describing childhood doubts about Jewish theology, Antin introduces a thinly disguised alter-ego: "There used to be a little girl in Polotzk who recited the long Hebrew prayers, morning and evening…. This pious child could give as good an account of the Creation as any boy of her age… [but was unsatisfied with the rebbe's replies.] What you would know, find out for yourself: this became our student's motto" (98-99). Antin concludes this description by commenting, "I should say the child was a piteously puzzled little fraud," then states, "to return to the honest first person, I *was* something of a fraud" (101; author's italics). Here the narrator acknowledges the artifice of othering the self, at least if that other self is referenced in the (presumably *dis*honest) third person. Yet Antin prefaces her life writing by claiming that she is now "absolutely other than the person whose story I have to tell" (1). In Smith and Watson's terms, her *narrating I* considers the *narrated I* an Other. This relation is valid in the sense that the remembered self is always constructed through the particular lens of another time and place, along the kaleidoscope of life experiences that separate I-now from I-then. Yet Antin seems to overstate this separation, characterizing her autobiography as an obituary for the dead old self. It is not enough for her to acknowledge that she is now a *different* self; she insists that she has died and been reborn.

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[15] As Sollors notes, Antin's choice of a pseudonym is revealing. Esther is an Old Testament heroine who saves her people, the Jews of Persia, and Altmann, a German translation of the words "old man," suggests the "old man" or "old person" of one's former self. Altmann also resembles Antin's mother's maiden name, Weltman—another "former self" of sorts (Sollors xv).

Why did Antin feel the need to disown her former self so thoroughly? Did she perceive that a "good American" should have no troubling ties to a personal history beyond the nation's borders? Was it necessary to kill off her Russian child(hood) in order to enter into the seductive singularity of adult American selfhood? (We should note that Othering the self is not necessarily a sign of political marginality; the patrician Henry Adams, directly descended from two Presidents, chose to narrate his entire autobiography in the third person.) Antin described the sensibilities of Jews in Polotzk as a "dual conscience": relations with fellow Jews operated according to different moral principles than relations with Gentiles. "A Jew could hardly exist in business unless he developed a dual conscience, which allowed him to do to the Gentile what he would call a sin against a fellow Jew" (23). She describes this duality as a necessary reaction to anti-Semitism: "Perhaps it was wrong of us to think of our Gentile neighbors as a different species of beings from ourselves, but… it was easier to be friends with the beasts in the barn than with some of the Gentiles. The cow and the goat and the cat responded to kindness, and remembered which of the housemaids was generous and which was cross. The Gentiles made no distinctions. A Jew was a Jew, to be hated and spat upon and used spitefully" (21). Perhaps Antin's claim that her old self from the old country was "dead" and "absolutely other" represented her wishful thinking that such inhumanity to fellow humans was unthinkable in her new country, though during this period of frequent racial lynchings, she must have suspected that this was not really true. As an active reader surrounded by academics (her husband, Amadeus William Grabau, was then a professor of geology and paleontology at Columbia University), Antin was likely aware that W.E.B. Du Bois had described the "double consciousness" of African Americans in very similar terms, less than a decade before she published *The Promised Land*. Yet the "dual conscience" she outlines is more externally focused than Du Bois's double consciousness: while he describes

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the internal conflict of "two warring ideals in one dark body" (12), she relates a dual code that Russian Jews applied either to Gentiles or to fellow Jews. Antin's "dual conscience" does not seem to imply an internal duality—only a dual morality that applies to "us" or "them." Moreover, this dual conscience is aligned with the old world that she leaves behind when she "dies" and is "reborn" into the single-mindedness of American identity. If Antin was aware that some Americans did not share her vision of the nation as a welcoming family in which all could share full membership, she chose not to acknowledge this fact. Internal duality suggested the divided allegiances of "hyphenated Americans," and Antin apparently found it more advisable to consider the old self dead and buried.

It is also possible that Antin's othering of old-self (*Altmann*) served as a rhetorical strategy for eliciting readerly empathy with her "new" American self. For just like the adage, "the enemy of my enemy is my friend," empathetic identification might be said to operate according to the logic of Fritz Heider's balance theory: the Other of my Other is like me. (In this sense, the Othering of a former self in pursuit of empathy for the current self functions much like the Othering of a third party as a strategy for eliciting empathy for oneself, as discussed in the previous chapter.) If the American reader were to find the young Russian Jewish girl in the Pale of Polotzk entirely unfamiliar or "absolutely other," they would then *precisely share* the narrating I's stated relation to that Other. By rendering her former self as utterly foreign, Antin the autobiographer reflexively characterized her new self as entirely domestic: an American through and through. This strategy also informs her relations with America's founding fathers (and mothers): Antin describes the "utter reverence and worship" with which she regarded George Washington as a young student, and she recalls "gaz[ing] with adoration at the portraits of George and Martha Washington" (175). "This George Washington… was like a king in greatness, and he and I were Fellow Citizens," she writes

(176). This moment in the text marks Antin's transition from characterizing her old self as "dead" and "other" to describing her new self as fully American—and her readers are instructed to take note.

As a narrator, Antin is candid about the fleeting and imperfect nature of her memories. In her forays into family history, she acknowledges, "I have borrowed the recollections of my parents, to piece out my own fragmentary reminiscences" (64). But Antin insists on the emotional truth of her recollections, even if they are not factually accurate. For example, she describes her grandfather's house, where she was born, as "a small, one-story wooden building… [with one window,] and beyond the curtain a view of a narrow, walled garden, where deep-red dahlias grew" (66). At this point Antin confesses that she has since been informed that the flowers were not actually dahlias, but poppies, yet she refuses to revise her account. "As a conscientious historian I am bound to record every rumor, but I retain the right to cling to my own impression. Indeed, I must insist on my dahlias, if I am to preserve the garden at all…. My illusion is more real to me than reality" (66). This admission may actually elicit more confidence from readers in the narrator's account, for in conceding the imperfections of her memory, Antin simultaneously characterizes her account as fallible and insists upon its validity *qua* memory. If readers agree with her that the workings of memory are faulty and capricious, they are more likely to accept the remembered world that she offers, an illusion that insists upon its own reality. Likewise, Antin's confession of her imperfections as a chronicler of personal history may elicit readers' trust in the fundamental honesty of her own memories, despite their inaccuracies.

In characterizing the inchoateness of childhood memories, Antin also characterizes her young self as an everychild, a universal example of childhood. Speaking of the geography of Polotzk, she writes, "my inexperienced eyes failed to give me the picture of the whole…. I saw

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what a child always sees: the unrelated fragments of a vast, mysterious world" (69). Yet again

Antin insists upon the subjective reality of her recollections: "You may make a survey of

Polotzk… and show me where I was wrong; still I am the better guide…. It is real enough, as

by my beating heart you might know" (69). Here Antin embodies Olney's notion of the duplex

autobiographer, who acknowledges that "one can see with no other eyes than one's own," yet

can "see [her]self seeing with those eyes" and takes "a point of view on the point of view she

has taken" (43). *The Promised Land*'s autobiographical narrator is audacious in her insistence

that her story's truth is not lodged in facts but impressions. "And so over the vague canvas of

scenes half remembered, half imagined, I draw the brush of recollection" (69). Antin's account

is convincing in part because she does not feign perfect recall of people, places, and events

long past. And, to the extent that readers remember their own childhoods similarly—as vague

fragments, half-remembered and half-imagined—they will likely identify with Antin's

narrator.

At times Antin moves away from personal memories to offer broader depictions of the

immigrant experience. For example, in describing her father's initial business failures in the

United States, she writes that

> his history… is the history of thousands who come to America, like him, with pockets
> empty, hands untrained to the use of tools, minds cramped by centuries of repression in
> their native land. Dozens of these men pass under your eyes every day, my American
> friend, too absorbed in their honest affairs to notice the looks of suspicion which you
> cast at them, the repugnance with which you shrink from their touch. (144)

In likening her family's struggles and aspirations to those of "thousands" like them, Antin

offers their story as a representative example of the "American immigrant" writ large. In her

introduction, Antin explicitly claims as much: "It is because I understand my history, in its

larger outlines, to be typical of many, that I consider it worth recording…. It is illustrative of

scores of unwritten lives" (2). This universalizing of her own experience is not without

problems; as Sollors notes, "she may be speaking for thousands in one sense, but in another sense, her story does not even resemble that of her own sister" (xv). Yet Antin's endeavor to speak for other immigrants may lead readers to judge her more generously; her life writing attempts to give a voice to the voiceless, to defend the struggling newcomer against the "repugnance" and "suspicion" of native-born Americans—precisely those whom Antin's text attempts to befriend.

Werner Sollors has observed that *The Promised Land* clearly addresses "an audience perceived to be Gentile," unlike her previous autobiographical text, published in 1899 as *From Plotzk to Boston* (xx). "This strategy of sometimes addressing, but almost always implying, a reader from the outside would have to have certain effects on the writing of such a text: the in-group reader [i.e. a Jewish reader] would feel more excluded, and the role of the author as mediator would be strengthened. Yet in order to sustain this authority, the author… must keep a certain sense of language difference alive, which results in the inclusion of many non-English terms and of the glossary that legitimate the author as a translator of cultures" (xxi). Yet the converse is also true: if Antin's implied reader is a white, Christian, native-born American, this "out-group reader" is likely to feel more *included* and to forge a closer (imagined) relationship with the narrator. The book's commercial success among mainstream American readers, epitomized by Theodore Roosevelt's enthusiastic praise, suggests that this was indeed the case. Moreover, Antin's occasional addresses to this implied reader often stress the possibility of communal bonds that the reader may discover between himself and the immigrant Others that her text depicts: "'The Jew peddler!' you say, and dismiss him from… your thoughts," Antin writes. "[But] what if the cross-legged tailor is supporting a boy in college who is one day going to mend your state constitution for you? What if the ragpicker's daughters are hastening over the ocean to teach your children in the public

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schools?" (144). When the narrator directly addresses the reader, she does so either through the universalizing of her own experience—the everychild to all (former) children—or in this more particular form of address: the *you* serving as shorthand for those she elsewhere calls "you born Americans" (176).

In addressing this readerly "outgroup," both explicitly and implicitly, Antin engages in a practice that Suzanne Keen calls *strategic empathy*, in which authors "attempt to direct an emotional transaction through a fictional work aimed at a particular audience, not necessarily including every reader who happens upon the text" (*Empathy* 142). More specifically, Antin's appeal to mainstream American readers constitutes what Keen categorizes as *ambassadorial strategic empathy*, which "addresses chosen others with the aim of cultivating their empathy for the in-group, often to a specific end" (142). Keen's categories are helpful for considering the intended audience of Antin's autobiography as well as the authorial intent that shapes it, but they they neatly sidestep the text itself, in all of its complexity. I hope the foregoing discussion of *The Promised Land* makes clear how significantly the formal qualities and rhetorical strategies of Antin's autobiography influence readers' responses to it, as well as the historical context of American nativism and world war which informs those responses.

Perhaps Antin's most effective strategy for eliciting readerly empathy is her insistent enthusiasm about the opportunities that life in the United States affords her. This enthusiasm, as many critics have noted, is belied by many of the actual facts she relates, including the photographs of Boston's slums that accompany her optimistic account. Jolie Sheffer argues that Antin "frequently abandons her own biography, with its incommensurable losses and frequent setbacks, in favor of another national convention—the Horatio Alger progress narrative" (157). In particular, Sheffer points out that the photographs that Antin includes in her text often seem to contradict her narrative of inclusion and self-realization through

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American citizenship. For example, the image below depicts the view from the South Boston Bridge, "a favorite resort of mine," from which Antin views "the dim tangle of railroad tracks below" (233). From this vantage point, she can muse, "I love my beautiful city spreading all about me. I love the world. I love my place in the world" (236). One can almost hear the author repeating these statements to herself, in place of the grim realities of her life. Sheffer interprets this scene as "the specter of trauma emerg[ing] yet again, for the railroad hub is a 'dim tangle'—nonlinear, hopelessly knotted, and endlessly circling back on itself" (158). Yet if this scene appeared as dismal to Antin as it does to Sheffer, the autobiographer refused to acknowledge the darkness.
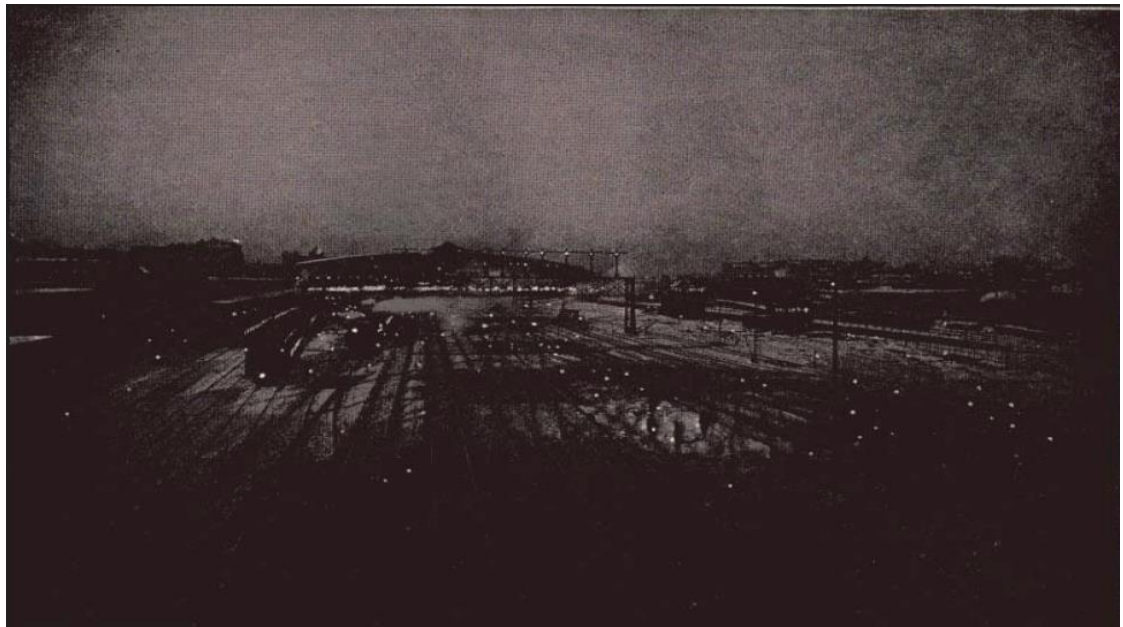
"I liked to stand and look down on the dim tangle of railroad tracks below." (235)

For better or for worse, Antin refuses to find fault with America. When her father makes a spectacle of enrolling his children in the public school in Chelsea, unintelligible despite his "best English," Antin generously surmises, "I think Miss Nixon guessed what my father's best English could not convey. I think she divined that by the simple act of delivering our school certificates to her he took possession of America." (162). When she is harassed in

the schoolyard for professing that "there is no God," she insists upon her right to free speech: "'This is a free country,' I remind them" (190-191). In these and many other scenes like them, readers may note that Antin insistently makes the best of difficult circumstances; she expresses an unfounded (and, as we now know in historical hindsight, erroneous) optimism about the panacea of immigrants' chances in America. But this optimism is tinged with her evident realization that life could also be grim, dangerous, and thankless. Perhaps what Roosevelt and many other American readers found most compelling in Antin's text was her refusal to concede that the universe would not grant her a happy ending, God or no God. Although it ultimately did not, her defiant and ebullient words remain, like a last laugh.

Conclusion(s): The Lives of Others

There are many reasons why particular readers may identify more or less with specific autobiographical narrators, and the self-protagonists whose exploits and opinions they recount. Some of these reasons are based on shared experiences or subject positions, though throughout this dissertation I argue that formal qualities of literary narratives and the psychological states that they convey are ultimately more influential than mere identity categories. For example, both Eaton and Antin are female autobiographers, and therefore female readers (of their era or our own) may initially identify more with their life writing than with that of a male autobiographer. Similarly, readers of a particular race or ethnicity may find themselves inclined to imaginatively identify with a particular narrator due to his or her common race or ethnicity. But in most cases, these categorical forms of identification forge less powerful bonds between reader, writer, narrator, and protagonist than those based on what James Phelan calls "narrative judgments"— our judgments as readers about the propriety of the protagonists' actions and attitudes and/or of the narrator's manner of relating

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them.[16] For example, readers may find that they identify more with Eaton than Antin, because Eaton's subject position frequently forces her to act defensively, based on her mixed-race identity, her gender, and her marital status, as well as the strong principles that compel her to repeatedly speak out in defense of the most marginalized members of American society. Or they may identify more with Antin's hard-nosed optimism and her adamant patriotism. Readers may identify with Douglass because of his diplomatic handling of difficult situations, or because of the dignity with which he presents the final portrait of his life, or simply because he is a male writer. Yet even if a male reader should identify most closely with Douglass due to Douglass's "masculinity," we must remember that it is not Douglass's actual sex to which the reader is responding, but rather the textual representation and performance of his gendered identity.

In assessing a particular narrative's likelihood of eliciting readerly empathy, it is necessary to account for the text's formal qualities as well as the reader's personal attributes. For example, I suspect that political conservatives and those who express strong patriotic attitudes would likely identify with Antin's protagonist in *The Promised Land* (or an excerpt from it), due to her stated self-reliance and her optimistic assessments about the opportunities that America affords all its citizens. However, readers with strong religious beliefs may find Antin's stated atheism troubling, and those with anti-Semitic or misogynistic attitudes may not fully engage with her text. Likewise, I suspect that older readers and those with progressive racial attitudes would respond more positively to Douglass's text than other readers—controlling for all other variables—but since these demographics often work against

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[16] Phelan explains that "when we become more advanced readers and encounter more sophisticated narratives, we meet characters for whom the simple labels 'good guys' and 'bad guys' are no longer adequate, but we continue to make ethical judgments of them and, indeed, of the authors and narrators who tell us about them…. [T]hese judgments are… crucial for the kinds of engagements we make with these sophisticated narratives" (2).

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each other (with older individuals often holding *less* progressive racial attitudes than younger ones), favorable responses might reach a peak somewhere around the Baby Boomer generation before beginning to decline. I also suspect that female gender and support for feminist attitudes would be the best predictors of identification with Eaton (or Miss Far), because her essay repeatedly focuses on childhood experiences and situations in which she has to resist male suitors or finds herself in awkward situations created by male characters. These situations may seem more relatable to women than men, although male readers may identify with Eaton's circumstances based on other experiences or personal factors.

Ultimately, I believe that an autobiographer's writing style and his or her self-presentation will have the greatest effects on readerly empathy. For example, *The Education of Henry Adams* (1907) effectively conveys the author's remarkable intelligence, but I find its effrontery and mock-self-derogation off-putting. Continuing his recurring conceit that despite all of his formal education, he still knows nothing of value, Adams writes of his decision to pursue a career in journalism (in what Antin might call the "dishonest third person"): "The press was an inferior pulpit; an anonymous schoolmaster; a cheap boarding-school; but it was still the nearest approach to a career for the literary survivor of a wrecked education" (211). Although this sentence purports to characterize Adams's younger self as a failure, it nevertheless comes off as a condescending sneer at the "cheap boarding-school" in which the author was forced to sully his hands. By contrast, in his "Old Times on the Mississippi," Mark Twain describes his chagrin at realizing how much he still has to learn as a "cub" riverboat captain:

> When I returned to the pilot-house St. Louis was gone and I was lost. Here was a piece of river which was all down in my book, but I could make neither head nor tail of it: you understand, it was turned around. I had seen it, when coming up-stream, but I had never faced about to see how it looked when it was behind me. My heart broke again, for it was plain that I had got to learn this troublesome river *both ways*. (343)

Like Adams's account, Twain's describes a failure of his youthful education in an "inferior pulpit"—riverboat captains were not members of America's cultural elite—yet the tone of Twain's narration is completely different. Whereas Adams's description includes words such as "inferior," "anonymous," and "cheap," Twain's does not seem to judge the social set with whom he casts his lot or the prestige of his new career—and when he does elsewhere, the career of the riverboat captain seems rather glorious, not tawdry, through the remembered eyes of his youthful self. Twain evokes light humor at his youthful dismay when realizing that a river looks entirely different traveling downstream. While Henry Adams's autobiography often bludgeons the reader with his intellect, the importance of his family, and his false modesty, Twain's entertains us through the narrator's bemused recollections of his juvenile worldview. Twain's narrator is no rube: we laugh *with* him at the younger self, but also at the additional cast of characters that fill out his text, such as the night watchman whose story was "so reeking with bloodshed and so crammed with hair-breadth escapes and the most engaging and unconscious personal villainies, that I sat speechless, enjoying, shuddering, wondering, worshipping" (336). In short, because Twain's "narrating I" is able to enjoy a laugh at his naïve "narrated I," we as readers are inclined to empathize with the narrator (if not also the boy). Laughing at the young Twain's naiveté doesn't seem wrong, considering that he has since grown into such an engaging (and self-critical) author and narrator.

These three Progressive Era autobiographies demonstrate the imaginative work of writers who "assemble, if only temporarily, a 'life' to which they assign coherence and meaning and through which they position themselves in historically specific identities" (Smith 17). Because each autobiographer assembled a literary "life" during a period marked by racial animosity, xenophobia, and nativism, these texts reveal various ways in which they "Othered the self," either as a conscious strategy for eliciting readerly empathy or as an unconscious

reflection of the period's racial and ethnic sensibilities. Yet writing one's life always requires the author to acknowledge the existence of a past self who is undeniably other than the "narrating *I*" who remembers and speaks. Perhaps because readers understand that this protagonist exists as a proxy and a signifier for the autobiographical narrator—and the converse is also true—the relationship between the two becomes crucial in the production and elicitation of readerly empathy. It is not necessary for the narrator to claim, as Antin's does, that her past self is "absolutely other" or that "her life ended when mine began" (1), but some distance between the two seems to facilitate the reader's engagement with the text. Autobiographies that are more transparent about their own fallibility—the authors' "duplex" acknowledgments that they "see [themselves] seeing with those eyes" (Olney 43)—may encourage greater readerly empathy by assuaging readers' natural skepticism regarding the processes of memory, imagination, and self-representation. Finally, the generosity with which the autobiographical narrator treats the text's own "Others"—whether they be Gentiles, naval officers, or racist Midwestern whites—may prove influential in eliciting readerly empathy. Ultimately, our narrative judgments about autobiographical narrators and protagonists derive from our own sensibilities and past experiences, and we are most likely to empathize with the texts of life writers whose values and self-representations (but not necessarily whose experiences) most closely resemble our own.

Chapter Five

EMPATHY, PERSPECTIVE, AND (MIS)JUDGMENTS IN MODERNIST FICTION

This final chapter moves ahead in time to analyze three novels—from the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s, respectively—which fall under the broad category of modernist fiction. These three works rely heavily upon the strong yet stylized personal voices of their narrators to convey their ideological messages to the reader, and all three texts make those messages unmistakably clear. Yet unlike many earlier works that I have discussed in the preceding pages, these narratives refuse to preach their messages. Rather, they employ powerful plots full of gripping, sparkling, and action-packed sequences to set up narrative situations in which readers are strongly (but subtly) encouraged to side with their protagonists. As I will discuss, they do so through narration that is at times ambivalent (or seemingly so), poetic, ethnographic, and vernacular. As modernist novels par excellence, these three literary works present characters who emerge as fully-formed and unforgettable—even "great"—individuals with whom we as readers are invited to identify.

"Modernism," a capacious term that encompasses a wide variety of aesthetic forms shaped by various political and philosophical developments over a long and debatable period of time, often serves to mystify critical conversations more than it clarifies them. Scholars of modernism often begin by troubling the word "modern," which literally means "new" but is often invoked by twenty-first century critics to signify an outmoded view of what's new or supposedly once was. Modernism is tied to modernity, but it is difficult to say precisely where either ends or begins. Scholars of the Renaissance sometimes refer to that period as "early

modern," while scholars of contemporary literature are more likely to refer to the present day as "postmodern" or even "post-postmodern." Ambiguous terms such as "posthuman," "postracial," and "post-American" have also been suggested by various theorists; each term seems more confident in what it purportedly comes after than what it actually means. In these already murky waters, any simple or dichotomous definition of what constitutes modernism and/or modernity is bound to be quickly contradicted, if not completely debunked. Yet for my purposes in this chapter, it will be helpful to propose a working definition of American literary modernism. The four paragraphs that follow are my attempt to offer one qualified, contextual definition.

American literary modernism refers to a broad movement that should be considered in terms of historical parameters, prevailing themes, and formal qualities. As an early- to mid-twentieth-century phenomenon, this movement was deeply influenced by the two world wars as well as the period between the wars, including the euphoric spectacle of the Jazz Age, the Harlem Renaissance in black arts, Prohibition and the rise of gangster culture, and the long, sustained suffering of the Great Depression, with its attendant political causes and movements. This was a period of rapid and sweeping social change, marked by a demographic shift from rural to urban living, including the Great Migration of African Americans from southern farms and plantations to cities such as Memphis, Chicago, and New York. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) was founded in 1909, under the leadership of W.E.B. Du Bois, Ida B. Wells, and others. Women increasingly entered the workplace, and with the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920, they finally received the right to vote. Franklin Delano Roosevelt's New Deal policies put millions of Americans to work on projects of rural, agricultural, and infrastructural

development, drastically increasing the role of the federal government in ensuring public welfare.

As these historical developments suggest, the first half of the twentieth century was a period of great intellectual ferment. Sigmund Freud's notions of repression, child sexuality, wish-fulfillment, and the unconscious would deeply influence the leading writers of American literary modernism, as would the revolutionary ideas of Karl Marx and his followers. The works of Friedrich Nietzsche and Charles Darwin continued to send out intellectual tremors, threatening the bourgeois values that undergirded the modern nation state as well as religious explanations of the universe and its origins. Pioneers in the visual arts such as Pablo Picasso, Willem de Kooning, Arshile Gorky, Mark Rothko, and Jackson Pollack experimented with the fragmentation and distortion of visual images, and Marcel Duchamp's infamous (1917) *Fountain* challenged the limits of what could (or should) be construed as art. In literary circles, the works of James Joyce were read with admiration, and the 1922 publication of *Ulysses*—initially banned from distribution in the U.S. under obscenity laws—was considered a breakthrough in literary form. In the same year, T.S. Eliot published *The Waste Land*, which would become an exemplar of high modernist form; back in New York, Claude McKay's *Harlem Shadows* signified that the Harlem Renaissance was fully underway. These three publications in the year 1922 mark what many now consider to be the apex of literary modernism.

"On or about December, 1910, human character changed," Virginia Woolf famously wrote, recalling the date of the first post-impressionist art exhibit (qtd in Lewis 64). Yet the world in December 1910 had no way of anticipating the horrific events soon to come, or the vast disillusionment that they would precipitate. A decade later, in the wake of the "Great War," the very ideas of human civilization and progress would seem deeply questionable.

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Moreover, the notion of the unified human subject increasingly came to be seen as a fiction. Just as the first World War demonstrated international boundaries to be arbitrary and changeable, the boundary between the thinking, "rational" self and the repressed, unconscious self came to be seen as tenuous and permeable. As Mary Loeffelholz explains, "at the heart of the high modernist aesthetic lay the conviction that the previously sustaining structures of human life, whether social, political, religious, or artistic, had been destroyed or shown up as falsehoods or, at best, arbitrary and fragile human constructions" (712). Daniel Singal describes the shift from Victorian to modernist sensibilities as a move from "outdated morality and… radical innocence" to the premise that "man was the human animal, that the universe was inherently irrational, that morality was embedded in history and not in immutable natural laws, and that personality was primarily determined by one's culture" (111, 261).

American literary modernists, like their European counterparts, were concerned with the modern subject's alienation from both nature and society; many lived as expatriates in Europe, or as recent émigrés from the rural South. In attempting to shake readers awake, these writers often represented themselves as unrepentant truth-tellers who revealed the ugly nature of the human condition, rather than acceding to the polite conventions of bourgeois society. Ezra Pound charged would-be poets to "Go in fear of abstractions" (32). Willa Cather wrote in 1922 that "the novel, for a long while, has been over-furnished" with mundane details and polite interactions that did not merit literary immortality. "How wonderful it would be if we could throw all the furniture out of the window," she mused (1508-1509). Similarly, Langston Hughes complained of the twin pillars of convention that black writers faced from readers of both races. "'O, be respectable, write about nice people, show how good we are,' say the Negroes. 'Be stereotyped, don't go too far, don't shatter our illusions about you, don't amuse

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us too seriously. We will pay you,' say the whites." In response to both sets of critics, Hughes

channeled the spirit of jazz: "the eternal tom-tom beating in the Negro soul—the tom-tom of

revolt against weariness in a white world, a world of subway trains, and work, work, work;

the tom-tom of joy and laughter, and pain swallowed in a smile" ("Negro" 1512). These and

other "modernist manifestos," writes Loeffelholz, "tried to grab their audiences by the lapels,

to separate not only the new from the old but also a creative *us* from a 'vulgar' or hidebound

them" ("Modernist" 1499). Lionel Trilling deemed literary modernism an "adversary culture,"

a movement *against* the forces of modernity and the conventions of the modern era as much

as one that coincided with them.

The three novels I will address in this chapter are emblematic of the predominant

trends and themes of modernist American fiction writ large. Each text emphasizes the

individuality of its characters, sometimes to the point of eccentricity or even ridicule. Each

text introduces a protagonist who clearly belongs to his or her social community in various

ways but finds him/herself pitted against the values that it promotes. Each text speaks

meaningfully to American history, with its great aspirations and often disappointing results.

Yet each text also suggests the possibility of happier things to come: greater freedom, greater

possibility, dreams deferred but not (as Hughes imagined) "explode[d]" or dried up "like a

raisin in the sun" ("Harlem" 1308-1309). These three novels introduce new and complicated

ways of relating interpersonal behavior, particularly in scenes depicting conflicts and

misperceptions. Literature has always recorded and reflected the vagaries of human behavior,

but it does not seem outlandish to argue that modernist fiction is more concerned with human

psychology than previous genres and movements—and more specifically, concerned with

theory of mind cognitive processes: who knows (or thinks they know) what about whom, and

when they (think they) know it. Much of the drama in these three texts arises from this central

concern. And because these novels focus on theory of mind cognition, they both invite and elicit readers' empathy with a variety of characters, even as they discourage empathy with certain antagonists. Adam Smith once claimed that "fellow-feeling… does not arise so much from the view of the passion, as from that of the situation which excites it" (16). These three novels painstakingly present the situations which excite those passions, often as perceived through the perspectives of various characters in addition to the narrator.

F. Scott Fitzgerald's 1925 *The Great Gatsby*, Zora Neale Hurston's 1937 *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, and William Faulkner's 1942 *Go Down, Moses* introduce us to a series of characters who are caught up in the historical and cultural circumstances of their existence, yet are simultaneously alienated by them. For Fitzgerald's narrator, the rise of the modern era leads to an inevitable wistfulness for times past, a nostalgic desire to return to a simpler age when perhaps Gatsby's aspirations might have been realized. Hurston's novel is both a celebration of Janie's growing independence—and that of the all-black community in which she gains her most expansive sense of self—and a narrative of disillusionment, prompted by the disconnect between the person Janie wants to be and the roles in which other characters repeatedly seek to place her. Like Nick Carraway's, her sensibilities are always "within and without"; she belongs to the community of Eatonville yet remains removed from it. Faulkner's various narrators grapple awkwardly with change in a fictive southern community that has not recovered from its violent and painful past. They attempt to make sense of racial differences (and changing race relations) while they remain burdened with a difficult history of oppression and exploitation. Unlike many of the texts analyzed in previous chapters, these three works did not originally take shape as ideological or political instruments; they did not serve as obvious arguments for or against a particular political goal, such as the abolition of slavery or legal protections for embattled minority groups. However, I argue that these novels

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are more likely to move us as readers than many texts whose motives and purposes seem more obvious, because their careful attention to the psychological dynamics between characters is more likely to transport us as readers to their fictive worlds, and in turn, more likely to change us in the process. If the narrators and protagonists of these three texts convey a sense of fragmentation, of fractured and (re)constructed psyches and stories, they do so in a way that may well remind readers of their own sense of self. As Janie notes, concluding her story: "you got tuh *go* there tuh *know* there" (192).

Judgment, Empathy, and Fantasy in *The Great Gatsby*

Nick Carraway, the enigmatic narrator of *The Great Gatsby*, appeals to readers through a paradoxical combination of aloofness and self-deprecation, and his depictions of other characters are often equally contradictory. Though at times he characterizes himself as morally or culturally superior to other characters, Carraway is also an outsider of sorts—as a "West Egg" resident cavorting with members of the more established "East Egg"; as a Midwesterner among East Coast elites; and as a purportedly middle-class citizen among the wealthy and the powerful. Although he attended Yale with Tom Buchanan and is a distant cousin of Tom's wife Daisy, Nick repeatedly juxtaposes the Buchanans' opulent home and lifestyle with his own humble lodgings, a "weather-beaten cardboard bungalow" that he rents for "eighty a month" (3). Likewise, through a series of dramatic scenes, Nick emphasizes his unease at the way the Buchanans relate to others, and Tom emerges as a particularly unsympathetic character. Nick's self-characterization as a liminal figure, simultaneously inside and outside the scenes that he narrates, enables his subsequent narrative to appeal to many types of readers, whether or not they approve of the lavish lifestyles and the morally complex situations that he describes.

Nick's initial self-characterizations are favorable and solicitous, but upon closer scrutiny, they seem inconsistent or even misleading. He begins the narrative by recalling his father's advice to avoid criticizing others because they may not have had "the advantages that you've had" (1). As a result, Nick claims, "I'm inclined to reserve all judgments, a habit that has opened up many curious natures to me and also made me the victim of not a few veteran bores" (1). At first glance, readers may identify with this statement: those who are tolerant and considerate of others' opinions are more likely to suffer in the company of those who enjoy hearing themselves talk. Yet Nick's assertion that he is "inclined to reserve all judgments" is immediately followed by a strong judgment about conversationalists whom he calls "veteran bores"; right away, Nick's self-characterization seems more generous than his characterizations of others. Shortly afterward, he states that only Gatsby, "who represented everything for which I have an unaffected scorn," was "exempt" from his disinterest in fellow humans, for "there was something gorgeous about him, some heightened sensitivity to the promises of life" (2). Not only are these judgments unreserved, they are also paradoxical: the protagonist of Nick's narrative is somehow both deeply objectionable and aesthetically pleasing, both "gorgeous" and worthy of scorn. Scott Donaldson observes that

> One part of Nick wants to believe in Gatsby, just as another part holds him up for ridicule…. He can simultaneously praise Gatsby… and still disapprove of the "gorgeous pink rag of a suit" he's wearing, scorn his "old sport" affectation, disapprove of his ostentatious Hotel de Ville and extravagant parties, scorn his shady business "gonnegtions"—above all, disapprove of Gatsby's social incompetence. (135)

As we will see, Nick's contradictory introduction appropriately sets the tone for the novel as a whole.

Early in the novel, Nick relates his social engagements with Daisy and Tom, as well as Daisy's friend Jordan Baker, a professional golfer, and Tom's mistress, Myrtle Wilson, who is married to an automobile mechanic. Nick's descriptions of these encounters are full of

judgments—some humorous, some sympathetic, and some scathing. He refers to the Buchanans' recent travels abroad as "drift[ing] here and there unrestfully wherever people played polo and were rich together" (6). Tom is introduced as "a sturdy straw-haired man of thirty with a rather hard mouth and a supercilious manner"; Daisy's voice sounds "full of money"; Jordan first appears sitting "motionless, and with her chin raised a little, as if she were balancing something on it which was quite likely to fall"; later Nick refers to Jordan as "the balancing girl" (7–9; 120). As he comes to know her better, Nick warms up to Jordan; it is not love that he feels, but "a sort of tender curiosity" (57). Nevertheless, he repeatedly emphasizes her difference from himself. Jordan moves with an athletic, upper-class "jauntiness," Nick observes, "as if she had first learned to walk upon golf courses" (50). Moreover, he finds her to be "incurably dishonest," whereas Nick claims, "I am one of the few honest people that I have ever known" (58-59). These characterizations situate Nick as an outsider to the Buchanans' social set and position him as a representative of aspirational middle-class values who is at once morally superior to, socially critical of, and ultimately disaffected by these wealthy, privileged elites. Nick's intriguing but ultimately dismissive descriptions of these characters are calculated to elicit readers' empathy for himself and for his narrative perspective. His presentation of people and events therefore requires its own sort of balancing act. As Dan Coleman argues, Nick's "commitment to making his hero turn out all right cannot be separated from his uncertainty about whether or not Gatsby really did…. Nick's control of the narrative is always uncertain and his ability to bring Gatsby to a happy ending is always in doubt" (208-209). Nick does not merely narrate events; he takes part in them, while constantly passing judgment on other characters, and readers are encouraged to accept his judgments as their own.

During a weekend junket to New York with Tom, Nick meets Tom's mistress and becomes embroiled in a lengthy party at the apartment that the couple rents in the city. As the evening's events unfold, Nick characterizes himself as an unwilling participant: "I wanted to get out and walk eastward toward the Park through the soft twilight, but each time I tried to go I became entangled in some wild, strident argument which pulled me back, as if with ropes, into my chair" (35). This apparent manipulation is a recurring theme in the novel: Nick often describes himself as being coerced into action (or inaction) against his will. Earlier that day, he had characterized Tom's invitation to meet Myrtle as "border[ing] on violence" and explained that "I had no desire to meet her—but I did" (24). Nick's repeated self-depiction as an unwilling participant seems designed to abjure himself of complicity in the novel's events. While consorting with Tom and his mistress might be construed by readers as a betrayal of Daisy's trust or as a sign of moral complacency, Nick repeatedly suggests that he has no choice in the matter. His decisions to go along with the couple (initially) and to stay (until the end of the party) are described as forms of self-preservation. While there are no actual ropes binding him to his seat, Nick insists that the conversation restrains him, "as if with ropes." In these and other situations in the novel, Nick describes himself as a partial outsider who should not be held accountable for the excesses and behavior of his colleagues—including, in this particular party, Tom's sudden violence, when he breaks Myrtle's nose with a "short deft movement" (37). Just before this assault, Nick muses that

> high over the city our line of yellow windows must have contributed their share of
> human secrecy to the casual watcher in the darkening streets, and I was him too,
> looking up and wondering. I was *within and without*, simultaneously enchanted and
> repelled by the inexhaustible variety of life. (35; emphasis added)

This noncommittal positioning—both "within and without"—aptly describes Nick's self-characterization as an inside/outsider: one who is privy to the most private confessions, the

most elite company, and the most egregious events, yet who never quite belongs to the group. Through this imaginative distancing, Nick retains his ability to criticize the social and moral failures of his company without fully including himself in the critique. Donaldson astutely notes that "Fitzgerald's greatest technical achievement in the novel was to invent this narrative voice at once 'within and without' the action" (131). As readers, we also find ourselves "within and without": engrossed in the sensational tale that Nick tells, implicated in its noble aspirations and smutty realizations, and yet somehow able to extract ourselves from it neatly, with our hands still clean. To the extent that we embrace Nick Carraway's narrative uncritically, readers are likely to experience a strong sense of empathy with his actions, inactions, and judgments.

In addition to acknowledging his relative lack of financial means, Nick attempts to draw readers in with self-deprecating statements, often related in a wry, quippy narrative voice. He informs us that he was "rather literary in college," having written "a series of very solemn and obvious editorials for the *Yale News*," and that upon moving back East, he formed the "high intention" of reading many books on subjects such as "banking and credit and investment securities" (4). This language indicates that Nick regards his former intellectual endeavors with whimsical disdain; the "solemn and obvious editorials" seem sophomoric in hindsight, and the reference to his "high intention" of learning the fundamentals of Wall Street suggests that this subsequent intellectual project met with similarly pedestrian results. Later in the narrative, Nick summarizes his actions between more noteworthy events: "mostly I was in New York, trotting around with Jordan and trying to ingratiate myself with her senile aunt" (101). Like the previous references to his intellectual endeavors, this self-deprecating remark shows that Nick is not too proud to make light of his own (former) actions and attitudes. In these cases, Nick the narrator includes Nick the character in his critical purview; his former

self is also subjected to scrutiny.[1] This seemingly critical self-awareness may predispose readers to find Nick honest and transparent, even though the narrative he relates offers ample evidence to the contrary.

Nick makes frequent references to his own social anxieties, particularly when he is in the company of the Buchanans. During his first visit to their home, Tom takes a telephone call in the kitchen, and Jordan informs Nick that "Tom's got some woman in New York" (15). This revelation leads to a forced exchange between Tom and Daisy, and Nick describes his discomfort: "Among the broken fragments of the last five minutes at table I remember the candles being lit again, pointlessly, and I was conscious of wanting to look squarely at every one, and yet to avoid all eyes" (15). He proceeds to sit on the front porch with Daisy, "trying to look pleasantly interested and a little deaf" (16). Nick's attempts to maintain decorum in this scene contrast with the blunt candor of Jordan's remark and the obviousness of Tom's indiscretion. Likewise, upon first attending a party at Gatsby's house, Nick recalls, "I wandered around rather ill at ease among swirls and eddies of people I didn't know," and he subsequently heads to the bar, which he describes as "the only place… where a single man could linger without looking purposeless and alone" (42-43). Later in the evening, Nick fails to recognize his neighbor and host, telling Gatsby that "this man Gatsby sent over his chauffeur with an invitation" (47). Gatsby replies by identifying himself and then puts Nick at ease by taking the blame: "I'm afraid I'm not a very good host" (48). In these scenes, Nick's straightforward disclosures about his social anxieties may prompt readers to experience them vicariously, and they make him seem like a reliable narrator. If he is willing to admit his own gaffes and uncertainties, it stands to reason that he will be truthful about other things as well.

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[1] Toward the end of the novel, Nick mentions that he is recalling the book's events two years after the fact (163).

Yet Nick's claims are not always supported by the "facts" of the narrative that he tells. During the party in New York with Tom and Myrtle, Nick recalls, "I have been drunk just twice in my life, and the second time was that afternoon; so everything that happened has a dim, hazy cast over it" (29). But soon afterwards, during his visit to Gatsby's house, Nick admits that "I was on my way to get roaring drunk from sheer embarrassment," and subsequently another round of cocktails comes "float[ing] at us through the twilight" (42-43). Since this party occurs after the second of Nick's two (alleged) lifelong experiences of being "drunk," we must suppose that his criteria for that condition are quite severe. On other occasions, Nick describes drinking champagne until "the scene… changed before my eyes into something significant, elemental, and profound" (47) and drinking gin rickeys "in long, greedy swallows" (118). Therefore, Nick's avowal that he had only been drunk twice in his life seems to contradict the actual events that his narrative relates. This apparently misleading statement might prompt us to question another of Nick's claims: "I am one of the few honest people that I have ever known" (59).

One of Nick's most effective narrative strategies is that he frequently depicts the foolishness of others, presumably in contrast with his own cleverness or social graces. At Gatsby's parties, a veritable parade of drunken buffoons is characterized in comical caricatures. There is the red-haired chorus singer who weeps while "engaged in song," so that mascara-inked "tears coursed down her cheeks… in slow black rivulets" (51). There is the drunken driver who has somehow managed to shear a wheel completely off of his car, but nevertheless proposes to "put her in reverse…. no harm in trying" (55). One inebriated partygoer complains at having her head dunked as a strategy for sobering her up: "Anything I hate is to get my head stuck in a pool…. They almost drowned me once over in New Jersey" (106). These clownish characters establish Nick as a sober, responsible actor who records the

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hilarious behavior of the Jazz Age without fully engaging in it. Depicting the other guests at Gatsby's parties as debauched fools makes him seem clever and reliable in contrast, and as readers we are more likely to accept Nick's judgments about them than to question his motives.

If the foolish guests at Gatsby's parties are characterized as "Others" of sorts, the book's most pronounced Other is Tom Buchanan. Tom is wealthy and powerful; as an East Egg resident, he belongs to an elite social group, and he has what Gatsby wants most in the world: Daisy. But rather than emerging as an object of envy or aspiration, Tom is repeatedly characterized as cruel, belligerent, racist, and ignorant. During Nick's first visit to the Buchanans' home, Tom rants that "civilization's going to pieces…. It's up to us, who are the dominant race, to watch out or these other races will have control of things" (12-13). Nick comments that "there was something pathetic in his concentration," for "something was making him nibble at the edge of stale ideas as if his sturdy physical egotism no longer nourished his peremptory heart" (13, 20). Here, Nick's indirect characterization of Tom (through his paranoid and racist statements) sets up Nick's direct characterization of Tom as a dilettante and a brute.

Fritz Breithaupt has suggested that narrative empathy often functions as a "choosing of sides" in which readers must select one character to "pull for" over another (*Cultures* 18). In *The Great Gatsby*, such a situation emerges as Gatsby and Tom vie for Daisy, sometimes directly sparring with each other. However, the psychological dynamics of the narrative are much more complicated than a mere case of either/or, for in the text Daisy must choose between Gatsby and Tom, and this very choice is presented through the consciousness of an older (and presumably wiser) Nick recalling previous events. Eventually Daisy chooses Tom, for reasons we are never shown, but readers are not likely to agree with this decision, even

though Tom is her husband and the father of her child. The primary reason for this general consensus is that Nick's diegetic empathy for Tom is very limited, while his empathy for Gatsby is sustained and extensive; he concludes his narrative with the observation that "They were careless people, Tom and Daisy—they smashed up things and creatures and then retreated back into their money or their vast carelessness, or whatever it was that kept them together, and let other people clean up the mess they had made" (179). Compare this characterization with Nick's explanation of Gatsby's mindset—keeping in mind that readers enter into this retrospective narration through (the narrator) Nick's first-person "I," thinking back on his former perceptions (as a character) of a man he knew briefly and not very well:

> I thought of Gatsby's wonder when he first picked out the green light at the end of Daisy's dock. He had come a long way to this blue lawn, and his dream must have seemed so close that he could hardly fail to grasp it. He did not know that it was already behind him, somewhere back in that vast obscurity beyond the city, where the dark fields of the republic rolled on under the night. (180)

Not only does Nick imagine Gatsby's thought process—his allegiance to an old dream he had pursued for so long that it came to define him; Nick invests this dream with a tragic significance which he associates with both national and regional identity. Like the Dutch settlers arriving in the New World, Gatsby pursued a dream that led him to unknown lands, but like Nick, he arrived in the East as a Midwesterner, "subtly unadaptable to Eastern life" (176). Nick "chooses Gatsby's side" in part because he seems to admire this dream, even though he acknowledges the fleeting nature of dreams and the "high price" that Gatsby ultimately pays for "living too long with a single dream" (161). By the end of Fitzgerald's remarkable novel, the distinction between Nick's consciousness and Gatsby's has not only become blurred, it begins to feel transgressed. Nick imbues his romantic notion of Gatsby with his own imaginative longings and aspirations. If we as readers are inclined to identify with this vision, we should ask ourselves, "whose vision is it, really?"

Ben Railton argues that Nick Carraway, like the narrators of more recent "meta-realist" novels such as Philip Roth's *American Pastoral* and Junot Díaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, positions himself as a "novelist-narrator" who refers periodically to the story that he is ostensibly writing. Railton explains that these novelist-narrators attempt to "create their own mimetic versions of the lives and dreams of their central subjects and serv[e] as focal points in their texts' mimetic reflection of that writing process" (136). For example, Nick muses at various points about how his narrative is structured and what he has "written so far" (qtd in Railton 137). In this sense, Nick periodically shifts from diegetic empathy to authorial and readerly empathy, providing a self-styled model for narrative empathy, writ large. His repeated exercise of mind-melding with Gatsby provides a ready example for readers to follow. The book's imaginative quality also manifests itself in overstated metaphors—such as the much-discussed spectacles of Dr. T.J. Eckleburg—and in certain characters' laughable names, such as "the Hammerheads" and "Beluga's girls." Perhaps in these moments, when it acknowledges its own fantastic qualities, Fitzgerald's fiction is most honest, and in turn most compellingly elicits readerly empathy. *The Great Gatsby* is a great novel, in part, because it realistically admits its unreality.

Robert and Helen H. Roulston argue that the novel's greatest strength lies in its "blend of formal and informal" language, as Nick "switch[es] from being a Thackeray-like raconteur to prose poet and back again without losing his recognizable voice or his coherence as a character" (158). For example, in the midst of a rather pedestrian exchange between Tom and Gatsby, Nick interrupts his reporting of their dialogue to [sonnetize] a small sailboat sailing out to sea: "Slowly the white wings of the boat moved against the blue cool limit of the sky" (118). Roulston & Roulston note that Nick frequently shifts between a more conversational, informal tone and "blazing lyrical passages" of poetic prose (158). Miall and Kuiken call the

latter type of passage "foregrounded language," and they have found that such passages tend to attract readers' attention and cause them to read more slowly (224). These more abstract or poetic passages elicit "aesthetic feelings," which "reflect heightened interest" as well as "greater uncertainty." "In response to highly foregrounded text," they write, "feelings are more likely to elicit recollections that are not conventionally but, rather, affectively related to the text" (227). Therefore, Nick's occasional flights of poesy are likely to cause readers to identify with his narrative perspective based on having felt similar feelings, even if they haven't shared an identical experience.

As readers, we are likely to accept Nick's judgments—contradictory though they are—rather than Daisy's choice of Tom over Gatsby. The notion of pursuing a dream is one that most people can readily identify with, and the fact that the dream is ultimately unrealized may lead us to identify with Gatsby, even though we come to see him as a flawed individual whose "greatness" is more carnivalesque than realistic. That Fitzgerald's novel so effectively inspires readerly empathy for a man living under an assumed identity while working in cahoots with gamblers and bootleggers, all the while pursuing a married woman, is testimony to the novel's brilliant narration. Indeed, the most remarkable quality of Nick Carraway's narration is that even after we identify its calculating rhetorical strategies and its inherent contradictions (even, possibly, its untruthfulness), we are nevertheless likely to accept its conclusions. Reading *The Great Gatsby* is not likely to inspire us to emulate Jay Gatsby, or even to consider him "great." But it is difficult not to admire a figure whose dogged pursuit of his dream(s) led him to imagine that he could attain "the orgastic future that year by year recedes before us" (180). Railton notes that this sentence contains an "abrupt and striking pronoun shift" (from *he* to *us*) which links Gatsby's dreams to our own and makes it clear that "Gatsby's grail is, to Nick's eyes, our shared American Dream, past, present, and future"

(140). This blending of perspectives explains, perhaps, why the book is so effective at eliciting readerly empathy: Nick Carraway would never have been capable of Gatsby's aspirations, but Gatsby could never have described them as eloquently as Nick.

Empathy Through Deracialization and Focalization: *Their Eyes Were Watching God*

Zora Neale Hurston's 1937 novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God* presents the life of an African American woman living in the U.S. South during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. This period, well after the end of the Reconstruction period and well before even the "long" Civil Rights Movement began, was rife with interracial violence and mistrust. Between 1880-1930, there were 4,697 reported cases of racial lynchings in the United States, predominantly in the South and surrounding states (Apel & Smith 15). Yet Hurston's novel does not take race as its central concern; rather, it focuses on adversarial relations between men and women in southern black communities, and it offers an early feminist vision of a female protagonist who thwarts conventions and popular opinion to attain the freedom of self-definition.

Initially dismissed by Richard Wright and his literary followers, the novel has since gained recognition as one of the most important works of African American literature. As Henry Louis Gates, Jr. notes, "the loving, diverse, and enthusiastic responses that Hurston's work engenders today were not shared by several of her influential black male contemporaries" ("Zora" 199). Elsewhere, Gates has argued that "the Hurston-Wright debate… turns between two poles of a problematic of representation—between what is represented and what represents, between the signifier and the signified" (*Signifying* 182). Wright, who had written heavily of the "serious responsibility" of the "Negro writer" in his often-cited "Blueprint for Negro Writing," found Hurston's work too light-hearted and worried that it perpetuated popular images of African Americans as minstrel figures.

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"Perspective for Negro writers," wrote Wright, "will come when they have looked and brooded so hard and long upon the harsh lot of their race… that the cold facts have begun to tell them something" (202). In contrast, Wright complained that Hurston's characters "swing like a pendulum eternally in that safe and narrow orbit in which America likes to see the Negro live: between laughter and tears" (qtd in Hemenway 241). Yet Wright and other critics of Hurston's work may have overlooked the novel's power to inspire identification with its black female protagonist by readers of all races and genders, which is due in part to its oblique treatment of interracial conflict. Whereas Wright advocated a full frontal assault on the sociological bases of American racism, Hurston achieved a more effective vehicle for interracial understanding with a book that addresses race only indirectly. For by identifying with the individual struggles and hardships of Janie Mae Crawford, which are informed by but not reducible to Janie's racial identity, readers will have already achieved an antiracist milestone: recognition of Hurston's black female protagonist as a fellow human with shared hopes, beliefs, and dreams.

Hurston's novel encourages readers of various races to identify with Janie by situating her in a series of adversarial relationships in which racial dynamics are acknowledged, but their significance is diminished. These relationships are staged so that interpersonal conflicts are rarely reducible to racial difference; factors such as social class, age, gender, and situational context (such as competition over romantic interests) are often more central. The novel does not ignore race or pretend that racial difference doesn't exist: Joe Starks' funeral is described as "the finest thing Orange County had ever seen with Negro eyes" (88), and the light-skinned Mrs. Turner tells Janie that "De black ones is holdin' us back" (141). Yet the novel's central concerns are largely dissociated from racial identity. Moreover, the text juxtaposes "good white people" with antagonists who are either black or of unstated racial identity, perhaps to

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encourage non-black readers to identify with Janie. Beginning with the initial frame narrative, Janie's primary antagonists are black; seeing Janie return to Eatonville, the porch-sitting townsfolk "sat in judgment," remembering "the envy they had stored up from other times" (1-2). Their initial criticisms and speculations about Janie's presumed comeuppance situate her as a former elite brought low by unknown circumstances, and their insincere welcome inclines readers to hear and sympathize with Janie's side of the story. The "noisy 'good evenin'" that she receives upon her return directly follows more candid comments from the porch: "'What she doin coming back here in dem overalls?… Where all dat money her husband took and died and left her?… Why she don't stay in her class?'" (2). This Greek chorus does not seem to have Janie's best interests in mind. More importantly, the fact that these antagonists share Janie's racial identity downplays the importance of racial difference from the outset. Whether Hurston framed her narrative this way because of her own childhood experiences in the all-black town of Eatonville, Florida, and/or whether she attempted to make the novel as palatable as possible to white readers remains open for (endless, and perhaps pointless) debate. Hurston's treatment of the novel's subject matter is not "postracial" or blind to issues of racial difference, as its discussion of Mrs. Turner later makes evident. Yet Hurston treats race in a fashion that both entices and potentially appeases readers of all races. Janie's story is informed by the history of slavery and racial alterity, but it seems removed from the interracial animosity and strife which historically surrounded the novel's publication. There are few, if any, easily identifiable white villains in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*.

Even Janie's grandmother—a former slave who pronounces that the black woman is "de mule uh de world" (14)—presents racial matters in nuanced terms. Her own account strongly suggests that she became pregnant with (Janie's mother) Leafy by her white master, Mr. ("Marse") Roberts. After Mr. Roberts departs to fight in the Civil War, his wife demands to see

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the baby, and seeing that Leafy has "gray eyes and yaller hair," Mrs. Roberts pledges to have an

overseer "cut de hide offa [Nanny's] yaller back" (18). So far, this characterization is fairly

conventional: the slaveowner's jealous wife persecutes the attractive female slave whom she

suspects of having a sexual relationship with the master. But this characterization is complicated

by the tender scene that Nanny describes before Mr. Roberts departs: after pretending to ride

off, he

> "let on he forgot somethin' and run into mah cabin and made me let down mah hair for
> de last time. He sorta wropped his hand in it, pulled mah big toe, lak he always done,
> and was gone after de rest lak lightnin'." (16-17)

This secretive (but apparently fond) farewell complicates the tropes of the lascivious white

master and the helpless black slave. Nanny does not tell Janie that she loved Mr. Roberts, or

that she entered into the relationship willingly. Yet her decision to narrate this final encounter

—which seems at least affectionate, if not downright loving—places the subsequent rage of

Mrs. Roberts in a context that is irreducible to racial difference. In the scene that follows, the

slaveowner's wife is not merely a spiteful white mistress; she is also (and most obviously) a

jealous spouse. Responding to Mrs. Roberts' repeated slaps, Nanny tells her, "Ah don't know

nothin' but what Ah'm told tuh do, 'cause Ah ain't nothin' but uh nigger and uh slave," but as

she recounts to Janie, the purpose of this statement was to "pacify" the mistress, rather than

merely testifying about her exploitation (17). Nanny's story, narrated to Janie in hindsight,

suggests that her relationship with Mr. Roberts was more complicated than a case of simple

coercion, just as her relationship with Mrs. Roberts is more complicated than a case of a

hateful mistress. Neither the slaveowner nor his wife is dehumanized in Nanny's narrative.

Nanny tells Janie that after the Civil War, she "got with some good white people" and

proceeded to West Florida (19). These benefactors (previously introduced as the Washburns)

allow Nanny to punish their children as she wishes and treat Janie as one of their own. It is not

the white family who initially causes her to realize her racial difference, Janie recalls, but rather a photograph in which she first allegedly notices (with surprise), "Ah'm colored!" (9). Nor do the Washburns make Janie aware of her financial dependence upon them: that allegation comes from a "knotty head gal name Mayrella," presumably one of the "colored chillun" who were not dressed as nicely as Janie and the Washburn children (9). Nanny tells Janie that after moving to Florida, Mrs. Washburn "helped" her with Leafy and made it possible for the child to attend school, but one day Leafy did not return home after school. "De next mornin' she come crawlin' in on her hands and knees. A sight to see. Dat school teacher had done hid her in de woods all night long, and he had done raped mah baby and run on off just before day" (19). In contemplating this horrific event, readers may envision the schoolteacher as being white or black, or they may not consider his race at all. Historical accounts of both black and white schoolteachers in the South who participated in the project of "racial uplift" support either interpretation of the account, though the historical record of interracial violence in the South suggests that the schoolteacher/rapist may well have been white. Yet the tragic episode is narrated so as to downplay racial identity; if a man could commit such an egregious act, the text implicitly asks, why should his race matter at all? In this passage and others like it, Hurston strategically juxtaposes "good white people" with antagonists of various (or undisclosed) racial identities in order to discuss the violent exploitation of black female characters without necessarily rendering white readers as an outgroup. Readers are likely to sympathize with the Grandmother's struggles and to bemoan Leafy's assault, regardless of their racial identity. Hurston's narration therefore resists interracial finger-pointing, even as it relates troubled histories in which race played a central role in determining power structures and economic inequalities.

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The novel establishes Janie's grandmother as a doubly-embedded narrator—the frame narrator sets up Janie's embedded narrative, which Janie relates to Pheoby, including her grandmother's narrative, as previously told to Janie—in order to emphasize the distance between Nanny's perspective and that of the frame narrator (or, loosely speaking, that of the text). Using focalization and dialect, the story takes us first to Eatonville to observe Janie's return after Tea Cake's death, then to Janie's porch to hear her recount her story to Pheoby, and then to the grandmother's previous homes, as Nanny's account is retold. This narrative "distance" between Nanny and the frame narrator is therefore spatial, temporal, and thematic: from its initial focus on Janie's sexual "blooming" (figured by the ubiquitous pear tree), the text transports us back in time to events that preceded Janie's birth (and even her mother's birth) before returning readers to Janie's questions of love and sexual desire. "You told me Ah mus gointer love him, and, and Ah don't," Janie reproaches her grandmother, after marrying Logan Killicks. Nanny responds, "Heah you got uh prop tuh lean on all yo' bawn days, and big protection, and everybody got tuh tip dey hat tuh you and call you Mis' Killicks, and you come worryin' me 'bout love" (23). Houston Baker finds the pear tree metaphor "a deceptively prominent… [and] romantic construct" in a text that is actually grounded in economic and legal realities, such as the "concubinage of Nanny to her white owner" and the "parodic economics of black, middle-class respectability" (57-58). Yet the narratological structure of the novel insistently pushes such concerns to the margins of the story it tells. Readers who have already vicariously experienced Janie's awakening to the "ecstatic shivers" of the pear tree pollinated by "dust-bearing bee[s]" and "frothing with delight" (11), are unlikely to accept Nanny's pat dismissal of love and sexual desire, as they will already have perceived the narrative distance between Nanny's perspective and Janie's. This double embedment allows the most difficult and troubling facts of Janie's family history to inform

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the narrative without coming to define it—and, in a sense, lets readers off easy. Having

obliquely discussed slavery, miscegenation, torture, and rape, the narrative returns promptly to

the more palatable topic of Janie's unfulfilled desires.

In its depiction of the growing rift between Janie and her second husband, Joe Clark,

the novel employs variable internal focalization to switch back and forth between Joe and

Janie's perspectives. In these passages, the frame narrator reasserts an independent

perspective that is not reducible to Janie's, though it often coincides with hers or acts in subtle

ways to support her position. For example, when Joe attends the mock burial of Matt Bonner's

yellow mule, we first learn (from direct dialogue) that Janie asks to come with Joe and that he

refuses. We then learn (from the narrator's perspective) that he delivers a "great eulogy on our

departed citizen," which increases his popularity with the townsfolk, who "loved the speech"

(60). Janie does not witness this event, because she is not permitted to attend the burial, and

therefore she does not recognize (as readers may) the hypocrisy of Joe's statement, upon

returning to the store, that he wishes "people would get mo' business in 'em and not spend so

much time on foolishness" (62). Yet we are also privy to Joe's thoughts, as the focalization

switches to his perspective, that Janie

> wasn't even appreciative of his efforts and she had plenty cause to be. Here he was just
> pouring honor all over her; building a high chair for her to sit in and overlook the
> world and she here pouting over it! Not that he wanted anybody else, but too many
> women would be glad to be in her place. (62)

From this musing, the perspective switches to the seemingly objective reporting of direct

dialogue between Joe and Janie, before she again becomes the focalizor and he the focalized:

"Janie took the easy way away from a fuss. She didn't change her mind but she agreed with

her mouth. Her heart said 'Even so, but you don't have to cry about it'" (63). Mieke Bal

explains that "focalization is the relationship between the 'vision' [or 'visual narrative'], the

agent that sees, and that which is seen…. If the focalizor coincides with [a] character, that

character will have an advantage over the other characters" (149). Similarly, Gerald Prince explains focalization as a tripartite phenomenon: "In 'Jane saw Peter leaning against the chair'… Peter is the focalized" (32). Here Jane is the agent that sees, and the "vision" is the focalized narrative of Jane seeing Peter. Film theory also provides useful ways of thinking about focalization; in any given scene (which I as a reader imagine in my mind's eye), where is the camera lens, and what does it "see"? Is it just over Janie's shoulder? Does it see her within its frame? Does it zoom in and out? Focalization in *Their Eyes* is not "character-bound" to the degree that it is in *The Great Gatsby*, which is presented almost entirely from Nick Carraway's perspective. By moving between the perspectives of Joe and Janie (as mediated by the frame narrator), Hurston's novel gives readers a greater sense of objectivity, as if they are able to witness both sides of the dispute, represented without bias. But because the novel is more frequently focalized from Janie's perspective, and because the narration concludes the exchange with her (unspoken) words, readers are likely to side with her, finding Joe hypocritical and self-serving.

The following chapter, which describes Joe and Janie's public confrontation in the store, is focalized almost entirely from Janie's perspective, and it is narrated in an epic tone, full of metaphors and allusions. Janie is described as "a rut in the road" (76) and compared to "the stolidness of the earth which soaks up urine and perfume with the same indifference" (77). By providing readers with Janie's unspoken thoughts and feelings, the chapter also employs dramatic irony: we know more than Joe knows, and therefore we are not surprised (as he is) when Janie speaks up against him in the store. We have already witnessed Janie observing the physical changes to Joe's body: "His prosperous-looking belly that used to thrust out so pugnaciously and intimidate folks, sagged like a load suspended from his loins" (77). Joe's behavior has also changed: he "began to talk about her age all the time" (77), as if

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calling Janie old somehow made him feel better about his own aging body. Janie is aware of

Joe's thought process, or at least what she perceives it to be: "For the first time she could see a

man's head naked of its skull. Saw the cunning thoughts race in and out… long before they

darted out of the tunnel of his mouth" (77). As readers, we are not privy to Joe's perspective

on his physical changes (which we later learn to be the results of a kidney disorder), or his

perceptions of Janie's status (physically or psychologically), but the lack of narration from his

perspective implies that Janie's characterization of him is more or less accurate; the novel's

focalization characterizes him as both arrogant and thoughtless. Therefore, when he publicly

insults Janie—"Don't stand dere rollin' yo' pop eyes at me wid yo' rump hangin' nearly to

yo' knees" (78)—we are already primed to accept her response as fair and well-deserved:

"Talkin' 'bout me lookin' old! When you pull down yo' britches, you look lak de change uh

life" (79). This pointed riposte, delivered in front of the town's biggest gossips—who, as we

already know, can make "killing tools out of laughs" (2)—devastates Joe and seems to

accelerate his physical decline. Janie, the narrator tells us, "had cast down [Joe's] empty

armor before men and they had laughed, would keep on laughing" (79-80). But because the

narrative reveals Janie's mistreatment and her sense of unfairness *before* the confrontation, we

are inclined to think that Joe had it coming. Focalization has prompted identification, and

identification fosters readerly empathy—or, in Joe's case, the lack thereof.

 In contrast, when Janie comes into conflict with her third husband, Vergible "Tea

Cake" Woods, the narrative perspective favors his position. We are first exposed to a lengthy

diatribe by the light-skinned Mrs. Turner on the flaws of dark-skinned blacks, among which

she includes Tea Cake. "Ah jus' couldn't see mahself married to no black man," she tells

Janie. "Ah can't stand black niggers" (140-141). Later Janie enters the kitchen and finds Tea

Cake "sitting in there with his head between his hands" (143). He has had to listen to Mrs.

Turner maligning him based on the color of his skin and questioning Janie's choice of him as a husband. When Mrs. Turner introduces her brother to Janie as a potential replacement, Tea Cake whips Janie. But the text skips over the actual event, and gives us only Tea Cake's perspective, in hindsight. We learn only that

> Before the week was over he had whipped Janie. Not because her behavior justified his jealousy, but it relieved that awful fear inside him. Being able to whip her reassured him in possession. No brutal beating at all. He just slapped her around a bit to show he was boss. (147)

From this casual, forgiving explanation of domestic abuse, the text jumps to Tea Cake's dialogue with Sop-de-Bottom, who expresses envy because the bruises on Janie's face are visible and because "she never raised her hand tuh hit yuh back" (147). Rather than emphasizing the violence of the blows that bruised Janie, the text seems to characterize them as a model couple: "The way he petted and pampered her as if those two or three face slaps had nearly killed her made the women see visions and the helpless way she hung on him made men dream dreams" (147).

Zora Neale Hurston has often been identified as a predecessor of third-wave feminism, an early voice of the "African American womanism" that Alice Walker and others would carry on. Lovalerie King argues that Hurston's "work in the woman-centered narrative" served as a bridge between "African American women's literary production" in the late-nineteenth and late-twentieth centuries (233), a period that includes many of the most important achievements of American feminism. Yet some critics question the effectiveness of the novel's feminist message, because its presentation of domestic abuse seems passive or even apathetic. When Walter Thomas says of Mrs. Robbins, "If dat wuz *mah* wife, Ah'd kill her cemetery dead" (74), the text seems not to judge but to smirk. Tina Barr summarizes the debate among "Hurston scholars [who] disagree about the extent to which Tea Cake contributes to Janie's development [as well as] the extent to which he is a desirable mate"

(103). Indeed, the whipping that Tea Cake gives Janie is focalized almost entirely from his perspective and from that of his admiring friend. Moreover, by prefacing the abuse with Mrs. Turner's offensive speech and following it with the staged fight that destroys Mrs. Turner's store, the text frames both the whipping and the fight as reasonable reactions to an already-identified antagonist and a traitor to the race.

As I discussed in Chapter One, one of oldest tenets of reader-response theory is the idea that we are more likely to identify (sympathetically and/or empathetically) with characters who are more or less like us. This notion appears in the critical theories of Aristotle, Adam Smith, and Suzanne Keen, among many others. Yet Zora Neale Hurston's novel suggests that shared identity and/or experiential circumstances are not the most important drivers of imaginative identification. Through its use of deracialized characterization and focalization, *Their Eyes* shows that readerly judgments based on moral and emotional reasoning (the hypothetical "what would I do in this situation?") may be more influential than identity categories or shared circumstances. Hurston's well-crafted narrative effectively places readers into Janie's "shoes" and "skin" in an emotional and existential sense, regardless of their own race and gender.

Misreading "the Other" as a Strategy of Narrative Empathy in *Go Down, Moses*

William Faulkner's fiction frequently depicts the limits and failures of human empathy. In particular, *Go Down, Moses* may be read as an extended meditation on the limits of interracial empathy in nineteenth- and twentieth-century U.S. southern culture. In the first chapter, "Was," slaveowner Hubert Beauchamp is so blinded by racial categorization that he fails to recognize that the very slave whose future hangs in the balance of a high-stakes hand of poker is the one dealing the cards. In "The Fire and the Hearth," two distant cousins fail to

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imaginatively identify with each other's mental state—one unable to manage single parenthood following his wife's death, the other deprived of his wife's company without request, permission, or explanation—because, according to the logic of Jim Crow, one is "white" and the other "black." In "Pantaloon in Black," a sheriff's deputy fundamentally misreads the actions of a grieving man who has recently lost his wife as a sign of the man's *in*humanity. In "The Old People," Walter Ewell derides Boon Hogganbeck's powers of perception, quipping that the large buck Boon claimed to see was probably just "somebody's stray cow" (178). In "The Bear," the (white) authors of an antebellum plantation ledger are unable to comprehend why a (black) mother would commit suicide after her daughter is seduced by her own (white) father and then dies in childbirth. In "Delta Autumn," an old white man cannot imagine why a southern black woman might willingly enter into a sexual relationship with a young white lover, and in "Go Down, Moses," a "progressive" but sanctimonious white lawyer characterizes an old black woman's desire for justice after her grandson is executed as a penchant for pageantry. Each story turns around a failure to empathize with some figure of categorical difference.

As Fritz Breithaupt and others have noted, the *absence* of diegetic empathy may elicit readerly empathy more strongly than the most empathetic narrator. Faulkner's fiction often functions in this manner: some of his most powerful statements or messages are indirect, unspoken, or even disavowed. Who can read, for example, Jason Compson's characterization of his niece Quentin in *The Sound and the Fury*—"Once a bitch always a bitch, what I say" (173)—without experiencing a visceral negative reaction to his words? Reading this passage, one is more likely to identify with the niece's misfortune of having Jason as a guardian than to accept his statement at face value. But who can determine the extent to which our own sentiments or conclusions as readers "accurately" reflect Faulkner's own? We might more

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profitably examine the ways in which literary texts structure and elicit certain responses: the technologies of narrative empathy.

Not only do the stories that comprise *Go Down, Moses* culminate in dramatic misperceptions and mischaracterizations; they are structured in a manner that encourages readers to recognize and respond to these failures. By revealing the actual attitudes and beliefs of the "Othered" characters before they are then seemingly misjudged, the stories highlight the errors of those who pass judgment in advance, or lacking full knowledge: in other words, they implicitly critique the logic of prejudice. The text therefore informs the reader about the *diegetic truth* of each situation, within the ordered, contained world of the narrative, before depicting *mis*perceptions on the part of narrators or characters, which are often premised on racialized logic.[2] These crucial failures of empathy often occur at or near the end of the story, when the reader will be best informed about the mental states of the characters in question, and therefore most able to recognize the errors—a psychological version of dramatic irony. Through this construction, Faulkner's stories in *Go Down, Moses* prepare readers to identify and reject the failed empathy of certain narrators and characters by first enabling readers to empathize with those characters who are later misjudged as "Others."

Scholars have long discussed and debated how much credit and/or blame Faulkner merits for his fictional depictions of difficult cultural material. Racism, sexism, classism, violence, and simple human cruelty all feature prominently in his work. Therefore, critics often question the extent to which we should consider the author guilty of, or at least

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[2] Post-structuralist philosophers and theorists are quick to note that no absolute or essential truth is ever obtainable within the realms of language or narrative. However, diegetic truth may be understood as the apparent state of being as revealed by narrators and characters within the finite and imaginary world of a fictional narrative. Faulkner's fiction repeatedly points out and probes at the ineffability of certain knowledge; nevertheless, within the worlds he creates, some sense of trustworthy narration generally emerges. When Faulkner's narratives are rendered suspect (as in *Absalom, Absalom!*, when Quentin and Shreve speculate about the antics and motives of historical figures), I would argue that they generally do so openly and self-consciously. Nevertheless, diegetic truth should never be characterized as absolute or essential.

embroiled in, his own characters' "sins." When does a literary text move from portraying, say,

racist behavior to actually becoming a racist text? Philip Weinstein argues that Faulkner's

black characters are "largely deprived by the narrative of interior voice, of point of view, of a

sense of their own past and future (their memories and desires)—blacks as represented by

Faulkner are truncated figures" (44). In a similar vein, Thadious Davis writes that "Faulkner

seems able to acknowledge the tyranny of the cultural stereotype, especially in his portraits of

Lucas and Rider. . . . He transforms it more fully into an underlying imaginative conception

which serves his art, though he still cannot escape it" (243).

 While I will not attempt to offer any definitive answer to the age-old questions of

authorial intention or responsibility, I will argue that Faulkner's novel, *Go Down, Moses*,

presents some of its most offensive material in such a fashion as to guide the reader's

response to it in particular ways.[3] Characters who malign "Others" most egregiously in the

novel do so in ways that contradict information to which readers have previously been privy,

or they appear to misrepresent the nature of those characters' actions. Typically in these

situations (though not always), white male characters misrepresent the thoughts and actions of

black characters, both male and female. But Faulkner's novel is structured such that it

prompts readers to note and respond to these misrepresentations. Therefore, we might

consider *Go Down, Moses* as a psychology experiment designed to elicit readers' empathy

and disapproval or even outrage through the offensive attitudes and behaviors of certain

characters. Considering the text in this way should not necessarily excuse Faulkner for all of

the misconceptions that inhabit his fictional world, but it does seem to reveal his (at least

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[3] Although it was originally published as *Go Down, Moses and Other Stories,* Faulkner always insisted that the book was a novel rather than a short story collection. During one question-and-answer session at the University of Virginia, the author explained that he added extra material to "The Bear" because the novel centers around how "the Negro and the white phase of the [McCaslin] family" were the "same people," and "the rest of the book was a part of [Isaac's] past too" (qtd in Gwynn & Blotner 4).

partial) awareness of them as such. Although the novel does reproduce the ideology of Jim Crow in many of its representations, it seems to do so in order to undermine that logic, inviting readers to critique its own characters' stated conclusions. Instances of conspicuous misjudgment abound in the novel, but this article will focus on three particular failures of diegetic empathy and the reader-responses that these failures seem designed to provoke. I will first analyze the scene from "Was" in which Terrel (or "Turl") deals a fateful hand of poker; then I will turn to the deputy sheriff's concluding statement in "Pantaloon in Black"; and finally I will address Gavin Stevens's erroneous characterization of Mollie Beauchamp in the novel's final chapter.[4]

Despite opening with a chase scene involving a fugitive slave, the novel's first chapter sets a comic (or perhaps tragicomic) tone for the novel. Tomey's Turl, as readers later learn, is both half-brother and nephew to Buck and Buddy McCaslin, the unorthodox southern planters who have allowed their slaves to take over the "big house" and built themselves a log cabin instead (250-251). The chase is sporadic and convoluted: Turl initially eludes his pursuers, and he ultimately helps determine his own fate through a poker game that results from a confusing series of wagers between Buck, Buddy, and Hubert Beauchamp.

The sordid subtext of this story is that human lives are treated as currency, as wagers to be "raised" and "called" or "passed." Not only the lives of slaves are gambled: in the final game, Buddy offers "Buck McCaslin against Sibbey's dowry" (26). Hence, if Buddy loses, his brother will have to marry Hubert's sister Sophonsiba "without any dowry" (25). This "dowry" is itself measured in human lives, for Hubert had initially offered Sibbey's reluctant suitor his female slave Tennie, Turl's love interest and eventual wife (259). The "pot"

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[4] Though Faulkner spells this character's name as "Molly" in "The Fire and the Hearth," I will use the spelling "Mollie," as the narrator refers to her throughout the final chapter.

becomes more complicated when Buddy raises "them two niggers," meaning that Hubert would have to pay $300 to purchase Turl if he loses. Ironically, the *loser* of the hand would pay to keep the enslaved couple together. This twisted wager therefore subverts both the ideal of white southern womanhood—Buddy is desperately trying to free Buck from having to marry Sophonsiba—and the usual conventions of American slavery, in which enslaved couples were more often separated to suit their white owners' whims than united at the masters' inconvenience.

Before the hand of poker began, Hubert had instructed Buddy's young cousin "Cass" McCaslin to "Go to the back door and holler. Bring the first creature that answers, animal mule or human, that can deal ten cards" (25). This meant, of course, a slave, though Hubert's instructions reveal his lack of conviction regarding the slaves' humanity. After Buddy's raise, at the climactic point of the narrative, the identity of the card dealer is revealed. Hubert glances up in the dark room and shines a lamp on "Tomey's Turl's arms that were supposed to be black but were not quite white" (28) and then up to reveal his face, the face of a mixed-race relative whose life Buddy had just wagered. The strategic positioning of this revelation renders it simultaneously the story's dramatic climax and a sort of anti-climax. Hubert merely turns his cards "face-down" and says, "I pass, Amodeus" (28).

Hubert folds rather than calling Buddy's bet because he realizes (too late) that this "creature" who had dealt the cards might actually have some interest and agency in the situation at hand. The outcome is later recorded in the McCaslin plantation ledgers: "*Tennie Beauchamp 21 yrs Won by Amodeus McCaslin from Hubert Beauchamp Esqre Possible Strait against three Treys in sigt Not called 1859 Marrid to Tomys Turl 1859*" (259). But it is Hubert's initial failure to identify Turl (or Terrel) as fully human, as an individual with vested interests and a poker player like himself, that causes him to fold and therefore to lose the bet:

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the story turns upon his dramatic failure of empathy. But in the same moment that Hubert

realizes his folly—right after he asks "Who dealt these cards, Amodeus?" (28)—we as readers

can imagine the cleverness of Turl, who *may* (the novel never reveals the final card) have

intentionally dealt his half-brother a straight. The failure, or belated appearance, of diegetic

empathy elicits readerly empathy for the "Other": we recognize Hubert's folly, just as he does.

As a result, Turl remains part of the McCaslin family and gains a wife—and as it turns out,

Buck goes on to marry Sophonsiba anyway.[5] This conclusion sets the tone for the novel as a

whole, and scenes of strategic misreading recur in every subsequent story.

Critics have often questioned why Faulkner included the chapter titled "Pantaloon in

Black" in the novel. This story does not directly include any members of the McCaslin and

Beauchamp families that the other stories focus on; its central character, Rider, simply rents a

house on Roth Edmonds's land. As Linda Wagner-Martin points out, many early reviewers of

the novel wondered "how . . . to relate that story to the rest of the book?" (3). But its pivotal

scene, toward the end of the chapter, reveals a startling failure of empathy caused by racist

ideology, and this failure places the story at the thematic heart of the novel.

The chapter opens with the scene of Rider, a young black man of enormous strength

who works at the nearby sawmill, burying his young wife Mannie. The unidentified narrator

relates their brief romance and marriage: Rider's life of hard work, weekend whiskey and dice

games, and "nameless" women had changed six months ago "when he saw Mannie, whom he

had known all his life, for the first time" (134). Since then the couple had lived a life of quiet

routine, their savings increasing steadily, he working weekends to rebuild, reroof, and refloor

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[5] The novel does not fully explain how Buck comes to marry Sophonsiba, though she is clearly working hard to win his affections during the first story, set in 1859. By 1867, the couple has married, they have moved back into the "big house" that Buck and Buddy had previously forfeited to their slaves, and Sophonsiba has given birth to their only son, Isaac (287-288).

the house, and she preparing for him "the sidemeat, the greens, the cornbread, the buttermilk from the well-house, the cake which she baked every Saturday now that she had a stove to bake in" (135). Their brief life together is described in terms of newlywed commitment, contentment, and prosperity—although the narrator's commodification of their relationship into soul food and home improvement calls up the previous critiques by Davis and Weinstein. After her death, Rider sees a vision of Mannie and begs her, "Wait. . . . Den lemme go wid you, honey" (136). But the specter fades, and he descends into a terrible state of agitation and duress, working maniacally, walking aimlessly and furiously through the woods, and eating without being able to taste his food. When Rider's uncle urges him to put his "faith and trust" in the Lord, Rider rejects his advice: "Whut faith and trust? . . . Whut Mannie ever done ter Him?" (140). Likewise, his aunt begs him to pray, calling after Rider, "'Spoot! Spoot!' . . . the name he had gone by in his childhood and adolescence, before the men he worked with and the bright dark nameless women he had taken in course and forgotten until he saw Mannie that day and said, 'Ah'm thu wid all dat,' began to call him Rider" (146). Through this narration, Rider emerges as an individual with a family history and a complex psyche, who has undergone two life-changing experiences: he fell in love, and then his beloved was inexplicably taken away. After Mannie's death, neither religion nor "white-mule" corn whiskey can assuage his mental anguish; he laments that "Hit look lack Ah just cant quit thinking" (154). Rider's grief and anger at God are made evident to the reader, and they at least partly explain his sudden and violent action: without warning, he kills Birdsong, the white night-watchman who had been cheating him and the other mill workers at dice for fifteen years.

After Rider has been arrested, thrown in jail, taken out of the jail and lynched, the sheriff's deputy relates the story to his wife: "They ain't human. They look like a man and

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they walk on their hind legs like a man, and they can talk and you can understand them and you think they are understanding you, at least now and then. But when it comes to the normal human feelings and sentiments of human beings, they might just as well be a damn herd of wild buffaloes" (149-150). This startling racist diatribe demonstrates the deputy's utter lack of empathy for a man so deeply bereaved at his wife's death that he seemingly sought out and ensured his own destruction. One might argue that the entire story of "Pantaloon in Black" is engineered to exhibit the humanity of Rider; by the time we encounter the deputy's comment, it has become patently clear that his judgment is erroneous. This scene of failed empathy seems designed to abrade and offend the reader—not only because the comment is racist, but also because it contradicts the emotional "facts" of the story which we have already witnessed. If the phenomenological experience of reading a story is, as James Phelan explains, a process of forming judgments in progression with the developing plot, this statement is placed precisely at the point where the readers' judgments regarding Rider have become fully formed. This placement makes it evident that the deputy has fundamentally *misread* Rider and his story.

"Pantaloon in Black" also includes what Phelan calls an internal "narratee," or an audience embedded within the narrative: the deputy's wife, to whom he relates his version of the story's events. Her reaction to the deputy's narrative serves as a ready model for the reader's own response. When he begins his account—"Now you take this one today"—she cuts him off before he can even begin, with the retort "I wish you would" (150). Later, after he has recounted the entire series of events, she upbraids him again: "I think if you eat any supper in this house you'll do it in the next five minutes" (154). The deputy's wife's apparent lack of interest or credence in his account further undermines his misreading of the story and inclines the reader to reject it as well. Our previously formed empathy for Rider (and perhaps

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also our pre-existing attitudes toward racist ideology) precludes the possibility of readerly empathy for the sheriff's deputy.

The introduction of Gavin Stevens as the mouthpiece for the novel's conclusion—and its final strategic misreading—is confounding and double-voiced. The ostensibly progressive white lawyer is introduced as "Gavin Stevens, Phi Beta Kappa, Harvard, Ph.D., Heidelberg" (353), and he proves to be an intriguingly contradictory figure. Does the unidentified narrator revere Stevens or mock him? Does this introduction serve as homage or ridicule? At different points throughout the story, the answer seems to be one or the other, or both simultaneously. Stevens's figure even seems at times to serve as an avatar for the flesh-and-blood figure of Faulkner himself, perhaps with a modicum or even a heaping portion of self-satire. Like the author, he is a writer and a scholar of sorts: his "serious vocation was a twenty-two-year-old unfinished translation of the Old Testament back into classic Greek" (353). The nature of this pursuit suggests both a passionate attention to detail and a lack of regard for the pragmatic applications of one's work.

In the final chapter, "Go Down, Moses," we learn that Mollie Beauchamp's grandson, Samuel Beauchamp (aka "Butch"), is scheduled to be executed in Chicago for allegedly killing a policeman (a charge that he denies). Mollie comes to Stevens's office and tells him, "I come to find my boy. . . . And you the law" (353-354). Mollie explains that Roth Edmonds "sold him in Egypt. . . . I just knows Pharoah got him" (353-354), and Stevens remembers that Edmonds "had caught the boy breaking into his commissary store and had ordered him off the place and had forbidden him ever to return" (355). Like many of Faulkner's works, this scene reveals multiple perspectives from which to understand a historical event. Here, even the semantic registers of Gavin and Mollie's language are different: she speaks in an Old

Testament-infused African American vernacular, and his is the legalistic language of prominent white landowners in the postbellum South.

Gavin Stevens's initial response to Mollie's request seems admirable, especially given the racial codes and politics of their time (the story is set in or around 1940). He consults the local newspaper editor; he meets with Miss Worsham, an old white woman with whom Mollie lives; he arranges a proper casket for the young man, and he solicits donations in town to pay for Samuel's burial. Yet while visiting Miss Worsham and Mollie, Stevens seems troubled by Mollie's accusation that Edmonds "sold my Benjamin . . . Sold him in Egypt . . . Sold him to Pharoah and now he dead" (362). His immediate response is "I'd better go," and the narration suggests that he feels unable to breathe during this interchange. The reason for Stevens's sudden shortness of breath is unclear. Does he take offense at the charges that Mollie levels at Roth Edmonds? Does he feel somehow complicit in the young man's death? Does he disagree that whites are responsible for Butch's death? Or is he merely uncomfortable in Mollie's presence and with her incantatory song?

Stevens's characterizations of Mollie Beauchamp mark her as "Other"; he focuses on her age, gender, and race, and he refers to her throughout the story in the coded language of Jim Crow. Stevens's first address to Mollie—"Beauchamp? . . . You live on Mr Carothers Edmonds' place" (353)—identifies her as a dependent and a member of the racially stratified plantation society in which she was denied the full rights of citizenship. Stevens's deferential (full) naming of "Mr Carothers Edmonds" contrasts with the terse "Beauchamp," as he greets her, devoid of courtesies or honorifics. When Mollie begins to explain her situation, Stevens cuts her off with the dismissive phrase "Wait, Aunty" (353), and he goes on to refer to her repeatedly, both in his narration and his subsequent conversation with the newspaper editor, as "the old Negress" (354-355).

When Stevens learns that Mollie is the sister of a black man whom Stevens has known all his life, he muses, "They were like that. You could know two of them for years. . . . Then suddenly you learn by pure chance that they are brothers or sisters" (354). Not only does Stevens's rhetoric of "you" and "them" establish Mollie Beauchamp as a racialized Other, but his narration presumes an audience (or narratee) who, like him, is white and accepts the racial hierarchies of the Jim Crow South. In short, Stevens is unable or unwilling to imaginatively identify with Mollie, and rather than attempting to perceive their common humanity, he emphasizes the inscrutability of blacks—an unknowable, unpredictable "them"—with "their" ability to surprise people like "us."

After Stevens has arranged a ceremonial burial for the young man, he drives behind the hearse with the newspaper editor, Mr. Wilmoth. Wilmoth tells Stevens that Mollie had instructed him, "I wants hit all in de paper. All of hit" (365). This prompts Stevens to think, in what are nearly the final words of the novel, "*She doesn't care how he died. She just wanted him home, but she wanted him to come home right. She wanted that casket and those flowers and the hearse and she wanted to ride through town in a car*" (365). In this final rationalization, which Stevens feels compelled to make for perhaps the same reasons that he previously "had to leave" the grieving grandmother, he dismisses the nature of Samuel Beauchamp's death, telling himself that "she doesn't care how he died," that Samuel was executed for a crime that he may not have committed. The story opens with a scene in which Samuel tells a census taker that his occupation is "getting rich too fast" (352)—with the double connotation of robbery and of a newfound prosperity that whites might not appreciate. Moreover, Mollie's injunction to put the story of Samuel's death and burial in the paper—"all of hit"—belies Stevens's conclusion that she didn't care how he died. His description of Mollie's desire for a proper burial for her grandson as a childish or ostentatious demand to be

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humored by tolerant whites such as himself—"that casket and those flowers and the hearse"—
and his description of the ceremony itself—"she wanted to ride through town behind it in a
car"—are dismissive and bereft of empathy. Stevens, the self-appointed figure of white liberal
tolerance, absolves himself of any guilt in the matter by arranging the pageant that he believes
Mollie is really after.

Stevens's neat resolution to the events in "Go Down, Moses" also misjudges the
importance of Samuel's death. Over the course of *Go Down, Moses*, the McCaslin and
Beauchamp lines falter and fail, in both their white and black lineages. Ike McCaslin is
childless and nearing eighty at the beginning of the novel. Samuel's mother Nat dies in
childbirth, and his father abandons him. Roth Edmonds's child with the unnamed woman in
"Delta Autumn" is unlikely to grow up with any intimate knowledge of his ancestral land or
family relations; he may never return. This final death represents the culmination of a long
series of failures to thrive; the McCaslin and Beauchamp descendents are few and scattered;
the dissolution of two once-proud southern families is almost complete. Therefore, Stevens's
complacent summary seems especially inappropriate to this final, tragic turn of events.
Stevens misreads Mollie and her story: despite his good intentions and his attempts to appease
the old woman, he fails to empathize with her or her family on a fundamental human level.
Readers are likely to find his conclusion unsettling and inappropriate, incommensurate with
the scope of the novel's dramatic subject. Gavin Stevens's failure of diegetic empathy is
Faulkner's finishing touch: one final misjudgment designed to elicit the reader's
uncomfortable or dissatisfied response.

As discussed earlier in this essay, scholars disagree about the extent to which
Faulkner's fiction should be considered guilty of the same problems and shortcomings it
highlights. Lee Jenkins acknowledges that black characters are often treated unfairly by white

characters in Faulkner's fiction, but insists that they are ultimately allowed a degree of

autonomy and dignity. "Faulkner's [black characters] . . . may still be the obverse reflection of

the whites they live among, but they are at least recognized as entities who cannot be easily

known, whose reality must be grasped with some effort, and who may conceivably have some

hard-earned and honorable conception of themselves that may belie the mockery, contempt,

and amusement of paternalistic whites" (223). The reader is left to cipher the attempts of

African American characters at "some . . . honorable conception of themselves" (223), and it

is often only through the conspicuous absence of (white) empathy that Faulkner gestures

toward the dignity or shared humanity of the (black) Other.

I would argue that a narratological approach to Faulkner's fiction that accounts for the

text's role in guiding and eliciting readerly empathy for "the Other" might help to

contextualize the literary sins of which the author is sometimes accused. The notion that his

black characters "cannot be easily known" does not always hold true in this novel; Lucas

Beauchamp and Rider are two examples of black characters who emerge with psychological

depth and individual identity.[6] But Faulkner's fiction often features white characters who fail

to "know" their black counterparts—and even their black relatives—because of dramatic

failures of diegetic empathy. These failures, I would suggest, are strategically placed to

highlight their errors and misjudgments. David Wyatt argues that "when it comes to race, we

are all readers, or misreaders; race is not a fact, but America's most complex and damaging

figuration. And Faulkner makes it clear [in *Go Down, Moses*] that any take on race will be a

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[6] In "The Fire and the Hearth," Lucas expresses moral outrage: "How to God . . . can a black man ask a white man to please not lay down with his black wife?" (58). He plans to upbraid the disrespectful young man who has married his daughter: "*it will be a lesson to him about whose daughter to fool with next time*" (61, 70). He experiences a change of heart about the treasure he had resolved to find with his metal detector: "I reckon to find that money aint for me" (127). These passages demonstrate that Faulkner was perfectly "able" to write black characters who escape the "tyranny of the cultural stereotype"; indeed, that aim is precisely what animates the character of Lucas Beauchamp. His ability to create compelling female characters or to provide them with original, individual voices is another question.

reading" (281). Perhaps the way we, as 21st-century readers, read that reading can shed new light on Faulkner's art.

This novel demonstrates that the absence of diegetic empathy may function as a powerful technology for eliciting readerly empathy, especially when its absence is strategically placed in conspicuous locations. The failures by many of Faulkner's narrators or characters to empathize with figures of difference may provoke a strong sense of empathy on the part of the reader toward these abused textual "Others"—not merely because of the reader's own political leanings or ideological identifications, but because the text leads readers to witness and respond to the perceptual shortcomings of those who prejudge fellow humans as "Others."

Conclusion

To say that focalization in literary narratives strongly encourages readers to identify with particular perspectives on narrative events would seem to state the obvious. By figuratively "hearing" and/or "seeing" a story through particular characters' perspectives, we are prompted (if not coerced) into taking those characters' sides, thereby finding their opinions reasonable and their actions warranted. Yet the first-person narrative may not be the most effective "tool" for spurring readers to identification; the speaker's narrative "I" constantly reminds us that s/he is speaking for herself rather than speaking for us. A recent study on "experience taking" in literary narratives surprisingly found that when reading stories about a particular outgroup member, test subjects actually identified more with the protagonist when the narrative was related in the third person.[7] This study suggests that while

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[7] The study compared responses from college students to narratives told in both the first person and the third person. The narratives also varied the identity of the main character, alternately as a student at an unidentified university (which they defined as an "ingroup identification" due to the subjects' status as college students) or as a student from a particular university that was different from the test subjects (which they defined as an outgroup

test subjects recognized the protagonist as an "Other," the othering mechanism of third-person narration actually led them to identify with that protagonist, perhaps because they found themselves in the same situation as the narrator vis-à-vis the protagonist. Yet third-person narration does not inevitably lead to identification with literary characters, any more than first-person narration does; it can also be employed to disparage or to ridicule. Moreover, third-person narration that is too one-sided or that presents only positive characteristics may not be as effective, as my discussion of *The Heroic Slave* in Chapter Two has suggested.

The three novels analyzed in this chapter elicit readerly empathy for specific characters through the individual nuances of each text's narrative voice. Nick Carraway, with all of his protestations, self-contradictions, and petty judgments, convinces us that there *was* "something gorgeous" about Jay Gatsby, although Gatsby was a dealer of bootleg liquor, operating under an assumed name, whose "great" aspiration was to steal another man's wife. The narrator of *Their Eyes Were Watching God* persuades us to find it noble and triumphant that Janie Mae Crawford Killicks Starks Woods repeatedly trades one husband for another and winds up picking beans "on the muck" of the Everglades with a man who beats her, before a (cleansing?) flood washes all their worldly goods away. The narrator of *Go Down, Moses* shows us that many of the (white) legal authorities of Yoknapatawpha County fundamentally misread the very narratives of southern culture that the novel purports to tell. These three modernist novels perform remarkable acrobatics of narrative perspective in order to elicit particular responses from readers, and they speak to us in voices that are in turns poetic, idiomatic, idiosyncratic, grandiose, embellished, and enigmatic. Yet each text conveys fundamental truths about the human experience in ways that are neither didactic nor reductive.

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identification). See Kaufman & Libby, "Changing Beliefs and Behavior Through Experience-Taking," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 103.1 (2012): 1-19.

Though their rhetorical strategies are as divergent as their narrative voices, these novels demonstrate the power of well-crafted narratives to transport us to fictive worlds, to make their characters come alive, to entertain and to instruct, and to change us in the process.

Conclusion

FROM NARRATIVE EMPATHY TO MEANINGFUL CHANGE

While I was researching and writing this dissertation, debates over empathy made national headlines on more than one occasion. During the 2009 confirmation hearings of Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor, President Obama's statements about the need for judicial empathy were circulated by media outlets, and his claim that empathy was a necessary quality for jurists brought about a series of attacks from political conservatives—including former Supreme Court nominee Robert Bork, who complained, "I don't even know what that means" (qtd in Taylor 32). In the wake of Obama's 2012 reelection, many pundits focused on two key factors: national demographic trends favoring Democrats (particularly Obama's strong advantage among young voters and the fast-growing Latino/a population) and the so-called "empathy factor." As early as April 2012, *The Washington Post* noted that Obama enjoyed a significant lead among independent voters who were asked which candidate "better understands the economic problems people in this country are having" (Cillizza & Blake). The *Washington Post* editors hypothesized that this question would serve as the single best measure for predicting the election's outcome, and the election results seemed to confirm their prediction. But Obama's so-called "empathy edge" quickly prompted critiques from the right. *National Review* columnist Kevin D. Williamson argued that empathy "precludes…consideration, thought, and analysis" and serves as a "gateway to the most vulgar and intellectually indefensible kind of identity politics" (34).

These ongoing debates demonstrate that the benefits of empathy—or at least preconceptions about empathy—remain salient in contemporary American political and philosophical discourse. Yet these concerns are far from new. Since Plato and Aristotle recorded their theories of artistic representation and its various effects on audiences (and probably as far back as our earliest storytelling ancestors), humans have employed and analyzed the power of narrative to prompt imaginative identification with the situations, behaviors, and attitudes of other humans. As the preceding pages have demonstrated, narrative empathy results from a complicated interplay between *formal qualities* (including, but not limited to emplotment, perspective, narrative voice, characterization, conflict and resolution); *personal factors* (including, but not limited to the reader's race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, national and regional origin, religious beliefs, political orientation, previous experience, and linguistic abilities); and *authorial information* that characterizes the narrative's creation and transmission—especially regarding the author's identity and the purported "truth" or "fiction" that the narrative is thought to represent. These three categories correspond to James Phelan's triangular model of rhetorical reader response, based on author, text, and reader.

Because literary critics should not presume to speak for other readers or didactically to instruct others on how they *should* respond to particular narratives, I have offered my arguments in this dissertation as a set of potentially testable hypotheses, in the hopes that social scientists and neuroscientists might determine which factors exert the strongest influences upon particular readers. The possibility of moving from qualitative literary criticism toward a more empirical or quantitative approach does not arise from any suspicion that traditional methodologies of literary scholarship are no longer useful; rather, they

represent my strong belief that neither the social sciences nor the emerging fields of brain science have fully addressed the complexity of human narratives. If future interdisciplinary approaches to narrative empathy—or, more broadly, what might be called "the psychology of reading"—are able to shed light on the complicated nexus of readers' responses to particular narratives, their investigations will be enriched by the contributions of literary critics, practiced in the nuanced methods of close reading and formal analysis. Likewise, if human narratives can be considered as illustrations or reflections of the complexity of social cognition, narratologists' insights should inform neuroscientists' work, just as developments in neuroscience should inform narratology.

Because the catalog of human narratives is so capacious, posing an almost unlimited supply of stories and situations, it is difficult to reach any sweeping conclusions that profess to hold true for all narratives or all readers. However, over years of reading and teaching literary narratives, I have discerned some emerging patterns that might be considered "rules of thumb." These rules will not always hold true, but I believe they generally will—when other factors (such as Forrest "Asa" Carter's membership in the Ku Klux Klan, as discussed in the Introduction) do not prove more salient. Some seem fairly self-evident, such as the notion that reading a first-person narrative inclines the reader to identify with the protagonist (even when the reader attempts to resist such identifications). To read another's "I" is to assume that person's perspective, whether consciously or subconsciously. Yet this "simple" statement is not as simple as it may appear: does the reader of an autobiographical account take the perspective of the *narrating* or *narrated* "I"? The answer is probably both, but to varying extents. When, for example, Mark Twain's narrating "I" gently ridicules his childhood self in *Old Times on the Mississippi*, we are likely to identify differently with the

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narrator and the protagonist—even though we know that they are both, in some sense, "Mark Twain" or Samuel Clemens. The fact that the child protagonist is young and naïve may incline us to share the narrator's judgments about him; however, this rhetorical situation may also incline us to find the autobiographer trustworthy, clever, and humorous. Other autobiographical texts, such as Eaton's "Leaves from the Mental Portfolio of an Eurasian" (discussed in Chapter Four), demonstrate much less distance between the narrating and narrated "I." Readers of such narratives are likely to feel a greater immediacy of the narrative's action—in part because of the use of present-tense narration and the sense that past conflicts continue to characterize her life in the moment of writing. As a result, we may find ourselves identifying strongly with Eaton's childhood self—as many of my students have reported. And although both of these examples come from autobiographical texts, the principles that structure readers' responses would likely hold true for fictional first-person narratives as well. My interest in narratology is due in part to my belief that regardless of genre, human narratives are constructed (whether intentionally or unintentionally) according to psychological principles that, while not perfect prognosticators, are generally predictive of readers' responses.

As I discussed in Chapter Four, a recent study on "experience-taking"—which is not perfectly synonymous with my definition of empathy, but which closely approximates it—revealed that test subjects become more invested in literary characters, and therefore less likely to judge them harshly or to close off the possibility of narrative empathy, as narratives progress.[1] This research suggests that readers enter into a narrative more open to suggestion (and therefore more likely to identify with narrators and characters) and then grow

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[1] See note 11 on page 210.

increasingly judgmental, based on the events that occur in a particular storyworld and the characters' reactions to those events. This identification can be thwarted or hampered by revelations of categorical difference early in narratives, but as the data revealed, revelations of categorical difference later in narratives has a decreased effect of "disidentification." In other words, once we identify with specific narrators or characters, it becomes increasingly difficult to rescind that identification as narratives progress. Many texts (including "Benito Cereno," as discussed in Chapter Two) play on this predisposition—whether intentionally or unintentionally—and therefore challenge readers to rethink their initial views, assumptions, judgments, and commitments.

My overarching argument in this dissertation, formed from an initial hypothesis that has been borne out through my engagements with a large number of narratives (both as a reader and a teacher) over the past seven years, is that our judgments about how characters think, feel, and behave within the context of their particular storyworlds become more influential than any categorical identifications that we forge—either with or against characters—based on personal similarities or differences. This argument contradicts (or at least qualifies) Aristotle's belief that "we pity those who are like us in age, character, disposition, social standing, or birth; for in all these cases it appears more likely that the same misfortune may befall us also… what we fear for ourselves excites our pity when it happens to others" (*Rhetoric* 78). While it may be true that the categorical factors Aristotle describes (age, character, disposition, and so on) incline us as readers toward or against certain initial identifications, I believe his model ultimately fails to account for the power of narrative to inspire the human imagination. Against this Aristotelian model, I argue that judgments based on moral and emotional reasoning are ultimately more influential than shared experiences or

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categorical identifications—especially when authors of carefully crafted narratives find ways to delay or defray the empathy-inhibiting and tribalist impulses that are shared by most humans.

If we can imagine how characters in particular situations might feel—"feeling their pain," as the old adage goes—and if we approve of (or at least understand) their responses to the challenges that they face, we can identify with them, whether or not we share their age, character, disposition, or any other categorical factors. Indeed, it is when literature inspires us to see the world from the perspective of someone completely different from ourselves (however that difference is perceived or described) that human narratives reveal their power, offering us hopeful, cosmopolitan visions of a world without Others.

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