

2013

Affective Reconfigurations: A New Politics of Difference

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**AFFECTIVE RECONFIGURATIONS:
A NEW POLITICS OF DIFFERENCE FOR THE 21st-CENTURY U.S. LITERARY
COMMUNITY**

**BY
LAURIE RODRIGUES**

**A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN
ENGLISH**

UNIVERSITY OF RHODE ISLAND

2013

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY DISSERTATION
OF
LAURIE RODRIGUES

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Abstract

My dissertation is concerned with experiences of individualization in the context of ethnic group identification; and by extension, the instabilities inherent to defining certain American novels as ethnic and others as mainstream. I read American novels published since 1960 that do not fit into either categorization and have come under critical fire for their respective presentations of certain ethnic groups. These texts include J.D. Salinger's *Franny and Zooey*, Carlene Hatcher Polite's *The Flagellants*, *Almanac of the Dead* by Leslie Marmon Silko, and *The Human Stain* by Philip Roth. These novels structure the narrative present through characters' crises of individual identity. I argue that through these scenes the novels reveal, not only how group identification involves an attachment to a shared narrative about oneself and others, but also the weight of these attachments on the individual who cannot perceive themselves within the group's narrative or institutional canon. I argue that these novels comprise an alternative genre that offers new senses of ethnicity for a multicultural United States. My method blends discourse analysis, narratology, and aesthetic theory to read characters' crises in specific social contexts, developing what is collective about individual endeavors for social survival. In conclusion, by perceiving the present as structured through emotional turmoil, we may begin to better understand larger social narratives about meanings and experiences of agency that have surfaced since 1960 and remain of crucial concern to present scholars. The characters' struggles for autonomy—from family, community, and capital—that are presented in these narratives point to an ideological shift in how scholars posit ethnicity in a multicultural United States. Overall, my dissertation highlights a process of social change that occurs on every-day, expressive registers and the role that narrative plays in re-mediating emotion into new political identifications.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Naomi Mandel for her support and guidance during this project's writing process, for furnishing deadlines when I needed them, and for her great ideas. I would also like to thank all the members of my dissertation committee for their advice along the way and for their patience with me in the face of obstacles. Thanks must also go to Michelle Caraccia for her organization and the support I found in her matchless dedication to helping students. Thanks to the library staff, at both the URI Kingston and Providence campuses. I would also like to thank my graduate student colleagues—those who have moved on, those still in the thick, and those just beginning—for your friendship, your support, and your feedback. I would like to thank my mock interview committee for offering me a glimmer of hope for post-dissertation normalcy and for showing me how to get out of my own way when discussing this project. Thanks also go to the English Department faculty and Dean of the Graduate School for investing in me and helping me to complete this project. And thank you to my friends at Birkbeck, who never ceased pushing and inspiring me through completion. Finally, I would like to thank Etienne Balibar, Drucilla Cornell, Costas Douzinas, Creston Davis, and Wendy Brown for their discussions with me and feedback on various aspects of this project.

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Introduction

My research is invested in the innovation of a socially progressive method for reading and research in ethnic American literatures, emphasizing discursive and theoretical flexibility in comparative examinations. This dissertation takes as its object of inquiry a faction of American novels, published since 1960, that have been critically-disparaged and culturally-displaced for their depictions of particular groups. Considered neither properly literary nor popular, and falling outside the canons of their respective areas of ethnic study, I argue that these texts reveal how ethnic novels are implicitly expected to work with and within certain definitions of group identification. Through my examination of how affect is produced within the novels and echoed in their critical receptions, I argue that by deploying new vocabularies to engage the texts' depictions of ethnic groups, we can develop compelling readings of how processes of individualization are in tension with group identification.

Examining affect through the states of emotional turmoil that link the novels' protagonists, I blend narratology and discourse analysis to consider how the novels suggest that group identification is unstably tied to questions of genre and type. The protagonists' turbulences arise from their frustration with how they are constituted within their respective communities, as they are unable to understand themselves within their groups' canons and discourses. My study therefore shows how these novels draw the reader's attention to what is collective about individuals' endeavors for social survival. This suggests the existence of an alternative genre that is critical and reflective of intra-ethnic social injustices such as classism, bullying, and sexism, among others.

Is it useful to talk about ethnic identifications without deploying their panoply of attendant discourses because, as the novels demonstrate, discussion of ethnicity creates a particular atmosphere. Rather than recreate that atmosphere in the work that I do, my project will instead probe these atmospheres and consider why certain affectively fraught novels—published during a fraught time in society and academia, where issues of diversity and inclusion are concerned—warrant deeper investigation than they have heretofore received. I suggest that my method may help readers begin to better understand meanings and experiences of ethnicity and multiculturalism in America since 1960, as I examine social and theoretical issues of particularity and nationalism that have surfaced since 1960 and remain concerns for scholars today.

In each chapter, I examine one novel and its critical reception; the texts include J.D. Salinger's *Franny and Zooey* (1960), Carlene Hatcher Polite's *The Flagellants* (1967), Leslie Marmon Silko's *Almanac of the Dead* (1991), and *The Human Stain* (2001) by Philip Roth. This project takes on the question of what it is that these novels all have in common which has caused them to fall between the cultural cracks, so to speak. Each novel, and its surrounding critical discourses, serves as an occasion to examine: first, assumptions concerning how ethnic American literatures are expected to participate in literary realism¹; what constitutes ethnic identity as identification with a group; and finally, what has historically been assumed to constitute American literature, when we consider how these novels manage the issue of individuality within group identifications. Interestingly, the novels all configure group identification as an atmospheric phenomenon, as communities of feeling that are organized around personal affections and politicized interests. And the crises of

individual identity—suffered by a character, the narrator, or both—which structure the novels’ present are framed as disruptions to this atmosphere. These crises appear as scenes that suddenly interrupt the narrator and the novel’s action, throwing the narrative voice off balance. This project will show how these crises are valuable moments embodying reflection and potentializing cultural change.

The characters studied within each of the novels perpetrate, in some fashion, a self-reflexive impulse through which they ruthlessly seek to understand—indeed, themselves, but predominantly—their community environments. As self-reflexivity is synonymous with critical distance, here it is posited as a stepping outside of oneself as a member of a community. However, this stepping outside is properly impossible for these characters. That is, the interval out of which the character steps is constituted by the same affective atmosphere as that interval *into* which he or she steps at the moment of reflexivity: any self-reflexivity is itself affected by the extensive (i.e., social) forces and atmospheres which give rise to the reflecting self. As a result, these characters present troubling portraits ethnic typicality. As they variously act in defiance against their social formation’s discourses and assumptions, these characters also possess deeply troubled psychic interiorities. Doing battle with intimate issues of familial/ ancestral exceptionalism, inter-group violence, and self-loathing, these characters reveal the disappointments, tensions, and possibilities that emerge from putting the allegedly affirmative notion of ethnic particularity in direct contact with personal states of crisis, vulnerability, and distress.²

Taken as representatives of Jewish, African, and Native American experiences, these characters have garnered significant critical ire, and the novels in which they are

showcased have largely fallen out of academic circulation. Further, the novels' other elements, such as biased or unreliable narrators and harsh depictions of particular ethnic groups, have heretofore distracted readers and reaped still more critical distaste. These facets of the novels have proven such a distraction precisely because their readers have been embedded, socially and academically, in the very same discourses and affective atmospheres that give rise to the characters' emotional strife. Within the texts, these discourses create particular atmospheres, which "get into" the characters, as Teresa Brennan might say, and deeply disturb them in various ways. And like the characters, readers have been unable to step outside of the discourses with which ethnicity is traditionally aligned—particularly concerning affirmative notions of nationalism and particularity. I argue that this speaks more to the perspective limitations of the novels' readers, than it does to the novels' aesthetic flaws.

Interestingly, the perspective limitations of readers reflect the limitations of each of the novels' narrators, as well: the tense relation between readers and characters that is recorded in the novels' critical receptions is uncannily echoed in the tense relationships that exist in the novels themselves, between narrators and characters. Tracking the main characters' interactions with others and their wider worlds, I pay particular attention to how each narrator treats and interprets the characters' inner lives. In each of the novels, character and narrator are at odds—the narrators cannot make sense, within their discourses and vocabularies, of the characters' struggles and erratic or seemingly irrational behaviors. And like the narrators, readers have also been unable to make sense of the characters' struggles and seemingly irrational behaviors; like the narrators, readers have responded to the characters' difficulties

with modes of interpretation that merely describe and disparage their opacities. I argue that, as a result, readers have been problematically unable to consider the purpose of the characters' antagonistic relation to the novels' narrators; just as they have been unable to critically engage, or consider the stakes of, the intra-ethnic social injustices that are perpetrated against these characters. Finally, but perhaps most importantly, readers have been unable to theorize the function of the characters' emotional turmoil in relation to their group identifications.

Thus, I examine the source and function of these responses, by both readers and narrators, illustrating and questioning the discursive and affective nature of ethnic group identity. My project's method functions to actualize the reader's ability to distinguish symbolically-based judgment (or, affect) from critical engagement with their functions. Habitual modes of interpretation promulgate tenuous, symbolic relations among ethnicities, while my affective mode *embodies* these very interpretive encounters. I argue that affect constitutes the very process of the responsive critical act; and, as I illustrate with each of the novels' critical receptions, affect precisely impacts how one conducts literary criticism itself.

Therefore, rather than occupying in any orthodox fashion the existent discourses or vocabularies through which these ethnicities are usually engaged, my method tracks each novel's production and transmission of affect to the reader, analyzing, at once, how the novels inhabit discourses on ethnicity and group identifications, as well as how they diverge from these vocabularies, particularly within the rapport between character and narrator. By exploring the complexity of affective manifestations within the novels' main characters, examining the agendas

and perspectives of the narrators, and tracking the transmission of affect to the reader from the text, this project utilizes the critically disparaged and culturally displaced ethnic novel toward answering questions concerning the comparability of ethnic identifications: What does it mean to encounter the unbearable—the all-too-spoken and already-interpreted—in one’s own identity, when that encounter confirms one’s residence in the typical, one’s political position and movement in the social? Such questions are important to a comparative engagement with ethnicity because they attend to the stakes of defining the general and the particular; as well as to the necessarily untimely character of, not only these difficult novels to their historical context, but also of affect’s relevance to ethnic comparative study.³ Accordingly, I explore the nature of the challenge that these texts pose to readers, encountering them—not merely as representatives of African, Native and Jewish American experiences, but—as indicators of the need in literary studies for a new vocabulary through which to imagine ethnic differences that does not rely upon traditional concepts of particularity or nationalism, as such.⁴

Toward creating a new vocabulary for literary studies to engage with ethnic identifications, I propose a methodology that has its foundation in affect theory. Affect theory is a radically open and interdisciplinary critical field for which one is hard-pressed to find a single definition; nevertheless, here, I think of this theoretical framework as a sociology of the unexpected encounter. Key to the field of affect theory is the joint writing of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, as well as the theories of Teresa Brennan, concerning affective transmission. To shape my project’s methodology, I adopt from Deleuze and Guattari the definition of what affect is; while

from Brennan's work, I adapt a theory of what affect, functionally, does. Deleuze and Guattari define affect as a visceral, unformed force that precedes both consciousness and language, and may be transmitted between bodies, whether people or objects.⁵ Understood in this way, the effects of affect are necessarily involuntary, driving thought and engagement that is not always positive or productive.

In terms of how affect functions and accomplishes its involuntary effects, I adapt Teresa Brennan's theory of affect's movement via transmission. As Brennan teaches, the transmission of affect occurs at the moment of judgment, particularly when a subject is overcome by the projection or introjection of negative affects. Brennan asserts that the transmission of affect is both a social and cultural phenomenon—it operates within the mediation of meaning via symbolic forms (5). Since society does not present ethnicity as given, or devoid of meaning, I adapt Brennan's ideas to both the act of reading and narrative construction. Via the novels' critical receptions, I engage the transmission of affect between readers and the text; and I also read affects' production and transfer within the novels themselves. Through this bifurcated approach, I demonstrate how the text operates both as an enclosed environment in which characters struggle against their communities' judgments; as well as an extensive environment in which the reader judges, interprets, and is affected by the actions and attitudes of the characters.⁶

Other scholars have activated affect in studies of ethnic literature; however, while scholars such as Anne Anling Cheng have taken a more literary-historical approach to the role of affect within ethnic literary study, my approach is sociologically-oriented.⁷ In this project, affect and its work upon the reader provides

the starting point for each chapter's re-reading of these novels. Affect situates the reader in relation to narrative voice—and by extension, that voice's relationship to characters and environment. I theorize it as a connective element holding great potential to reveal unexpected, and often uncomfortable, socio-cultural relationships. My aim in this is to provide a thicker description of ethnic identifications and their presentation in fiction, moving my analyses from an exposition of each novel's reception, to the novels themselves.⁸ My examination of this fraught process, taken as rendered experience, offers an opportunity to locate each novel's characters and narrator in terms of their wider meaning—that is, what each is trying to accomplish. Therefore, this project is premised on the notion that we can thicken our description of group identification by offering an account of what these narrators are trying to accomplish through their perspectively-limited representations of characters' struggles for individualization.

Thus, my project's method endeavors to reveal for my reader the inevitable part of reading which one absorbs/ refracts, and how this movement marks the coincidence of the human subject (i.e., the reader and/ or literary character) as well as the qualified object (i.e., ethnicity). This is not to suggest that this project posits ethnic identification as merely so many effects of non-rational, non-material drives that are asserted for the sake of social attachment and emotional fulfillment. My understanding of ethnicity is more complex, constituted by a combination of politically-oriented, personalized interest and affective resonances on both personal and social registers. And indeed, critical responses to the texts that I encounter demonstrate how previous, symbolically-based judgments, when applied to ethnic

identities, engender instability. My affective approach to these novels makes evident this instability within the texts as well, simultaneously revealing other precarities that are inherent in the symbolically-oriented, interpretive reader's engagement with them.

The preservation of nationalism and particular ethnic identity against absorption and assimilation has concerned scholars since before the advent of ethnic studies; yet, these concerns present no such misgivings to the writers whose novels I engage.⁹ These novels show that assimilation is not the real danger to the self or the group. Rather, the individual, emotionally fraught characters' reactive assertions of autonomy are ironically presented as the primary threat; the novels reveal that these threats are purely symbolic, endangering their communities' shared meanings and narratives of self and other. That is, the unlikely cadre of writers that I engage here all write with a common, implicit function of the novel in mind: to refuse goals of purity concerning direct ethnic experience and authenticity, and to shed light on the injustices that occur within purportedly affirmative communities when one is affectively at odds with the group. The writers and texts with which I engage work to envision a flexible, humane conception of ethnic identifications, holding each to a common standard of rigorous observation—hoping, we may presume, to encompass an increasing truth about life in contemporary America.

Against rising tides of critical formalism, ethnic nationalism, and multiculturalism, these writers offer novels which, for their respective decades, are unsettling and untimely; this is where I find the basis of the novels' comparativity.¹⁰ My method conceives comparativity, then—not as a process by which fixed distinctions and similarities of social groups are held abreast of one another, but

rather—as obliging difference by interrupting, or suspending, it via mediation and negotiation. It is with this in mind that my project presents readings that insist upon affect and politics’ intimate entanglement, asserting that affect and sensation fashion a distinctive asset for thought. I argue that it is affect which suspends ethnic difference in the late-twentieth and twenty-first centuries. This project proposes the existence of an alternative, untimely brand of American realism that demonstrates our ability to have knowledge of America’s ethnic diversity and its experiences, without reliance upon a one-dimensional, regulatory symbolic imagination.

Chapter 1 of this dissertation reads J.D. Salinger’s critically denigrated novel, *Franny and Zooey*, taking as its primary focus the myriad implications of ‘genius’ protagonist, Franny Glass’s, nervous breakdown. Franny is figured in the novel as an implicit portrait of a model minority; she is exceptionally beautiful, brilliant, has been educated since infancy in Eastern philosophies, and is half Jewish. However, as her characterization does not gel with conventional ideations of model minority status, Salinger’s critics read Franny as a snobbish, distasteful testament to Salinger’s obsessive devotion to his Glass family characters; she is a character, simply, with which the reader cannot relate. Yet, perhaps ironically, Salinger utilizes Franny’s nervous breakdown as a means of challenging the regulatory, disciplinary exigencies of formalism’s view of literary realism. Rather than driven by a desire to critique the contemporary social formation, Salinger’s *Franny and Zooey* is first an attempt to render readable and sensible the complexity of the pre-personal, irrational quality of society’s assumptions concerning model forms of difference. This reading of Salinger’s novel is made available by, and as a result of, its surface, conceptual

qualities—by the clinical coldness of its diagnostic import concerning Franny. The formalist critics' failure to recognize this speaks to their sense that a priori valued critical formalism (and its attendant universalizing humanism) has no purchase on Salinger's Glass family novel; and interestingly, this sense negatively manifests in the affective quality of the novel's critical attacks.

Franny Glass's resistance of her model identity via nervous breakdown helps the reader to understand the seemingly contradictory social and political structures, dynamics, and potentials of our intensive contemporary age. Although *Franny and Zooey* is not conventionally considered an ethnic novel, nor Salinger an ethnic writer, the context and function of Franny's nervous breakdown echoes characters' struggles in this dissertation's subsequent chapters. Personal identity and its appended interests, Salinger teaches, are upheld by social and academic domains inasmuch as its terms may be simplified to fit within abstract, symbolic associations. In this way, Salinger adopts identity as a field of convergence; identity is a cracked surface upon which the affective labors of interpretation and consumption collide with the para-consistent function of personal identification. What critics ultimately seem to begrudge Salinger is his refusal to cater to their shared sense of authenticity. Nevertheless, Salinger shows his concern for the self's ability to lapse into the social and academic realms' simplistic, mechanical formations of identity through his unyielding revelation of what this authenticity actually is: the engine driving a separatist culture industry. It is this revelation by Salinger which informs this dissertation's second chapter.

Chapter 2 examines Jimson and Ideal, the aptly-named African American protagonist couple within Carlene Hatcher Polite's culturally displaced novel, *The*

Flagellants. This melancholic novel of inter-racial violence and self-loathing was met with, at best, critical ambivalence and confusion. The primacy of the uncomfortable, affective responses solicited by the *The Flagellants* reveal readers' distaste for its depiction of African American communities, presented as quick to cast off individuals who will not prescribe to their affectively-produced senses of identity. As a result, the text received no scholarly attention and virtually disappeared from the American literary scene until the early 1990s, when a small cache of scholars tried, and arguably failed, to rediscover the text. Interestingly, the social and academic atmospheres contributing to *The Flagellants'* exile from American cultural legitimization—black American history, literary history, and the machinations of capital—are, ironically and prophetically, taken up in the novel by Polite herself.

Polite's Jimson and Ideal grapple with longstanding poverty and dysfunctional personal histories; this fosters in both diversely-manifested affective paralyses and strong senses of self-disgust. These affective states come to inhere to their conceptions of blackness, or 'being different'; thus, racial identification becomes shackled to an existentialist notion of 'authentic experience' via emotion: Ideal's paralytic, passive corporeality is called forth in her repetitious altercations with Jimson, as Jimson endlessly replays narcissistic, self-reflexive arguments affirming his self's preciousness. Their relationship illustrates for the reader that ethnicity is a broad, but particularizing, formulation that allows one to make assumptions about subjective experience; however, the reader so jarringly encounters Jimson and Ideal's respective personal experiences that his/ her assumptions are essentially void. Both

protagonists understand (in their distinct ways) being different solely through these experiences, and interestingly, if disturbingly, they seem ratify various stereotypes.

In this chapter, I combine Teresa Brennan's ideas concerning the transmission of affect, moving forward a method for thinking about the novel's multivalent play of embodied and sensory experience. This comes to reveal the novel's examination of exile from cultural legitimization through its expression of individual identity as non-unitary, multiple and diasporic. Polite's novel fashions a crisis of position in which the reader perceives how people labor to maintain fantasies of themselves in the face of evidence that their identities do not add. Portraying economic and political precariousness, Polite forces the reader to face the concept of race as a stable position: a mimetic, representational fantasy.

This notion of the mimetic fantasy of separatist identification drives the auto-critical method which I employ in Chapter 3.¹¹ Here, I explore Leslie Marmon Silko's *Almanac of the Dead*, an extensive, nonlinear narrative that illustrates an apocalyptic view of late-twentieth century America. The text features a cast of about seventy degenerate characters who vary in ethnicity, sexual orientation, class and locale; yet, Silko joins them all via their common participation in "sorcery." This sorcery figures, according to the novel's feature artifact, an ancient Mayan codex entitled the *Almanac of the Dead*, as so many means by which an individual, group, or system enacts an insatiable, ruthless lust for power and wealth in the name of recognition and immortality. According to the almanac's fables, which eerily resonate with countless of the novel's vignettes, sorcery is an analog for the effects of a specific variety of historical narration: the concept of linear time, as well as culturally-specific forms of

‘knowledge’ are all relayed as ‘nationalist’—or Western-style—forms of historical narration. These forms of historical narration generate hegemonic distinctions between self and other, which manifest as fear, hatred, and/ or suspicion among groups; this is the “sorcery” repeatedly called forth in Silko’s novel. Problematically, these hegemonic narrations isolate events, processes and people from a continuous conception of time; and as Silko and the almanac teach us, a continuous conception of time benignly blurs distinctions between self and other, subsequently preventing the exploitation of ‘Others’ for which the United States has become notorious, and may ultimately prevent the imminent destruction of the world portended by the almanac.

Silko’s arguably meandering and violent novel received deeply-divided reviewer feedback upon publication. Critics of the mainstream media generally saw the novel as, either a testament to its writer’s personal prejudice against white people; a vicious prescriptive for an underclass revolt; or proof that Silko is not a skilled writer, as the novel features no ostensibly relatable—or even likeable—characters. Smaller press and academic reviews, however, praised the novel for its capturing the desperation of the disenfranchised; the unreliability of traditional historical narrative; and the fundamental injustice lurking at the core of the cultural knowledges constituting self and other. Chapter 3 conceives both the novel’s positive and negative reviews as products of the very hegemonic constructions against which Silko’s novel speaks; seeming to therefore demand an auto-critical reading method, my encounter with the novel will reveal affective links between the novel’s seemingly unrelated mythical, historical and fictional narrative threads. Arguing that Silko does not privilege any history or ethnicity above any other, my reading will reconceive the

purpose of ethnic nationalist literature and show the novel's apocalyptic image of America as, finally, hopeful—a shrugging off of the palimpsest of history in favor of a truly immanent understanding of dynamic human life.

In this project's final chapter, I examine Philip Roth's well-known, if audacious, text, *The Human Stain*. This novel figures as a cornerstone for my project, bringing together the comparable, affective states and concepts attending ethnicity that the previous three novels draw out. Growing up amidst racial prejudice and economic strife, Roth's light-skinned African American protagonist, Coleman Silk, instrumentally chooses to reject his parentage and identify as Jewish. For nearly fifty years, Coleman successfully fools academic colleagues, friends and even his wife. When his model life is ruined, the seventy-one-year-old Coleman seeks out author (and the novel's narrator), Nathan Zuckerman, in the hopes of reaffirming his reputation and sense of himself. However, through Zuckerman's narration and acquaintanceship with Coleman, the crucial importance of one's personal history and sense of identity is revealed.

The bulk of the novel unfolds as Zuckerman's retroactive reconstruction of Coleman's life—which he largely invents. Through this retelling, which revolves around Coleman's various relationships with women over the course of his life, Roth's widely-read text gradually reveals an important relationship between desire, affect, and ethnicity. Tensions between group identity and individuality take center stage in Zuckerman's story, questions concerning sexuality, propriety, and Coleman's motivations in his lifelong pursuit of whiteness consistently derail the narrator's attempts to make sense of his subject. Coleman appears as apparently bereft of

affective identification—ethnic or otherwise; and to Zuckerman, he seems a figure who does not belong in the world. *The Human Stain* reveals the relations that conspire in the construction and performance of self, exposing the affectations that are inscribed in actuality and inform—not only the characters’, but—the reader’s abstract means for making sense of people and events. Through Coleman’s various relations to women, Roth exposes both the virtues and the dangers of group identification, however diversely conceived: while its intent may be euphemistic or optimistic, group identification is nevertheless formed around perceived threats to the image, of both society and the self, which it works to uphold.

Although widely-read, *The Human Stain* has met with significant negative criticism since its publication, particularly concerning the pragmatic ethnic switching of Coleman Silk. All told, I will illustrate how these readings serve and function within the very systems which Zuckerman relates as deeply troubling Coleman—and all of the characters that this project examines. In the end, we find that these novels explicitly speak to the methods through which we may reconfigure our conceptions of ethnic difference in twenty-first century American literary study: the perspective and vocabulary borne out of the texts’ affective transmissions reveal affect’s central role in making and un-making the separatist, nationalist associations we have come to understand as ethnicity and comparability.

Chapter 1

The Affective Labor of Identification: Conceptual Realism and Salinger's Franny Glass

Jerome David Salinger became famous with the late-1950s' formalist, literary critical circles for *The Catcher in the Rye* and *Nine Stories*. His subsequent publication of *Franny and Zooey* (c.1961), however—a merger of two less-admired pieces of short fiction—failed to win him similar literary critical praise. While a popular target for critics, the novel was hardly applauded, regarded by 1960s reviewers and scholars as extensive, confusing and rather cult-like in its subject matter; by scholars, it was almost uniformly deemed clumsy and misleading. In an early critical essay sarcastically titled, “J.D. Salinger: ‘Everybody’s Favorite,’” Alfred Kazin set the conditions on which Salinger’s *Franny and Zooey* would be relegated to the margins of literary realism: for adoring too deeply his “horribly precocious” Glass family children, particularly main character, Franny Glass (115). Kazin writes: “I am sorry to have to use the word ‘cute’ in respect to Salinger, but there is absolutely no other word that for me so accurately typifies the self-conscious charm and prankishness of his own writing and his extraordinary cherishing of his favorite Glass characters” (115).

Indeed, it was with Salinger’s version of literary realism in *Franny and Zooey*—his stasis-encouraging, excessive (and, arguably adoring) attention to minute character detail—with which formalists of the late-1950s and 60s struggled the most.¹²

Of particular interest to these critics was a literary work's the formal elements: narrative style/ technique, structure, imagery, along with larger elements such as plot and characterization. They took literature to be a source of meaning, a form of knowledge in itself; thus, a work's meaning could only be retained by examining these intrinsic elements. By extension, the evaluative formalists named 'greatness' in a work based upon the interdependence of a piece's form and content. For these critics, then, Salinger's narrative style in *Franny and Zooey* simply did not fulfill the conventional expectations of the form (realism); therefore, the work's content (here: characterization) was deemed incapable of bringing any meaning to bear upon the form.

According to convention, the realistic novel should open the reader to the process of identification, in which one character "represent[s] to the reader some aspect of his own conception of himself"; further, the 'modern-day' realistic American novel should re-present a heuristic, identitarian social normalcy within which a recognizable main character is not supported (O'Connor 17). That is, a realist novel *should* allow its reader to draw comfortable generalizations from its implicit background of "normal" society, which, over time, its generalized protagonist must either gain mastery of or be mastered by. However, *Franny and Zooey*'s main character, Franny Glass, is one with whom the reader simply *cannot* draw comforting generalizations, particularly since she cannot attach herself to, or regard as normal, the society in which the reader meets her.

Spouting torrents of literary, philosophical and theological references amidst a dizzying array of grievances against society, Franny (and her supporting cast of Glass

siblings) was condemned by most of Salinger's early critics as overtly snobbish and pretentious. Mary McCarthy, for instance, proclaimed: "the theme is the good people against the stupid phonies, and the good is all in the family, like a family-owned, 'closed' corporation [...] Outside are the phonies, vainly signaling to be let in" (131). Formalist, Joan Didion, also shelved *Franny and Zooey*, referring to it as "finally spurious, and what makes it spurious is Salinger's tendency to flatter the essential triviality within each of his readers, his predilection for giving instructions for living. What gives the book its extremely potent appeal is precisely that it is self-help copy" (79). Even John Updike, known for his critical generosity, charged Salinger with rendering Franny Glass in such a way as "not to particularize [an] imaginary [person], but to instill in the reader a mood of blind worship, tinged with envy" (123).

At first, Franny appears as a repressed character, struggling against a nervous breakdown in relation to her role in society and the family. Her society offers her no goals and no answers and she exists on its fringes, remote from the community, and cynical in her assessments of society (O'Connor 18-20). Nevertheless, while her character was a popular target for formalists, with Franny, Salinger seemed to fail in the creation of a protagonist with whom the reader might either identify or empathize. Given Franny's unusual level of intelligence, "extraordinary" prettiness, and the exacting narrators' deliberation over the minutest of her manners and gestures, Franny presents an extreme instance of repressed, alienated circumstances. Salinger portrays in Franny an excessive, and even *impossible*, figuration of intelligence, physical beauty and outspoken, malcontented social awareness. This, of course, amplifies her isolation, defeat and cynicism with respect to both the world of the novel and the

reader. Further, presumably due to her intelligence, Franny is conscious of her excessiveness, her endless criticism of society's/ people's imperfections, as well as her paranoid level of *awareness* concerning the damage possible to one's integrity at the hands of society; in this way, Franny determines her *own* abnormality with respect to society.

This determination by the excessive Franny is, at once, that which names the conditions of her breakdown *at the same time* as it conditions so many critics' dissatisfaction with this 'realistic' character. Franny extends, and even perverts, the formalist prescriptive for realistic characterization. She is not, properly speaking, *lacking* any of the traits prescribed to the realistic protagonist; instead, she embodies them to a hyperbolic, excessive degree. It is not the case, as the formalists have claimed, that Franny is not realistic. Rather, her characterization extends beyond the realistic, she is too much of everything that we expect in the realistic protagonist: more than intelligent, she is a "genius"; more than a member of her college's drama program, she is their star player; she is not magical or superhuman, but *all* of her abilities and features are consistently described as superlative. Further, while her grievances against society are justifiable, and we may even find ourselves able to relate to her alienated position on some level, these grievances and alienation subsume her character. She is ineffably *non-realistic* via her excess. With Franny, social abnormality becomes an auto-referential, identitarian position.

Interestingly, a select few of Salinger's early critics (and particularly those affiliated with the Chicago School) gestured toward this compelling facet of Franny's character.¹³ However, for them, the excessiveness of Franny's characterization

denoted a compelling appropriateness which Franny and the novel seemed to possess for early-1960s America. The myopia of *Franny and Zooey* and the stasis of its narrative action seemed to speak of an America where, as both Alfred Kazin and John Updike have put it, there seemed little left to do but *feel* (Kazin 119, Updike 122). In his review, Updike described the early-60s as an “age of nuance, of ambiguous gestures and psychological jockeying on a national and private scale.” Literary scholars, Bernice and Sanford Goldstein, have asserted that “the highly endowed, overburdened, critically conscious” Franny is a “representative of our time in history” (324). Speaking to Salinger’s apparent conviction that one’s intensive life matters more than one’s external existence, Kazin, Updike and the Goldsteins suggest that Salinger’s excessive realism bespeaks a brand of introversion which had been forced upon American history, post-1945.

The auto-referential dimension of Franny’s abnormality *almost* becomes her point of liberation: a critical consciousness which she, alone, seems to possess. However, in the novel’s second section (featuring her older brother, Buddy, as biased narrator), the reader is led to believe that Franny’s appraisals, of herself and others, are, in fact, *accurate*—she is portrayed, quite simply, as abnormal. Here, the liberatory effect of auto-referentiality takes an unexpected, perverse turn toward negation of negation. What unfolds in the first section as a semi-recognizable character within a semi-recognizable social formation is mutated and protracted, in the “Zooey” section, confronting the reader with a jarring, radically negative form of identity—unrecognizable as a ‘representative’ of any particular historical moment. As a result, for the majority of the novel, Franny’s self-imposed loneliness is so

fastidious, so abstracting, that (unlike in the traditional realist novel) the reader cannot make out who or *what* Franny *is*, let alone what her breakdown represents. We are only allowed to surmise who/ what, precisely, Franny/ her breakdown *is not*.

Little else was written on *Franny and Zooey*, or any of Salinger's work, following the 1960s, most likely because Salinger ceased publication of both novels and short fiction after 1965. It was not until the late-1990s when critics revisited *Franny and Zooey* once again—armed with 'new' critical theoretical approaches for reading the American novel.¹⁴ Turning away from explicit appraisals of novelistic style by way of form (the realist novel) and content (character), recent scholarship on *Franny and Zooey* has honed in on the novel's commingled emphases upon orthodox religiosity, 'mysticism' and Eastern religions, in terms of how these emphases relate to some understanding of the novel's theme. For instance, in a 1998 issue of *MELUS*, Dipti R. Pattanaik wrote on the prominence of Vedantic spiritualism in *Franny and Zooey*. Pattanaik substantiates the novel's oft-criticized 'silent' passages, which are awkwardly dispersed among its heavily dialogic scenes. Salinger's keen narrativistic attention to physical minutiae in these 'silent' passages, Pattanaik argues, evidence the writer's sensitivity to the complementary relationship between art, life and spirituality. Therefore, for Pattanaik, Franny's cantankerousness and social maladjustment, rather than pretentious or "spurious," are actually symptoms of her spiritual health.

Similarly interested in the hermeneutics of *Franny and Zooey*'s oddly placed, somehow sacred moments of silence, Myles Weber wrote a compelling piece in 2005 on the relationship between the man, Salinger, and the style of his later fiction. Against common criticism of Salinger's tendency to hide behind malcontented

characters, Myles maintains that Salinger is unabashedly present in his work. Rather than using his characters as a screen, Salinger's characters are *vehicles* for his enactment of the often contradictory, 'mystical' values that his fiction—and especially *Franny and Zooey*—seek to problematize. Squaring interestingly with Pattanaik's reading, Myles asserts that Salinger's narrativistic emphases upon character description, gesture, and variable dialogic 'silence,' bespeak his sensitivity to the ritualistic constructedness of the faith invested in social mores and authorial expectations.

Another compelling parallel between Pattanaik's and Myles' pieces: neither engages discussion of Franny's breakdown, or her role within Salinger's narrative economy of excessive detail. That is, neither scholar raises the question of Franny's own excessiveness and complexity, or how she might build upon Salinger's productive play of contingency concerning the mainstream's epistemic necessities for an individual's value, identity or the consequences of her actions. Franny's spiritual/social crisis preoccupies the whole of the novel, which, at least during the 1960s, fashioned a multivalent critical sticking point. The late trend of glossing the narrative stakes of her breakdown, reading certain of the novel's thematic strands and motifs, begs the question of why a critic might omit discussion of Salinger's protagonist. In the first *and* second sections of the novel, Franny's demeanor is marked by a melodramatic withdrawal from narrative action; yet, simultaneously, Salinger makes her excessively visible through his famous, if extreme, attention to minute descriptive detail. When Franny does dialogically participate in the narrative action, she manifests as an uncontrollable, ruthless insertion of personal opinions into objective

accounts/ circumstances. While formalists of the 60s found Franny's characterization an annoying means to reader-alienation, more current treatments of *Franny and Zooey* pay almost no attention to Franny's breakdown *or* Franny herself—a compelling point to which I will return.

Relatedly, and most recently, Amy Hungerford's *Postmodern Belief* has offered an interesting historicization of *Franny and Zooey*. Recalling the Goldsteins, Kazin and Updike, Hungerford defends the novel's appropriateness to its time in American political and literary critical history, vis-à-vis an examination of the once-criticized allusiveness of its characters' conversations. Published, according to Hungerford, at the dawn of an age of American cultural consciousness, she swiftly (if somewhat vaguely) attributes *Franny and Zooey*'s negative initial reception to an attendant, growing national sectarianism. Nevertheless, the popularity (if negative) of *Franny and Zooey* should not be surprising; according to Hungerford, in spite of America's growing skepticism, Americans desired to believe in *belief*. At the dawn of the 1960s, Hungerford maintains, Americans *wanted* to believe in the pith of religious belief, in the academy's righteousness, and so on. She refers to this as the "faith in faith" phenomenon and links it to the 1960s' (in contradistinction to the 1950s) association with spontaneity and creative self-expression. Hungerford outlines America's increasing social, political and cultural arbitrariness (i.e., its 'style without substance' modus operandi) in her attempt to justify the novel's appropriateness for its time *as well as* its contemporaneous critical denigration. In a manner similar to Myles and Pattanaik, Hungerford forgoes analysis of Salinger's protagonist, Franny Glass,

opting instead for an examination of her brother Zooey's role (who only appears in the novel's second section) to arrive at her conclusion.

Literary critics of the 60s used their assessments and theorizations toward the promulgation of an ideal: that is, the cohesive idea of an American literary realism. For these critics, the novel tells of how Americans explain to themselves where they have come from and where they are going, in relation to an excessive, affective impulse (e.g., an unconscious desire) which precedes and follows them. This very impulse in the mid-century critic demands that the 'realistic' American novelist give *form* to this otherworldly force (particularly through characterization). This idealism varies in its foci (the troublesome form of the novel; the appraisal of the protagonist, etc.), but is always identical in function: 'realism,' as such, is the means by which scholars detach themselves, and try to detach artistic expression, from the seemingly contradictory, all-revealing effects of the post-1960 American social formation—a point which the Goldsteins, Kazin and Updike begin to approach. From this detachment (a function of idealism), they define the parameters of mimetic, literary realism: the American subject tells her own story, she comes into existence through her own narrative. For these critics, narrative (or, representation) gives birth to the postwar American subject and constructs a possible space for meaning.

By contrast, more recent work such as Hungerford's, Pattanaik's and Myles's is focused in a common effort to account for Salinger's novel, in terms of both form and content, grounding their writings in an admiration of the popular, if obscure, American writer. However, overlooked within recent structures of thought is the fundamentally exclusionary impulse of adoring, affirming 'criticism.' Such

‘understanding’ and ‘tolerant’ evaluations are just as violent as the formalists’ sweeping, brutally descriptive interpretations—only perhaps less explicitly. These unquestioning, wholly affirmative reviews of Salinger’s work are committed to an idea of the writer’s singularity. They enfold Salinger (the man) and *Franny and Zooey* within an overarching narrative of the American 1950s/ 60s: the precarious structure of American identity/ authorship, and the contingency of mainstream social, political and academic values are named by these critics as *a priori*.

For the purposes of today’s *Franny and Zooey* scholars, seeking to show critical ‘tolerance’ over and against their forbears, such aspects of Salinger’s social formation need not be examined: the novel’s relationship with the structure of identity and mainstream social, political and academic values is taken, simply, as *mimetic*. Left unexamined, as *a priori* structures of which the novel is mimetic, these aspects become an implicit, totalizing logic for both narrative realism *and* history; within this totalizing logic, Salinger is sovereign. The implicit, totalizing structure behind today’s scholarly work on *Franny and Zooey* is commensurate with the function of the formalists’ ‘laws’ pertaining to literary realism. The spiritual supplementation of the novel’s work (e.g. the work of Salinger’s excessive realism) with ‘goodness,’ in both 1960s and contemporary scholarship, amounts to an endless quest for *meaning*. These critical practices (perhaps ironically) obliterate the immanent, social inclusiveness for which, I argue, the novel (figured through Franny Glass) labors.

This quest for meaning, in which both scholarly sets participate, is coaxed by *representation* (which may be argued as present in Salinger’s meticulous descriptions). Yet, in Salinger’s descriptive play-through-prose with the *visible*,

mimetic regime (read: representative) lies a problem with qualifying his novel as a work of literary realism. In addition to its idealistic associations, the essential problem with realism/ mimesis arguments lie in the reader's implicit encouragement to be in awe of the novel's main character, Franny Glass (as noted by Updike, among others)—in shock, disgust, envy—rather than to identify or even empathize with her. As early and recent critics are so assertively duty-bound by meaning, their readings are carried away by that task; they do not consider what task the *novel* might be trying to accomplish—apart from creating meaning.

By contrast, I argue that Salinger's novel tries to allow the complexity of relations, which *conspire* in realism, to appear. The novel's minute, stasis-encouraging attention to character visibility fashions it *conceptual*, in a manner which one might conventionally align with a visual image. Salinger's excessive, imagistic realism functions—not to re-create any aspect of social/ physical actuality (or an academic ideal) but—to express the virtual force of unrepresentable concepts and atmospheres which create and bear upon social/ physical actuality. Here, I simultaneously take to task the formalist focus upon aesthetic form/ content and the more recent critical attention paid to theme; the result is a turn away from multifarious modes of meaning-making/ ideal-maintenance, toward intensive visuality. While transcendent imperatives such as realistic characterization and theme do exist as problems and important component parts of the novel, I propose that they merely constitute spaces for the novel's many convergences.¹⁵ That is, they are *descriptive* of the novel, but cannot constitute analysis or critique. Moreover, engaging in 'critique'

of this variety promulgates the very problematic modes of meaning-making and valuation which Salinger's text implicitly takes to task.

Shifting focus from these transcendent imperatives, I aim to offer a thicker account of both Salinger's literary style and its cultural currency for a post-1960 United States. My analysis of *Franny and Zooey* will focus on two instances in which Franny's face undoes the order of 'realistic' representation, legitimizing an unconscious force to be found in the relation between two (mistakenly exclusive) orders: the *figural* with the *figurative*, or the *visual* with the represented *visible*.¹⁶ Rather than agreeing that Franny/ the novel stands as a representative of the end of the 1950s and the dawning of the 60s, my line of argumentation is foremost concerned with representation itself, and what, precisely, it means for a novel to be *about something*.

Salinger's excessive mode of visibility, demonstrated through his descriptions of Franny's face (a presumed material locus of signification/ subjectification), reveal the inherent *irrationality* of her unconscious desires, the American social formation and the troubling of her identity under the weight of her own 'rational,' personal interests. For Salinger, the face must be radically rethought; it is not a unary locus of relation/ communication/ empathy on the part of the reader.¹⁷ Instead, we will learn, the face is a field of excess, *miscommunication* and breakdown; it is the material locality of miscommunicated subjectification, a point where one is *meant* to find recognition, understanding. Yet, upon attempting to think the Other possessive of the face as thought, we come to see in the face a void—a palpably tragic, but necessary, sense of *pure difference*.

Thus, *Franny and Zooey*'s most critically-overlooked and denigrated asymmetries (at the level of characterization and form) do not constitute a stylistic lack where 'realism' (read: meaning) should reside. Rather, I perceive in these asymmetries the novel's attentiveness to a latent, immanent dimension of postwar America; that is, a sensitivity to that which gives rise to *meaning* (i.e., value) and a suspicion of identity-formation via meaning's manipulation and production of *affect*.¹⁸ The novel comprises a robust immanent ethics, at the heart of which lies a sustainable (read: productive) affective theory. Contra to most critics' negative (or, elided) evaluations of the novel's main character, I assert that her character demonstrates the way in which '*rational*' universals (e.g., professional interests, social roles, and so on) are carved out of a foundational, immanent *irrationality*.

Foremost, my analysis is based in an exemplary adequation between attention to the novel's imagistic, narrative detail and a privilege that, I assert (particularly in contradistinction to recent Salinger criticism), belongs to the 'insignificant,' 'myopic' details which Salinger belabors.¹⁹ The images of Franny are not the unary images of the protagonist which many postwar literary scholars expect; Salinger's Franny is not to be merely consumed by the reader. By extension, in holding his reader in awe, through these details, Salinger opens an uncomfortable chasm between reader and character. This chasm, or crack, in Salinger's excessive literary realism constitutes the missing link between character identity/ reader identity, on which the 1950s and 60s' formalists habitually rely. Therefore, while the efforts of Salinger's expression, shown through characterization and form, can be said to reach forth from a place of realism they are, nevertheless, vehemently non-mimetic: Franny appears as a copy

without a model. In this way, then, Salinger merely uses the ‘realistic’ novel form as a surface of equivalence, a conceptual space of articulation between literary realism’s ways of making (especially with respect to character) and other forms of visibility and intelligibility which determine the way in which the ‘realistic’ can be conceived.²⁰

While the face will not become a motif for my examination of the novel, through my discussion of Franny’s visage, I will demonstrate how this hyperbolic excess frustrates the unrepresentable, affective atmosphere underlying personal interest and de-personalized desire. That is, amidst her nervous breakdown, in spite of Salinger’s careful description of her facial appearance, the nature of Franny’s state cannot be communicated to the reader. We cannot think Salinger’s character as *thought*: Franny may verbalize her frustrations in dialogue with her boyfriend Lane and brother Zooey, but even Franny herself cannot articulate *how* or *why* she feels so conflicted by her interests or identity. This frustration, through Salinger’s narration, is simultaneously troublesome (evidenced by critics’ perplexed reception) and potentially freeing; the novel’s descriptive excess and Franny’s frustrated attempts at verbalization bring us to a point where we might begin to conceive the unconscious desires which drive Franny’s conflicted state, even if we cannot fully ‘understand’ her state (e.g., her crisis *and* her America), as such.

In this way, the delirious Franny Glass (as neither formal anomaly nor minor, existential figuration) features in my reading as the novel’s central, sustainable point of affective complexity.²¹ The seeming formal and dialogic inconsistencies of her “tenth-rate nervous breakdown” reveals a revolutionary theory of affective labor; Franny’s state, and the seemingly dissonant method through which she is drawn by

Salinger, points to a fundamental (if problematic) *relation* between conscious interest and unconscious desire (i.e., the rational and the delirious) within postwar American social modes of valuation (or, meaning-making). My naming Franny as the novel's central point of complexity is an assertion which functions on two levels: first, on the (transcendent) surface of the character's breakdown, Salinger exposes the 'rational,' 'meaningful' (educational, cultural, familial) values that generate and mold unqualified force (affect) in the interest of her personalized identity-formation (e.g., actress, sister of Seymour). However, I assert that Franny's fundamentally self-destructive breakdown is part and parcel of the elementary rational/ irrational system toward which her conscious interests are directed: according to my formulation, her breakdown comprises an abstract portrait of the American landscape, rather than some psychological aberration or mere individual choice.

Secondly, in naming Franny as the novel's center of complexity, I argue that a flat, anti-transcendent (read, immanent) exposure also occurs within her breakdown. Through the spiritual/ social deadlock by which we experience Franny (and with which the novel ends), Salinger shows us that her personalized interests actually serve a greater, irrational (and arguably malevolent) desire: that of the postwar American social formation (i.e., the 'meaningful' work of society building and cultural maintenance). Salinger reveals this to his reader through his exacting, if misleading, attention to Franny's physical detail; however, as Franny's excessive 'visibility' and does not define for the reader who or what Franny is, Salinger's use of description is not representative, but rather conceptual. Thus, for the sake of illustration, I enter the novel through two, seemingly oppositional, imagistic details: these include two oddly

dissimilar portraits-in-prose of Franny Glass's face, as described amidst her nervous breakdown. The first portrait may be found on page 22 (the "Franny" section) and the second, on page 125 (in the "Zooney" section). These arguably inconsequential, critically neglected portraits-in-prose are direct marks of an unrepresentable atmosphere whose imprint on the surface of the narrative undoes the logic of a well-arranged, 'realistic' story and its rational composition of elements (Ranciere 2010, 63).

I

In the first section of *Franny and Zooney*, Franny arrives by train from an unidentified college to spend the weekend of a Yale football game in an unnamed, collegiate town. She and her boyfriend, Lane Coutell, go to a restaurant:

[Lane] sat back and briefly looked around the room with an almost palpable sense of well-being at finding himself (he must have been sure no one could dispute) in the right place with an unimpeachably right-looking girl—a girl who was not only extraordinarily pretty, so much the better, not too categorically cashmere sweater and flannel skirt. Franny had seen this momentary little exposure, and had taken it for what it was, neither more nor less. But by some old, standing arrangement with her psyche, she elected to feel guilty for having seen it, caught it, and sentenced herself to listen to Lane's ensuing conversation with a special semblance of absorption. (11)

Here, it becomes apparent that Franny is not only feeling halfhearted about her weekend with Lane, but is also, perhaps, psychologically disturbed. She attempts to

explain her odd feelings and recent, disconcerted behavior while Lane eats frogs' legs and crows about a supremely insufferable term paper he has written on Gustave Flaubert. Finally, Franny faints in the restaurant's dining room; the story ends as the reader finds Franny prostrate on a couch in the restaurant manager's office, inaudibly mouthing words at the ceiling.

Early on in *Franny and Zooey*'s first section ("Franny"), a lengthy, if strained, conversation between Franny and Lane Coutell (her boyfriend) informs the reader of Franny's recent preoccupation with a relatively obscure, nineteenth-century Russian religious text, *The Way of the Pilgrim*. Franny tells Lane that she has begun studying the text's "Jesus Prayer," as well as its compelling, if excessive, instructions to "pray without ceasing" (an adaptation of Thessalonians 5:17); according to the book, Franny tells Lane/ the reader, the repetition of this prayer will incite spiritual enlightenment and ultimate self-knowledge. She tells Lane that she has been at this study, and attendant practice, for about two weeks. In the first section of the novel, we also learn that Franny is a relatively accomplished actress; yet, since beginning her study of *Pilgrim*, she has withdrawn from her university's theatre department and "retired" as an actress. Franny seems marked by a compulsive distraction: she tells Lane of how she has grown incorrigibly "picky" about every habitual, social, professional and academic affectation perpetrated by others (*and herself, especially*); withdrawn from her professional and social communities, she is distracted even from eating her lunch (which, we are to imagine, is lately a habitual behavior of Franny's) which results in her losing consciousness during the date with Lane.

At the central point of the novel's first section, not long after this conversation, the reader is presented with a detailed account of Franny's seeming delirium: prior to losing consciousness in the dining room, Franny locks herself in the ladies' room of the restaurant to which Lane has taken her (Salinger 21). At this central point in the section, Salinger's narrator (who remains unidentified) offers a detailed description of the first, 'visible' instance of Franny's breakdown:

Without any apparent regard to the suchness of her environment she sat down [in a ladies' room stall]. She brought her knees together very firmly, as if to make herself a smaller, more compact unit. Then she placed her hands vertically, over her eyes and pressed the heels hard, as though to paralyze the optic nerve and drown all images into a voidlike black. Her extended fingers, though trembling, or because they were trembling, looked oddly graceful and pretty. She held that tense, almost fetal position for a suspensory moment—then she broke down. (21-22)

This moment, just prior to her breakdown, exemplifies the section's narrative-driven distancing between the reader and Franny: with its methodically-rendered description of her lapse, the reader's emotional/ empathic response is subtended; in emotion's heuristic place of priority, the reader is encouraged, instead, to be moved to awe (or at least voyeuristic pleasure). We are 'shown' Franny's compact frame, her graceful (if trembling), pretty fingers and the fetal position into which she curls. Favoring visible procedure over emotional interest, the scene's minute description prompts the reader (rather than to empathy) to wonder whether these hysterical actions are a regular practice of Franny's, or if we are witnessing an initial expression of her

inner turmoil. Yet, while the reader is still oblivious to the extent of Franny's self-described "pickiness" (which she demonstrates before her breakdown, in response to Lane's term paper on Flaubert—a quintessential literary realist), the breakdown portrayal engenders a shift in the rest of the section's energy.

After crying for five minutes, "without trying to suppress any of the noisier manifestations of grief and confusion, with all the convulsive throat sounds that a hysterical child makes when the breath is trying to get up through a partly closed epiglottis," Franny's recovery, still inside the bathroom, is all the more distancing and striking (22). After her outburst, the narrator shifts focus from process to position; that is, from the interiorized, methodological procedure of the outburst, to the static facial close-up:

[W]hen finally she had stopped, she merely stopped, without the painful, knifelike intakes of breath that usually follow a violent outburst-inburst. When she stopped, it was as though some momentous change of polarity had taken place inside her mind, one that had an immediate, pacifying effect on her body. *Her face tear-streaked but quite expressionless, almost vacuous [...] She washed her face with cold water, dried it with a towel from an overhead rack, applied fresh lipstick, and left the room.* (22-23, emphasis added)

Interestingly, this shift from procedure to position does not heighten the emotive/empathic connection between the reader and Franny. Instead, her apparently immediate recovery from the "outburst-inburst" is jarring alongside Salinger's close description of the breakdown process; and while her freshening-up before the bathroom mirror may be argued as just as emotionally distant/ methodical as the steps

leading to her breakdown, a distinct chill vibrates within Franny's swift recovery. As Salinger's extradiegetic narrator provides no insight into the internal life of Franny herself, given only this externalized account, the reader is again left to wonder over Franny—*What just happened?*

The chilling descriptive incorporation of Franny's instantaneously vacuous face, post-outburst, is amplified by the narrator's evaluative, invested description of her immediate re-entry to the dining room:

She looked quite stunning as she walked across the dining room to the table, not at all unlike a girl on the *qui vive* appropriate to a big college [football game] weekend. [...] she came briskly, smiling to her chair. (23 original italics; brackets added)

Interestingly, rather than describing Franny's detailed appearance *during* her outburst, Salinger's narrator fosters distance—a sort of voyeuristic relation—between the readers and Franny by relating the interiorized, almost clinical procedure which leads up to her hysterical bathroom scene. Post-outburst, further descriptive detail of Franny's appearance is offered—and this is even more chilling (if similarly awe-inspiring), as her appearance is unsettlingly placid. The narrative's erasure of emotion, emphasizing Franny's expressionless face and unaffected demeanor, suggests to the reader (not some reproduction of the representative age's classical scene, wherein a hero conquers pathos via reason, but), an uncanniness, perhaps an instability, residing within the apparently beautiful Franny Glass.²²

The excessive, unrepresentable nature of the intensive breakdown-state is exaggerated through its complete absence from narrative action and detailed physical

description. The result is a jarring focus upon what may be, on the one hand, a purely performed “recovery” by the now-retired actress; or, on the other, an indication of schizophrenia in our main character—evidenced by her professed social withdrawal, flattened affect, and apparent inability to account for her intense, hystericized actions. Inasmuch as we are dealing with a fictional character, such diagnoses are entirely futile, given their interpretive bearing; however, Salinger’s purposeful drawing of his readers’ attention to Franny’s palpable un-consciousness of her own inertia and enigmatic impenetrability is a point worth lingering over.

Here, Salinger probes his readers’ reliance upon physical character description within the reader-character identity relation. The reader’s perspective is limited: we have no access to Franny, beyond the narrator’s extensive, processural descriptions of her emotional breakdown in the ladies’ restroom (as in the rest of the section). In our glimpsing Franny’s vacuous recovery-face an upsetting reflexive twist is indicated: Franny, we learn, is unknowable. We do not know, nor can we know if Franny is merely acting, if she is mentally ill, or otherwise. The portrait-in-prose of the instantaneously expressionless face only amplifies this understanding: the reader’s gaze, undoubtedly, turns upon him/ herself in the form of perplexed wondering over Franny’s problem. Thus, the expressionless face is a locus of excess, of misunderstanding, symbolizing the intensive state which, of course, cannot be properly symbolized.

In the novel’s first section, the reader’s reliance upon interpretive engagement is lampooned. The purpose of Salinger’s descriptions do *not* end with the (unsettling) presentation of Franny’s vacuous face; rather, the face demarcates symbolic excess,

drawing out through hyperbole the totally unknowable status of the character to the reader. Salinger provides the reader with an affectively irrational, unrepresentable event (the restroom outburst-inburst) and a resultant image of Franny's paradoxically emotionless face. The reader's ability to draw meaning from Franny's face is disconnected in the emotive event. This shows us that we can only guess at *what* or *who* Franny is on the most superficial level; which is to say, Salinger's rendering of Franny's face as either expressive or vacuous, is irrelevant to the reader's ability to form a relation between the character and the questions which she conjures in the reader's mind. Salinger leaves the formulation of (dissociating) questions to his reader: his/ her habitual recourse to interpretation, his/ her sensitivity to the character's performance of gentrified, recognizable otherness, is exploited by Salinger through Franny's seemingly psychotic, affective flatness. In this way, Franny's depiction presents (and even lampoons) the reader's habitual recourse to interpretation: questions, extensive of Salinger's Franny, demark the perspectival process of qualificatory labor.

This labor of meaning-making, or interpretive symbolic engagement, is wholly affective—a form of myth-making. This is an unrepresentable/ irrational process instantiated in the reader *vis-à-vis* his/ her unconscious, socially-directed desire; this affective labor or meaning-making is exerted toward gentrifying the character (and especially her vacuous face) to the level of a recognizable, fellow human. Conventionally, the product of this labor is the reader's ability to identify with, and perhaps even feel empathy for, the recognizable character. However, Salinger does not allow his reader to complete this affective circuit, as his/ her qualificatory labor

amounts to a frustratingly missed relation—reader perspective is, thus, rendered ineffectual.²³ The conceptual, reflexive twist presented by Franny functions *only* because the reader is unable to ‘access’ Franny herself. While this structure creates a compelling, if simplified, conceptualization of abyssal Otherness it also calls into question the presumed identity of an implied reader.

In this reflexive turn, Salinger’s Franny makes a distinctly radical gesture: Franny and her vacuous face refuse the wholeness which interpretation seeks to effect. The face, Salinger seems to suggest, is but a fragment, a mask—an illusory, “rational” crutch utilized in aiding dialectal formations. Problematically, these dialectal formations forcibly make of a person (or, a literary character) *a position*. Salinger points out to the reader how the Other’s face is reduced to a mere ‘what’ in such oppressive instances of meaning-making (e.g., racism, sexism, classism and so on). The work of identity/ identification, then, only tells us *what* someone is, or who they are at the most superficial level; therefore, any ‘politics’ based on the interpretive, symbolic engagement of ‘identification’ forecloses the singularity of the Other; this shuts down the space of ethical life.

Rather than a position within one such dialectal construction, Salinger suggests that Franny, in her state of delirium, conceptualizes an unsettling, virtual relation between the rational and the irrational. That is, her vacuous face and “stunning” post-outburst appearance in the dining room reveals the transcendent’s appearance in actuality as that which is *not* interested or personal; rather, the transcendent appears as internalized difference, that which can only actualize itself in the human-being in its differing from itself. Thus, at every opportunity which Salinger may present his

reader with a ‘realistic,’ normative society, the narration takes a turn, reminding us that the social formation of the novel is *not* understood by Franny as heuristically ‘normal’:

“[T]hat’s why I quit the Theatre Department. Just because I’m so horribly conditioned to accept everybody’s values, and just because I like applause and people to rave about me, doesn’t make it right. I’m ashamed of it. I’m sick of it. I’m sick of not having the courage to be an absolute nobody. I’m sick of myself and everybody else who wants to make some kind of splash.” [...] The waiter, who was not a young man, seemed to look for an instant at her pallor and damp brow, then bowed and left. (30)

The revelation found in the unrepresentable is frustrated the moment Franny begins to speak to Lane, having re-seated herself following her ladies’ room foray. Here, Franny’s personalized interests bubble back to the surface; she reveals the forcible alignment that she has enacted on them through her preoccupation with *The Way of the Pilgrim*. Thus, the remains of Franny’s bathroom hysteria come to the surface of the narrative.

As she struggles to verbalize the nature of her “picky” and distraught state, her former (if momentary) placidity quickly falls away to reveal a decidedly antagonistic, interested relation to her social formation:

“It’s *everybody*, I mean. Everything everybody does is so—I don’t know—not *wrong*, or even mean, or even stupid necessarily. But just so tiny and meaningless and—sad-making. And the worst part is, if you go bohemian or something crazy like that, you’re conforming just as much as everybody else,

only in a different way.” She stopped. She shook her head briefly, her face quite white, and for just a fractional moment she felt her forehead with her hand—less, it seemed, to find out whether she was perspiring than to check to see, as if she were her own parent, whether she had a fever. “I feel so funny,” she said. “I think I’m going crazy. Maybe I’m already crazy.” (26, original italics)

Again, we are offered no description of Franny’s frustrated face—we learn only that she is pale. Salinger’s foregone description of Franny’s emotionally distraught face denotes the futility in attempts to represent/ symbolize the intensively, inherently unrepresentable. Here again we are shown that the face cannot form the foundation of an ethical relation to the Other, according to Salinger; by leaving Franny’s breakdown-face out of narrative description, the reader is disallowed from lapsing into habitual, interpretive labor. The face is a false signpost; an expressionless face, then, is no less so.

At the section’s close, shocked by Franny’s uncanny instability and disorganized actions and speech, we find ourselves in an unlikely, identitarian alliance with Franny’s egotistical, pretentious boyfriend, Lane Coutell. While Franny cannot account for herself (e.g., she cannot explain her actions/ sentiments according to the norms of her social formation) to Lane, the reader (like Lane) cannot account for him/ herself in the encounter with the delirious Franny Glass. The function of social normalcy is suspended in Franny (and hyperbolized in her vacuous face), resulting in the coincidence of Franny with monstrosity—a figure recognizable through an excessive presentation of ‘normal’ (often, even virtuous) grids of meaning. This

should come as a surprise to the reader, as the section's voyeuristic narrator and Franny's "picky" commentary, *explicitly* suggest that Lane is the section's 'monstrous' figure.

Internally differentiated from herself, yet an interested subject of society (evidenced by her "pickiness" toward her university, friends and Lane), the Franny Glass whom we encounter at the section's close, inaudibly mouthing the Jesus Prayer at the ceiling of the restaurant manager's office, is struggling with de-personalization, fighting (albeit unsuccessfully) to become imperceptible. Franny does not *want* to be a representative (of her family, her school, or the drama department, etc.), though Salinger's extradiegetic narrator labors to hem her in with descriptions. Her vacuous face conceptualizes the foreclosure of her intensive life to the reader (as well as to Lane *and* the narrator); Franny's malcontented attitude and actions cannot be grasped, no amount of narrative description can represent them. Rather, through her breakdown and mysteriously instantaneous recovery, Salinger formulates a counter-intuitive relation between Franny's personalized interests and the impersonal desires of her social formation, residing at the core of her (recently "retired") social identity.

II

In the novel's first section, Franny's outburst stages a conflict between two regimes of sense, two sensory worlds: the extensive and the intensive. We may perceive in Franny's vacuous face a seeming dissensus with the 'outburst' she struggles to quell over the course of her date with Lane. However, Salinger's facial descriptions *do more* than report a 'visible' manifestation of the discord between content and form, the

intensive and the extensive. When we consider the structural relation between the extensive and the intensive in “Franny,” we come to see that it is not a polemic which Salinger seeks to present. Instead, the dissensus constructed by Salinger via Franny is an aporia—a space of affective convergence where a *concept* is expressed. In Franny we come to see the logic of the extensive as an outgrowth of a fundamental irrationality.

That is, while Franny is self-consciously malcontented with her social formation, she is irrationally incapable of: first, recognizing society’s intrinsic role in forming her personal interests/ identity; and, secondly, accounting for her intensive sensations to Lane and/ or the reader. Here, Salinger probes the complex and problematic relation between seeming cause and effect—the intensive and the extensive. In Franny, we come to see that her troubled identification/ ‘breakdown’ is *not* simply a means by which we may define her as ‘psychotic,’ ‘hysterical’ or representative of the dawning American 1960s; rather, her circumstances are conceptualized by Salinger as a complex formation, an organic result of the chaotic relation between, and interdependence of, the rational and the irrational. In my analysis of *Franny and Zooey*’s second section, I will broaden this line of argumentation to propose that Salinger’s brand of conceptual realism offers an extensive, compelling proposition which the second section enacts.

The first, shorter section’s assemblage of data and its intertwining of seemingly contradictory relations provoke a new sense of community, or collectivity: one which is non-productive, fragmental. In the longer “Zooey” section, this radically dissonant form of being-together is probed and protracted through the narrative’s shift

in focus: in the first section, Franny is merely a pretty college girl who has recently discovered the ugliness of the “hungry human ego,” in “Zooney,” we meet a Franny who is burdened by a childhood performance career on a radio quiz show (“It’s a Wise Child”), an ethnically “unstandard” parentage (“black” Irish Catholic and Jewish), and a consciousness that has been saturated by her deceased brother, Seymour, in the religious wisdom of the East (Updike 123). In the second section of the novel, Franny has returned to her family home, a large apartment in Manhattan’s Upper East Side; “Zooney” takes place on the Monday following Franny’s despondent Saturday with Lane. In the second section, we learn (through dialogue) of Franny’s theft of *The Way of the Pilgrim* from her brother Seymour’s preserved bedroom; through her mother Bessie’s concern and Zooney’s attempted counsel, we encounter the complexity of Franny’s crisis; and through a second portrait-in-prose, the negative visibility of her debilitating crisis is offered up. Through these additional, seemingly informational avenues, the dissociating, flattened affect of the first section’s Franny is extended in an effort to question the intrinsic consistency of the ‘realistic’ novel and its capacity to produce ethical effects in the mind of its readership.

By ‘realistically’ (e.g., subjectively) expanding the narrative in this way, the first section’s break with the regime of representation is hyperbolized in “Zooney”; of course, this hyperbolization (rather than resolution) flies in the face of attempted formalist readings of the novel. Not only is the dual effect of intellectual recognition and appropriate emotion (i.e., mimesis) refused in this second section (as it is in the first), this structure is further protracted through a staunch, narrativistic refusal to reconcile thought with matter and time, a refusal to transform and the continue the

world (or, the American 1960s) as we know it (e.g., a refusal of poiesis). And this narrativistic refusal, not only compounds the problems of the formalist reading, but it also deflates the critical tacks taken by more recent scholarship. Franny is alienated, rebellious, and cynical; however, her contextualization within family/ home does not impart her rebellion with any insight into the source of her sociological concerns. Salinger's second section asserts that historicity, ontology and epistemology are no more important than aesthetics; in fact, as we will see, these primary movers of meaning-making are problematically shot through with personalized interest, functioning together on the surface of the narrative.

The second section's alleged formal ineptitude and lack of concert with the first section (as it is perceived by formalists) may come, instead, to be seen as a productive and explicit exploitation by Salinger of the reader's reliance upon mimesis (and by extension, poiesis) to embody political efficacy. This formulation recalls the racial tensions in the American South, televised during the late-50s and early-60s, against the rising tide of Civil Rights movement-solidarity; political efficacy via mimesis involves manipulating the social presumption that an image of some racist offense will mobilize the spectator against racism. In the second section of *Franny and Zooey*, Salinger utilizes what I have termed conceptual realism (e.g., a version in prose of visual art's aesthetic break) to question the direct line from the character's performance of gentrified, recognizable otherness to its effect on the mind of the reader and his/ her perceptions following the act of reading. Salinger asserts the existence of a gap which lies at the heart of mimetic continuity, and *Franny and Zooey's* second section—rather than formally inept, myopic or static—exploits this

gap by informing/ protracting Franny's failure to account for herself, incorporating her role within the family economy, and by historicizing her identity with respect to a transcendent ideal.

At the opening of "Zooney," Franny's older brother, Buddy Glass, introduces himself as the author/ narrator of the section. Buddy labels his narrative a "sort of prose home movie," the realistic detail of which has offended its primary players (Franny, Zooney and Bessie Glass) to the point where, Buddy tells us, they have pleaded against its dissemination (Salinger 47). Appropriately, if comically, following this introduction, the reader meets Zooney himself, reclining in the bathtub of his family's apartment and reading a four-year-old letter from Buddy. Through the full transcription of this letter, we learn of Franny and Zooney's predominantly religious education under the tutelage of Seymour and Buddy, as well as how this education has made Franny into a "freak," as Zooney puts it later on (138).

On the surface of the "Zooney" narrative, Buddy's letter functions as an abridged history of the younger Glasses' education, offering the reader a brief—if stuttering—glimpse at the Glass family saint's (Seymour's) persona, as well as some vaguely foreshadowed insights into Franny's "spiritual crisis." The prose of Buddy's letter, however, "muttering" and struggling to articulate the "perfectly communicable little vision of truth" that inspired its writing, lets on to the existence of something else, something abstract (or, virtual), intertwined with this narrative surface (67). Toward the end of his letter, Buddy struggles to finally articulate the point he claims to have been driving at for the last several pages; however, upon relaying one of the

most important lessons that Seymour ever taught him, Buddy's abilities as a professional writer, it seems, ultimately fail him:

Seymour once said to me—on a crosstown bus, of all places—that all legitimate religious study *must* lead to unlearning the differences, the illusory differences, between boys and girls, animals and stones, day and night, heat and cold [...] All I do know for certain is that I had something happy and exciting to tell you—and on just one side of the paper, double-spaced—and I knew when I got home that it was mostly gone, and there was nothing to do but go through the motions. (67-8)

For all of the advice that Buddy's letter offers Zooey, lecturing him "on Ph.D.s and life [as a television actor]," at the end of the letter Buddy resigns himself to admitting that he has actually imparted onto Zooey—and Salinger's reader—nothing at all: "[h]ow messy, how funny, and how Seymour himself would have smiled and smiled—and probably assured me, and all of us, not to worry about it" (68).

Here, the reader, like Zooey, is imparted with little more than an impression of the saintly, now-dead Seymour and his all-important lesson. Zooey's introverted, intensive moment of reading, fleeting and introductory as it seems, haunts the remainder of the novel's second section: the letter's attempt to communicate the revelatory truth inspired by Seymour's lesson is redoubled by its overall non-representability (as admitted by Buddy) and extended through Franny's crisis. Although Seymour never appears or speaks within the context of the *Franny and Zooey*, his unrepresentable influence, even following Buddy's transcribed letter, is inescapable. "Zooey," then, depicts the Glass family (and especially Franny)

struggling to accept the absence of Seymour, their sublime artist-seer; this struggle, first evidenced in Buddy's letter, is transposed onto Franny in the form of her inarticulate, captivated breakdown—both of which are attempts to follow the dead Seymour's example in living pursuits. The atmosphere created by Seymour's memory in the novel's present is simultaneously inescapable and unaccountable; therefore, rather than knowable and unchanging in death, Seymour can only be *felt* in the narrative as pure *affect*, or, productive desire.

The transposition of Seymour's unrepresentable essence and his unsymbolizable lesson first appear when we re-encounter Franny, lying on the Glasses' living room couch. The portrait-in-prose offered to us by the second section's narrator, Buddy, is longer and more admiring than the first section's. Yet, its inconclusiveness and odd arrangement of ideas fails, not only to offer insight into Franny's distraught internal life, but even to cast any light on her personality:

There were half-circles under her eyes, and other, subtler signs that mark an acutely troubled young girl, but nonetheless no one could have missed seeing that she was a first-class beauty. Her skin was lovely, and her features were delicate and most distinctive. Her eyes were very nearly the same quite astonishing shade of blue as Zoey's, but were set farther apart, as a sister's eyes no doubt should be—and they were not, so to speak, a day's work to look into, as Zoey's were. Some four years earlier, at her graduation from boarding school, her brother Buddy had morbidly prophesized to himself, as she grinned at him from the graduates' platform, that she would in all

probability one day marry a man with a hacking cough. So there was *that* in her face, too. (125-26, original italics).

While most scholars would cite descriptions such as these as evidence of the minute, ‘realistic’ detail which Salinger belabors in his prose, I argue that this narrative image of the distraught Franny actually *cracks* the surface of the realistic narrative. Here, her physical description cannot be loosed from Buddy’s/ the narrator’s biased perspective, thus, the description offers us nothing.

In a manner similar to Buddy’s inability to articulate Seymour’s lesson, in his visualization of Franny’s face the reader encounters an anti-portrait-in-prose, inarticulate in its account of Franny. What kind of grin, precisely, warrants a morbid prophesy that Franny will marry a man with a hacking cough? How far apart *should* a sister’s eyes be set, and why? And what is an “*astonishing*” shade of blue? This description leaves us with no impression of what Franny looks like—whether in crisis or not. Further, this second portrait, once again, defers the reader from any glimpse into the internal workings of Franny. Again, Salinger asserts that the face is but a site of confusion: again, questions abound in the reader, and in spite of (or perhaps because of) the burdens which we are told freight Franny’s consciousness (according to Buddy’s letter), Buddy’s narrative-portrait of Franny’s face does not coalesce with or extend the narrative (e.g., it refuses poiesis). Therefore, given its perfect counter-productivity, its para-consistent logic, the face cracks the narrative’s surface just as it did in the novel’s first section.

As Franny’s character unfolds into surprising mutations over the course of her delirium, this crack extends to other detail-level aspects of the narrative (e.g., the level

of the narrative's 'actuality'). The facial manifestation of the unsymbolizable Seymour-effect constructed by Buddy's letter unfurls along the narrative surface of "Zooney." Over the course of Franny's delirium—a dialogic process—Seymour's ghostly absence/ presence bubbles up to the surface of the narrative again and again. Indeed, this continual 'appearance' of Seymour may, by extension, recall for the reader yet another analogous movement in the first section: Franny's bathroom-hysteria similarly creeps back to the surface of the "Franny" narrative, dissolving her post-outburst placidity into degenerative frustration as she attempts to discuss her psychological state with Lane.

The dialogic process of Franny's unfolding mirrors and extends (with a certain stuttering quality) the process leading up to her ladies room "breakdown" in "Franny"; but more importantly, in "Zooney," this process presents the novel's first indication that, perhaps, Franny's inability to account for herself finds its source in something like an interested, identitarian economy. Seymour's ultimate lesson urges that "legitimate religious study" requires the "un-learning" of illusory differences between people, things, ideas; yet, in her distraught state (or, more precisely, when she *speaks* from this distraught position) Franny herself becomes a ceaseless flow of editorial commentary and scathing criticism on nearly every social/ academic/ professional affectation. As Zooney points out:

"[W]hat I don't like [...] is the way you talk about all these people. I mean, you don't just despise what they represent—you despise them. It's too damn personal, Franny. I mean it. You get a real little homicidal glint in your eye when you talk about this [Professor] Tupper, for instance. [...] [Y]ou tell me

about it as if his hair was a goddamn personal enemy of yours. That is *not right*—and you know it. If you’re going to go to war against the System, just do your shooting like a nice, intelligent girl—because the enemy’s *there*, and not because you don’t like his hairdo or his goddamn necktie.” (161)

Distinct from Seymour’s notion of “religious study,” Franny’s obsession with his copy of *Pilgrim* and her resultant disdain for social affectation, yields her continual editorializing on differences. Franny is unable to perceive these rationalizing affectations as carved out of the very irrational system against which she rails. Zooey, in his attempt to counsel Franny on her “spiritual crisis,” catches on to the brand of identitarian particularization at work in Franny’s thinking:

“In the first place, you’re way off when you start railing at *things* and people instead of at yourself. We both are. I do the same goddamn thing about television—I’m aware of that. But it’s *wrong*. It’s *us*. I keep telling you that. What are you so damned dense about it?” (138, original italics)

Franny inarticulately tries to protest against Zooey; however, he cuts her off, folding Seymour into the structure of his corrective:

“It’s *us*,” Zooey repeated, overriding [Franny, amidst another picky tirade].

“We’re freaks, that’s all. Those two bastards [eldest brothers, Seymour and Buddy] got us nice and early and made us into freaks with freakish standards, that’s all.” (138-39; original italics, brackets added)

While Franny is intellectually aware of the unproductive, carping nature of her pickiness, she is incapable of finally perceiving herself—her own propensity for social disdain—as a product of the very system she abhors:

“I actually reached a point where I said to myself, right out loud, like a lunatic, If I hear one more picky, *cavilling*, unconstructive word out of you, Franny Glass, you and I are finished—but *finished*” (143-44, original italics).

Franny’s seemingly uncontrollable, antagonistic outbursts in relation to her social formation concomitantly speak to the politicized, social identities which *she* occupies as, at once, an actress (albeit retired) *and* a sibling of the saintly Seymour. As a performer herself, how *can* Franny’s commentary effectively expose, or even engage, the hypocrites/ the hypocrisy of her social formation? Such hypocrisies are precisely that which defines the essence of her occupation: that is, exhibiting signs on the body of thoughts and emotions which are not her own.

Further, her implicit admiration of Seymour (who is at a remove not unlike the reader’s distance from Franny) disallows her ability to perceive him, too, as a product of this irrational system. Therefore, she cannot conceive the tragic necessity of his suicide, or the destructive potential of her own martyrdom. Franny can only perceive in the world around her that which disgusts, destroys, perverts. The personalized, interpretive perspective that she assumes disallows her perception of how the ‘genuine’ relies upon, and must function within, these irrational and disgusting affectations. Thus, while she may not *want* to be a representative figure, the logic of her attitude, as Zooley points out, seems to suggest that *she cannot help but* enact some form of representation.

For instance, amidst her dialogic unfolding, Franny calls attention to her perspectival limitations, unwittingly making a crucial point on the nature of knowledge:

“It [i.e., my pickiness] was the worst of all in class, though,” she said with decision. “That was the worst. What happened was, I got the idea in my head—and I could *not* get it out—that college was just one more *dopey, inane* place in the world dedicated to piling up treasure on earth and everything. [...] What’s the difference whether the treasure is money, or property, or even *culture*, or even just plain knowledge? It all seemed like *exactly* the same thing to me, if you take off the wrapping—and it still does! Sometimes I think that *knowledge*—when it’s knowledge for knowledge’s sake, anyway—is the worse of all.” (145, original italics)

Quite clearly, this sentiment echoes Buddy’s relation of Seymour’s lesson: the work of college, for Franny, is to produce a mainstream, yet particularized, subject. The graduate of the University, according to Franny, is but a product of a very predictable and arguably harmful system. The student’s labor is, precisely, one which presumes to create *difference* (as compared to those who do not attend university); the desire to amass knowledge resides with the student’s interest in professionally setting him/herself apart. The difference, against a *lack* of ‘knowledge,’ to which the student aspires, is a lack inscribed in the student by the very irrationality of the social formation. Franny begins to scratch the surface of this point in her quotation above; however, she misses the fact that her own study of *Pilgrim* (as an imitative act of admiration) is constructed in precisely the same way as University education: her ‘study’ and practice conform to the same desire-interest-lack template as the social formation’s University student. In her attempt to account for this irrational structure through the rational medium of language (e.g., argumentation) she, again, frustrates

her own purported oppositional stance. That is, her exposition comes across as merely an editorializing on the obvious; just as Buddy struggles to confer Seymour's lesson, here, Franny is similarly communicating nothing. Her stance, like narrator Buddy's—her particular *position*—is necessarily steeped in personalized, conscious interest. In railing against the irrationality of academia, she merely reintroduces problematic, rationalized *difference* into the equation: the university is irrational, *inane*, but Franny, by her own problematic estimation, is not.

Ultimately, it is the very “unlearning of differences, the illusory differences” which we see Franny perform in the novel's first section; and this struggle is intensified in her “crisis” of the second section. By obsessively repeating the Jesus Prayer over the course of the “Zooey” section, Franny labors to transform herself into something *different*—detached, conscious, enlightened. This difference, however, is revealed by Zooey as an empty attempt at theatrical mimesis, grounded in her belief in a difference that Seymour/ Jesus purportedly possessed:

“If you're going to say the Jesus Prayer, at least say it to *Jesus*, and not to Saint Francis and Seymour and Heidi's grandfather all wrapped into one. [...] The Jesus Prayer has one aim, and one aim *only*. To endow the person who says it with Christ-Consciousness. *Not* to set up some little cozy, holier-than-thou trysting place with some sticky, adorable divine *personage* who'll take you in his arms and relieve you from all your duties and make all your nasty *Weltschmerzen* (trans., ‘world-weariness’ or ‘world-pain’) and Professor Tupperts go away and never come back. [...] you're using it [the prayer] to ask

for a world full of dolls and saints and no Professor Tupper's." (168-170-71;
parenthetical translation added and is my own)

The point Zooey tries to make (for several pages) is that, while Franny may be correct in her assessment of ego/ personalized interest as the force behind human action, she is incorrect in her assumption that by 'performing' a presumably enlightening ritual she will ascend to a condition that transcends this given. Her ritualistic behavior is no less egotistical/ interested than any of Professor Tupper's; and her interest in achieving this sacral 'difference' from her university colleagues is not unique from the interest which drives a stage actress to "make a splash" (to use Franny's words). Therefore, according to Zooey, Franny is not aspiring to "Christ-Consciousness"; that is, she is not seeking to appreciate the constructed nature of 'rationalized' differences and from this appreciation, understand their relationality via their origins in foundational irrationality.

It is important to note that the non-religious Zooey invokes Christ as a metaphor, a figure of condensation: he is the novel's primary point of immanence. That is, Christ emerges from the simultaneously self-contained and the self-differing: he is possessive of the ability to grasp pure relationality (e.g., the irrational core of all 'rationalizing' differences, or interpretations), while he is *also* the product of a fundamental irrationality (institutionalized Christianity). Christ, then, is just the same as everyone else—but 'He,' as such (like Seymour), cannot withstand interpretation, imitation or perception through defensive discourses and sentimentality, which is the essential flaw in Franny's practice (Salinger 170).

III

In this chapter, I have proposed that *affect* may provide a diagram for the thinking of relations. I have worked to reveal the limiting, invested perspective of the reader within the meaning-making machinery of literary discourse. Thus, I argue that affect, as a de-personalized and immanent force, may reveal how seemingly contradictory, apparently unrelated entities are connected. By uncovering the abstract relations among entities, I have fashioned my encounter with *Franny and Zooey* an analysis into *how* the novel works: While Salinger's novel un-moors generalized, 'rational' associations from form (e.g., reductive definitions of self/ community), he does not put these associations under erasure; instead, he incorporates *traits* of these fully-formed, ir/rational systems into his narrative, in the interest of exploring their creative potentials. Offering the reader unexpected, abstract relations (or, conceptual points of convergence) *Franny and Zooey* extends beyond the boundaries of representative, 'realistic' narrative. Beyond representation, Salinger explores the atmospheres (or, affects) which *intersect* with the novel; in so doing, he conceptualizes the productive play of contingency, between literary criticism's modes of meaning-making and constructions of American identity, to the novel's formal medium (e.g., realism).

My examinations of Franny's isolated, seemingly anomalous portraits-in-prose have functioned to reveal these relational points of convergence. Given their illusory self-containment, these portraits do not merely indicate contradiction (as may be assumed from a transcendent perspective); rather, these points, or portraits-in-prose, structure the relational approach which my reading takes. These portraits comprise robust points of conceptual intertwining, demonstrating affect's necessary

expansiveness from seemingly isolated, contradictory moments within the novel. Further, the portraits also indicate foldings between levels of the affective enterprise; that is, they indicate the emergence of the 'rational' from a foundational irrationality. The portraits of Franny, and their conceptual reverberations throughout the novel, manifest the manner in which the novel's concept of American identity layers and intertwines around the self-containing and the self-differing (which can only emerge in-relation).

It is precisely *because* we cannot construct meaning from Franny's portraits that her figuration in the novel reveals the fundamental irrationality of transcendent meaning-making; while the reader may not realize his/ her labor, in attempting to appraise Franny/ her breakdown, the reader takes part in the very game of personalized, rational meaning construction for which Zooey criticizes Franny; yet, Franny herself shows us that the appearance of the transcendent (or, the definitive) in actuality *cannot* be interested or personal. Instead, the transcendent can only be conceived, it can only appear, as internalized difference which actualizes itself in the human-being through its differing from itself. By extension, we might note that Franny's assembled perspective—an identitarian adoption of opposition to the social formation—is constructed in the same way as scholars like Didion, Geisner, McCarthy and even Hungerford, Myles and Pattanaik, construct their respective stances on the postwar American novel: at bottom, all rely upon a common dream of formal cohesion. For these critics, the conventional 'work' of literary realism should yield a definitive and recognizable figuration of self and community. Franny's dissatisfaction with her university/ Lane/ society is based in precisely these very problematic

expectations: meaningfulness, formal ‘beauty’ and therefore, virtue. The seeming inability of the literary text (for critics) or the person (for Franny) to show forth a resonant, perceivable sense of ‘reality’ is, thus, to be condemned as incomplete, “spurious” and/ or myopically irrelevant (Didion 79).

What Franny, as well as Kazin, Updike (and others) do not realize, however, is that their *desire* for conditions which allow for rational meaning-making *reveals* their positive investment in the fundamental irrationality of their social formation. The social formation in which literary scholars and Franny are invested is one which values generalization, simplification and distillation; in effect, that which can be interpreted and consumed is that which holds value. This conceptual convergence shows forth in “Franny,” as the vacuous face mocks the possibility of the reader’s association of Franny with the questions she conjures in the mind, while also expressing a gap in the necessary conditions for the establishment of difference/ sameness. This shows how the reader is also complicit in the ‘rational’ construction of representational realism. Even in the absence of an expressive, gentrified face, the reader may still labor, habitually, to found interpretive meanings in the figure. Interestingly, this very impulse is performed by Franny in the “Zooey” section of the novel: In the absence of Seymour, she tries to link her ritualistic practice and self-imposed loneliness with her personalized, static conception of Seymour’s saintliness.

The novel’s many frustrations and ultimate destruction of the constitutive elements of meaning-making amount to the anti-transcendent, ultimate lesson of Seymour (which Buddy fails to articulate); by extension, this narrative performance *also* assembles the novel’s immanent ethics. The absence of Seymour performs a

necessary destruction in favor of immanence, as expressed in Salinger's narrative effort. The diagram presented by affect in the novel does not merely describe these relations, but performs them; read across *Franny and Zooey's* narrative surface, the abstract performance of unqualified emotive atmospheres can help us to understand the seemingly contradictory social and political structures, dynamics, and potentials of our intensive contemporary age. This theory of affect works to extract the potential meanings, concepts, programs, and perspectives made available to us through the anti-transcendent diagram of its movements.

Literary criticism, as I have explored, traditionally fractures its investigation of fiction into a series of domains which all seek some mythic truth (much in the same way that philosophy does): whether implicitly or explicitly, epistemology, ontology, metaphysics, and ethics become discreet foci for each domain. However, I perceive these foci as merely so many lenses upon the relations-in-process which constitute Salinger's expressive effort; likewise, for my purposes, critics' epistemological, ontological, metaphysical and ethical conceptions of *Franny and Zooey* do not indicate domains so much as *perspectives* on the piece. Thus, over the course of this chapter, my own theoretical tack has been at once ontological, metaphysical, ethical and epistemological: I have argued that any entity (novel, character, critic) which may be said to have individuated itself from a background (historical, social, political, etc.) is necessarily related to that background, as well as to *other* entities, related at a higher level of abstraction.

Personal identity and its appended interests, as Salinger teaches us, is valued by the social formation inasmuch as its terms may be simplified to fit within its

abstract machinations of desire-production. Without such terms (as we see in Franny and Seymour especially) the self collapses, feelings of *lack* set in. *Franny and Zooey* seems to expressly resist interpretation/ engagement through a single domain.

Salinger's novel, in its exploitation of the reader's reliance upon interpretive symbolic engagement, reveals the fact that these practices are widely unrecognized by America's mass society (Rodrigues 7). The inner workings of the contemporary mainstream's relationship with identity (especially racial/ ethnic) is insufficiently, if ever, probed while its mythic, symbolic (and often denigrating) associations hold precedence. In this way, Salinger adopts identity as a field of convergence; identity is a cracked surface upon which the affective labors of interpretation and consumption collide with the para-consistent function of personal identification. Franny's breakdown cannot transcend her egotistical self-interest in differentiating herself from society's inanity; with this, Salinger potentializes thought, concerned for the self's ability to lapse into the very simplistic, mechanical formations of identification put forth by mass society. This is an assertion upon which I will expand in my next chapter.

According to my treatment of *Franny and Zooey*, as demonstrated in the immanent ethics of Salinger, *no* entity (whether the saint, martyr, or, as I venture, the racialized "Other") is ever absolute. Rather, all are elements of more encompassing frames of reference; all are products of an abstract, qualificatory labor. In turn, this labor is *also* a product of the same background from which the entity emerges—no product (not a theoretical approach, a novel, nor the one's conception of the "Other") can ever be more fundamental than the (affective, immaterial) process of its

production. As expressions of the (arguably mythical) whole from which they emerge, each entity and its appended affective process is ultimately a de-personalized perspective upon its own immaterial process of production.

Chapter 2

Feeling Difference: Race and Affect in *The Flagellants*

What comprises the relation of race to ‘being different’? Can this relationality be analyzed, deterritorialized—and what would this deterritorialization look like in literary novel-form? In this chapter, I will explore this deterritorialization in Carlene Hatcher Polite’s novel, *The Flagellants* (c.1967); here, the state of ‘being different’ is not what one might expect in association with race. *The Flagellants* focuses on the marriage of two African American people, and was written by an African American woman. Difference, or ‘being different,’ as influentially conceived by Polite’s contemporaries of the Black Power Movement, and subsequently adapted by its “cultural arm,” the Black Aesthetic (a.k.a., the Black Arts Movement), configures the subject’s experience of race as an ongoing process of collective, affirmative recognition (Towns 12). By contrast, Polite’s novel features two protagonists who are distinguished, not only by their personal feelings of ‘being different’ within themselves, but also by their respectively overdetermined, figurative embodiments of codified, pre-personal racial difference (i.e., the literalizations of their ‘being different,’ in the social/ cultural sense). Presenting the allegiances of inner-racial life as problematically freighted—and even destructive—Polite’s novel does not accommodate the Movement’s injunction to maintain an affirmative aesthetic appeal; instead, *The Flagellants* explores the problem of racial difference’s *affective production* within society, and its violent, divisive effects within the black community.

In this way, the process of recognition, customarily linked to race via affirmation, is problematized; recognition, instead, results in paralysis—rather than affirmation, a despairing affectivity saturates the novel. As a result, the interpretive reader finds him/ herself caught in the very same paralysis as Jimson and Ideal, Polite’s protagonists.

In this chapter, I will adapt and deploy a set of well-known theories concerning affect and its transmission, especially as explored in the works of Gilles Deleuze and Teresa Brennan. In the joint writings of Deleuze and Felix Guattari, affect is presented as an unformed, mobile force that precedes both consciousness and language.²⁴ In my encounter with *The Flagellants*, it is especially important to remember that ‘feelings’ and ‘perceptions’ are not terms to be used interchangeably with affect.²⁵ Feelings and perceptions are personal, biographical sensations that are experienced and understood in their relation to one’s previous experiences (Shouse 1). Feelings and perceptions, thus, are interpretive; they do belong to the realm of affects, but they are not synonymous or interchangeable terms. This is essentially because, as Teresa Brennan teaches, affects are cultural—never individualized or personal, and therefore, never interpretive (Brennan 5, 6 – 9).

Affects situate the human—such as the reader or literary character—in a compound, in relation, with the non-human: an idea, environment, narrative voice. An affect combines elements both concrete and abstract, ‘natural’ and artificial. A connective element, affect generates unanticipated social and cultural relationships; thus, the transmission of affect is a cultural and social phenomenon which may aid the construction of perspectives and feelings. Brennan’s assertion, therefore, posits affect

as capable of altering the “neurology of the subject,” as social and cultural atmospheres “literally get into the individual” (1). This conception theorizes the work of affect as, not factually or teleologically quantifiable, but intensely processural—and therefore intelligible through fictional elements and the narrative re-creation of ‘real life.’²⁶ By way of narrativization, affect comes to the fore and reveals ‘real life’ as processes of complex, material un-ravelings and entanglements. To explore *The Flagellants*’ affectivity, and subsequently use this aspect of the novel to ground my theory of race’s affective production, I will first examine the novel’s reception and following scholarly treatments; then, I will offer my own reading of the novel by way of affect theory.

Both contemporaneous reviews and subsequent academic work on Polite’s novel laud its deeply moving, if dark, emotional content—though neither reviewers nor scholars critically engage, or delve too deeply, into this aspect of the novel. Reviewers of the late-60s, by and large, dismissed Polite’s text; they perceived its strong emotional content as too closely tied to the novel’s more important, glaring flaws of style and characterization. As a result, they were incapable of linking *The Flagellants*’ affectivity to any meaning within or without the narrative. By contrast, early-90s historicist and feminist readings of the novel have labored to give meaning to *The Flagellants*’ abstract, affective content, interpretively linking history and Polite’s own personal experiences to emotion, via race. But no analysis of this novel’s affectively-constituted notion of race, as a deeply felt, trans-personal state of ‘being different,’ has heretofore been endeavored.

My assertion that the novel's experience of race is affectively-constituted refers, first, to the countless dead ends and thresholds—directly inarticulable by the narrative itself—proliferating within *The Flagellants*' scenes.²⁷ The struggle with 'being different,' which is revealed in these moments, operates on the surface of the narrative; the struggle propels the narrative forward, while fashioning an endless and problematic clash between 'race' and 'experience.' This inarticulable struggle with 'being different' has historically troubled American readers of *The Flagellants*, paralyzing them much in the same way we find Polite's affectively-constituted protagonists to be paralyzed. Yet, the novel's singular points are not the end of affect's function in *The Flagellants*; rather, they resonate together to enunciate the text's central problematic—a second role of affect which resides beyond the personal problems with which the protagonists struggle.

Affect's second, and more central, function speaks to the troublesome contingency of the protagonists' struggles, *as well as* readers' difficulties with interpreting the novel: The sensation of 'being different' (codified as racial difference) is a mere offshoot of a larger, underlying problem of paralysis. This transmitted, paralytic affect is produced again and again over the course of the novel, and always at the points where a character's individual state of being different takes center stage. In order to track the novel's production of paralysis, I will mine within and between these personal problems to uncover their effect in both the reader and the protagonists. That is, affective paralysis is synthesized when race (or other rationalized forms of 'being different') is conceived as the concurrence of experience and emotion. This transforms personal experience into little more than a set of

mechanisms, and race into a mere personal feeling—an individuality which, problematically, cannot resist the machine of ideology and is therefore manipulated and dominated by it.²⁸

This chapter will encounter *The Flagellants*: a novel that is, in strong and embodied ways, about contemporary American life. I am defining Polite's 'contemporary' aesthetic attitude in light of her novel's heavily stylized narrative—a break, at once, from conventional literary realism (sought by her reviewers) and the injunctions of the Black Arts Movement (explored by historicists); this aesthetic, as preliminarily explored in my last chapter, involves both the writer's refusal overlook (or explain) the contingency and overdetermination of the present, as well as the idealized and ideologically-infused constructedness of the past. Accordingly, *The Flagellants*' presentation of contemporary American life speaks to the difficulty in fictionally envisioning an acceptable resolution to the mechanized problem of oppression; the result is a de-realization of ideology and a resultant de-naturalization of black identity.

I

Carlene Hatcher Polite is a black American writer whom many readers and scholars of American literature have forgotten. Polite completed two novels; her first, *The Flagellants* (c.1967), won critical acclaim in France—the place of its original publication in 1966.²⁹ Polite was one of a second wave of black American artists to expatriate to and write in the city of Paris, France. Many writers of her generation doubted the usefulness in moving to France to further one's artistic career; young

African Americans of the mid- to late-1960s had learned from the poetry of Larry Neal (“For Black Writers and Artists in ‘Exile,’” c.1964) and the prose of Richard Wright (*The Outsider*, c.1954)—among others—that European landscape was anything but a safe haven from the oppressions and anxieties of racism. However, with the encouragement of a new acquaintance, the French editor Dominique de Roux, Polite elected to travel to Paris in order to fulfill her ambition to be a writer. De Roux had read a sampling of Polite’s prose during one of his trips to the United States and had excitedly reported to his colleagues in Europe that he had “found a writer”; in 1964, Polite moved with her daughter to Paris (Fabre 264). De Roux, young editor of *L’Herne* magazine and advisor to the Presses de la Cité publishing house, eventually became editor-in-chief of the subsidiary press, Editions Christian Bourgeois. The publications of *Les Flagellants* marked the birth of the new publisher, and as a result, garnered significant attention from the French press (Fabre 264).

The Flagellants brings the reader uncomfortably close to the dysfunctional marriage of Jimson and Ideal, a poor, young black couple who have, prior to the novel’s main action, both moved from their respective locales to contemporary Greenwich Village. However, the two are anything but happy with their life in the city, as neither can escape the apparitions and hard lessons of their past. In *The Flagellants* these painful memories endlessly resurface; thus, the novel unfolds as a series of repetitive arguments, both actual and imagined, between the novel’s two introspective and histrionic protagonists. Appropriately, the novel’s title suggests its recurrent theme of flagellation: the act of whipping oneself for the sake of attaining some ultimately impossible, transcendent goal. Taking this definition as its first cue,

The Flagellants offers a bleak glimpse into the resentment, violence and delusion that may overcome a romantic relationship—or any allegiance, we come to find.

French critic, Rene Vigo, praised Polite for her sharp and “terrible visions of the black ghetto,” praising the novel’s intelligently emotive style, he described it as “so haunting, so rich in thoughts, sensations, so well located in the poetic chiaroscuro that one [may] savor its ineffaceable harshness” (qtd. in Fabre 264). Much like Ralph Ellison, Polite preferred to separate her activist- and protest-oriented writing from her fiction; and indeed, French critics and reviewers responded positively (Lottman 21, Fabre 265). The cruel exchanges between Polite’s protagonists, Ideal and Jimson, were discussed in comparison to Edward Albee’s ruthless characters, while other reviewers in the French press compared the novel with Henry Miller’s fluid poeticism (Fabre 264). The protagonists’ inexhaustible pursuit of the definitive—in identity, love, virtue—served as testament for French readers that black American writers need not create only protest literature; indeed, Pierre Descarques claimed, “the narrative comes close to poetry” (7). Similarly, Charles de Richter described Polite as “a poet of the weird, an angel of the bizarre and the decrepit in an unknown world” (qtd. in Fabre 264). The novel was also described as “poetic, tragic, and flashing beauty”; “[Polite] makes us penetrate the black ghetto, and thus reveals the most secret facets of the Negro American soul,” wrote one French reviewer (qtd. in Lottman 1967, 21). Critics raved of de Roux’s discovery of Carlene Hatcher Polite, the new, “captivating” “born writer” (qtd. in Lottman 1967, 21).

Stateside, however, the novel met with a much different, and much more negative, reception when it appeared in 1967. The novel covers aspects of

contemporary, urban black American life that had heretofore gone unexamined by a black female writer. Publishing her novel prior to the 1970s' and 80s' boon in black female writers' exposés of the darker sides of black experiences, Polite's ruthless *Flagellants* blazed a new trail; its handling of romantic relationships, varying shades of abuse, and, perhaps most strikingly, blackness as both an internal and external state of 'being different' brought to the fore the violent, inner-community evils of racism.³⁰ Indeed, comparisons may be drawn between *The Flagellants* and, for example, Ann Petry's *The Street* (1946), which also examines some facets of black female sexual and emotional exploitation and abuse. However, written in the United States, Petry's work did not enjoy the wide and varied readership and recognition of *The Flagellants*. Polite's text was praised outside of the United States and *The Flagellants*' international appeal has perhaps helped prevent it from falling into complete obscurity; its 1967 release by Farrar & Giroux met with confusion and frustration, as it was uniquely bold and merciless in its handling of inner-racial life.

Only a handful of reviews were written in the States, but the similitude among their points of praise and critique for *The Flagellants* is uncanny.³¹ American reviewers appreciated the depth with which Polite expresses her protagonists' respective agonies. *The Flagellants* was referred to as "painfully urgent," and a "novel of indignation and near despair" (Sayre 344; Raphael 40). In a review for *The American Scholar*, Roger Ebert compared Polite to Richard Wright, claiming, with the publication of *The Flagellants*, that "[t]here is now a novel that throughout its length remains at [a] pitch of endurance and despair" comparable to Wright's *Black Boy* (Ebert 682). Nora Sayre, on the other hand, extended her praise of the novel's moving

affectivity beyond the bounds of racialized agony. The sincerity and immediacy of Jimson and Ideal's painful relationship, Sayre wrote in *The Nation*, is effective because it is constituted by "agonies that are uniquely Negro" and "torments which can afflict lovers of any color" (Sayre 344). Black and white mainstream readers alike praised Polite's ability to render human emotion into the tumultuous story of a poor American couple's failing marriage.

While some reviewers made note of the 'human' (rather than 'racial') struggles and emotions put forth in the novel, and the power with which they were conveyed, none delve too deeply into how, or where in the novel, these affects are especially projected. Really, more reviewers were intent on positively commenting upon the strength of *The Flagellants*' emotional content given its apparent focus upon racial difference.³² But there is no commonality among reviewers regarding which scenes, dialogues or circumstances within the novel lend it its affective power; taken as a whole, all were caught up in the struggle and attendant emotion that propels the story, drawn in by the personal problems and experiences of the protagonists, in light of their race.

More importantly, however, the reviewers above also articulated a much greater dissatisfaction with *The Flagellants*, as well as with Polite's abilities as a writer. Polite's prose style, along with her mode of characterization, were repeatedly critiqued as the novel's greatest flaws. Elsewhere in the article cited above, Sayre refers to Polite as "careless of characterization" (Sayre 344). Frederic Raphael, author of the novel's most negative review, expounds upon this complaint; in his piece, he distastefully comments on Polite's inattention to character development—as well as to

all “standardized methods of Creative Writing” (Raphael 40). As the narrative tone vacillates, according to Raphael, between “whimsy” and “two-fisted rant,” Polite reveals her stylistic uncertainty (40). Thus, the novel demonstrates the author’s difficulties with expression and intention—that is, Raphael asserts, Polite did not seem to know her “ideal audience” (40). Roger Ebert comments similarly, linking Polite’s “strange” writing style to the difficulties he faced in reading her two protagonists: “Jimson and Ideal speak by turns in elevated language, in jargon, in gutter idiom, in poetic incantation, and in obscenity” (Ebert 684). Ebert notes that the narrative’s frequent tonal shifts place too much emphasis upon the characters’ “masochism” (Ebert 682). Polite’s unsettlingly self-aware characters “watch their own lives deteriorate”—and this, for Ebert, too closely resembles “the flagellants of classic pornography” (Ebert 682, 684). The result, as Raphael points out, is a “smoke screen of words,” behind which the protagonists’ “fire” is neutralized by Polite’s convoluted and inconsistent prose style (Raphael 40).

For reviewers of the 1960s, a time when the non-integrationist Black Arts Movement was in its heyday, Polite’s prose style and mode of characterization were certainly “strange” (Ebert 684).³³ Closely linked with the philosophy of Black Power, the Movement’s aims were nationalist, demanding that black art should serve and empower the African American community. Proponents of the Movement did not express interest in collaborating with or assimilating into the predominantly white publishing mainstream, seeing it as irrelevant to black community life; instead, writers were expected to create in order to promote the brotherhood of all African Americans via African American cultural autonomy (Henderson 63). Of these aims, Malcolm X

asserts that black American writers should seek to “launch a cultural revolution to unbrainwash an entire people” whom he felt remained stripped of their African cultural identities since slavery (X 563).

Polite’s novel, however, seemed not to “address itself to the mythology” and/or concretely link itself to the struggles of the community, in tandem with the Movement’s injunctions; first, the Black Aesthetic’s safe, supportive micro-nation is nowhere to be found in Polite’s novel (Neal 39). Though Polite’s protagonists suffer, they are effectively alienated within the African American community; in fact, this sense of disconnection pervades the novel by way of the protagonists’—and especially Jimson’s—paranoid and melancholic relation to the world. They dwell in the past, judge other African Americans’ ways of life, and they are highly suspicious of the motivations of other black people.

Noel Schraufnagel denigrated the novel for this negative, self-defeating aspect of its protagonists, claiming that their ostensible strife is merely a figuration of their respective, wrongheaded senses of “martyrdom” (129). Jimson and Ideal’s attitudes, he asserts, are the result of their various, unsuccessful efforts to “accommodate” American society’s “white-is-right” doctrine (129 – 130).³⁴ As a staunch, latter-day supporter of the Black Aesthetic, Schraufnagel sees the novel as a failure. Neither Jimson nor Ideal have a single friend or advocate—of *any* race—they only have each other; this alone stands as an abomination of the Movement’s ideals, as Polite’s tight focus upon her protagonists’ personal struggles results in the novel’s “[taking] for granted” the exclusive “exploitation of blacks” as a community (Schraufnagel 121).

The greatest difficulty faced by Polite's protagonists comes in defining and/ or understanding their racial difference (which they conflate as *identity*) and by extension (as they see it), the purpose in their lives. Thus, the novel's only ostensible "address" to racist "mythology" comes through their endless, pugnacious summoning of generalities which denigrate black womanhood and manhood. Polite thus brings into focus the limited means through which racial difference may be narrativized, made readable—even in light of the Black Aesthetic's ideals. By narrativizing conceptually crude generalizations, Polite presents the emasculated black male and the black matriarch, not as mere stereotypes, but as evidence of a population's internalization of an overdetermined conception of being different—that is, being African American in mid-century, urban America. In direct opposition to the Black Aesthetic's ideal of a flourishing and affirmative image of American blackness, Polite's characters affectively produce and perpetuate this conception of difference in their interactions with their environment and each other. As a result, they are paralyzed; her protagonists are fixed to a grid of racist identity determinism, problematically recognizing each other (and themselves). In this way, *The Flagellants* challenges the 1960s/ 70s reader's encounter and engagement with race as 'being different.' Polite offers a grotesque depiction of black American existence, driven by manias and fixations within and without black American consciousnesses and communities.

Nevertheless, the Black Aesthetic defined the prevailing artistic attitude—an essentially new perspective on literary realism—among American black writers of the late-1960s and early-70s. The strong and then-familiar ideals maintained by the Black Arts Movement for black literature speak to mainstream reviewers' negativity toward

the text, as well as *The Flagellants*' virtual disappearance following Schraufnagel's critique. Indeed, further (if scant) scholarly work on *The Flagellants* did not appear until the 1990s, following the novel's long-awaited second printing (c.1987). And interestingly, while initial reactions to the novel proved largely confused or dismissive, subsequent academic treatments labored to explain the novel's often troubling emotional content as meaningful, overlooking the formal aspects of the novel that had been perceived as flawed. The 90s' brief resurgence of *The Flagellants*, driven by historicist readings of Polite's gender and geography, questioned the novel's absence from the contemporary literary scene, linking this fate to its powerful, emotional content.³⁵ Turning away from explicit appraisals of Polite's prose style and/ or mode of characterization, 90s scholars came to *The Flagellants* with a greater interest in Polite herself, her historical moment, and the Black Aesthetic's apparent suppression of black female writers.

Unlike Schraufnagel, who saw *The Flagellants* as something of an *opponent* to the Black Arts Movement, Trudy Palmer reads in the novel an inverse relation: The Movement, she asserts, was an opponent of Polite's. As a result, Polite wrote *The Flagellants* to comment upon the "ferment surrounding the [Black Arts] movement's theories and practices" (Palmer 51). Palmer attributes the novel's relative anonymity to the Movement's exclusionary, and often sexist, aesthetic values. Others have extended this argument, asserting that Polite wrote her novel in Paris so that she might attain a "poetic distance" from the Movement's repression, allowing herself to more immediately, or accurately, communicate the despairing emotions of her female protagonist, Ideal. Characterizing the late-60s as a celebration of the writing of

African American males (as well as a celebration of their right to a share of the patriarchy), Adele Newson asserts that Polite's time in Paris allowed her to present a more "realistic portrait of African American struggles" (26):

Paris afforded Polite the psychological space needed to characterize objectively the interrelated religious awareness of African Americans, their problematic romantic relationships, and the racial climate of the United States without the sentimentality, transcending, timescaping, or formulaic protest characteristic of the era. (25)

Newson, like Palmer, interprets *The Flagellants* as "Ideal's story" of "bowing to the will of the giant"—that is, Western culture and its attendant racism (25). This formulation fashions the novel an analogy for Polite's own struggle as a black female writer.

For Palmer, as well as for Newson, a historico-biographical, feminist understanding of the text apparently erases its 'shortfalls'—but more importantly, heightens the novel's emotional richness. Both scholars, avoidant of the novel's stylistic and structural complexities, applaud its emotional immediacy. Newson refers to the novel as "sophisticated" for its "disciplined" "emotional intensity"; and for Palmer, Ideal/ Polite's habitual effort "to prove her goodness and capacity for love by demonstrating her willingness to suffer" fashions the novel as a "heartrending" tale of female exploitation and abuse (Newson 23; Tate qtd. in Palmer 70). Margaret Reid likens the novel's flagellants to the tempestuous affair between Jean Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir. And while Reid's article traces the likely influences of French philosophy, literature, and art upon Polite (rather than making a feminist argument),

she asserts that these real-life links add depth to the protagonists' absurdly cruel exchanges, and she too focuses her reading upon *Ideal* (Reid 1992, 32 – 33; Reid 1996, 40 – 43).

Each scholar takes a very similar approach to the novel, reining her historicist interpretation of *The Flagellants*, by and large, to Polite's life and her own engagement with civil rights activism, American politics and/ or the Black Aesthetic.³⁶ By virtue of the scholars' engagement with biographical information (however scant), this critical method does seem to draw out, and to a certain extent amplify, the novel's highly emotional content. *The Flagellants* is made to seem more immediate, more *real*, as this method seeks to concretize the novel's affective intensity by linking it to Polite's 'real life.'

On the other hand, Polite's contemporary, mainstream reviewers associated the novel's emotional effectiveness with the very aesthetic shortcomings that they perceived in *The Flagellants*: Polite's prose style and mode of characterization. That is, paradoxically, reviewers felt the novel's greatest acuity issued forth from its 'flawed' aspects (which, for most reviewers, were overwhelming). As a result, this affective intensity is inarticulable for Polite's reviewers—mentioned off-hand, but unexamined—given the novel's greater 'flaws.' The overall result, then, of readings by reviewers and scholars alike is the same: a positive nod to *The Flagellants*' apparently sincere, deeply affective content, but an inability—outside of re-casting the protagonists' personal problems onto Polite—to directly and critically engage the affectively-constituted nature of being [racially] different, which resonates within the novel.

These bifurcated reactions rest upon a common, underlying assumption held by 60s reviewers and 90s scholars alike: Namely, that *The Flagellants* is work of literary realism, and therefore, is subject to readings via interpretation. By way of their respective methods, readers of the 60s and 90s sought—and more often struggled—to locate and define the novel’s affectivity. Their respective misconstructions are understandable. *The Flagellants* does present the reader with a myriad of emotionally-linked problems: the disenchantments of marital life, poverty, unsettling childhood memories, and the weight of racism within and without the sanctioned bounds of community—these problems structure *The Flagellants*. However, these problems, the protagonists’ problems, are personal; they are rooted in character experience and personality. Reviewers and critics have clung to these agonies in hopes of finding meaning within Polite’s narrative. And yet, critics and reviewers seeking a celebration of blackness according to the ideals of the Black Aesthetic were disappointed; and those who saw the novel as Polite’s personal (either feminist or French-influenced) critique of the Movement’s sexism, were satisfied. In this way, we might note that as a mode of reading, realistic literary interpretation is ineffective in an encounter with *The Flagellants*.

Comparably, 90s scholars’ common focus upon Ideal’s experiences as *the* vehicle for interpreting the novel, reveals a further misconception. Claudia Tate’s “Introduction” to the 1987 edition of *The Flagellants* identifies Ideal as the “principle structuring agent” of the novel (Tate xiv). Given the tenor of the scholarly treatments that followed the second printing—focused upon the intersections of race, gender and history—it is likely that Tate’s Introduction, in combination with the climate of

academia in the 1990s, set the tone for 90s scholars' treatments of the novel.

Academic trends aside, however, it is worth noting that the novel is not, in fact, told through Ideal's point of view; the novel is relayed in a limited, third person narrative voice. Although the text seems to exist within Ideal's consciousness, its narrative voice does not. *The Flagellants'* narrator stands outside of Ideal's consciousness and comments, rather flatly, upon her thoughts and actions. The narrator's distance from Ideal, and the novel's gap between narrative voice and character identity, denies readers (regardless his/ her race) a comfortable perspective with which to identify—Ideal's or the narrator's.

That such an uncannily pronged set of perspectives can be had, and reasonably well supported, about Polite's first novel reveals (not the absurdity of the perspectives, but) the bifurcation of the text itself: *The Flagellants'* irreconcilable atmospheres, 'race' (or, difference) and personal experience (or, being different), propel Polite's narrator, while they simultaneously curtail readers' ability to critically engage with the novel's most compelling, if abstract, aspect. These bifurcated atmospheres can be called irreconcilable because they are tenuously held together by a third term. This third term is a false problematic—an implicit, reifying idea or belief whose work is to make 'race' and experience gel. This is a trap set by Polite for the reader. And it is only in setting this trap of 'racial difference,' that Polite can express and work through her central, inarticulable problematic of paralysis.

These considerations cannot be made under the yoke of interpretation, or through the lens of Ideal. For the purpose of engaging with the novel's affective dimension, I will focus my reading upon an analysis of Polite's narrative voice; this

voice plays a key role in the novel's prologue, which showcases Ideal; while interestingly, as the novel unfolds, it falls away whenever Jimson flies into one of his customary tirades. In effect, Polite's narrator implicitly over-emphasizes the status of 'racial difference', especially through Jimson, who becomes a figuration for that which grounds and sustains problematic, limiting identity determinisms. Polite does this, I argue, in order to reveal the production and manipulation of affect and its work within/ upon seemingly transparent ideological discourses.

After all, it has been with Polite's *expression* of her protagonists' personal problems that reviewers and scholars have met with difficulty. To my mind, this fact points to the central problematic of affects that the reader encounters in the novel: a series of blockages, dead-ends and entries that are not, and cannot, be articulated within the narrative itself. This problematic resides with the affect of 'paralysis'—a menacing and intensive, immeasurable quality that bears upon the novel's protagonists in much the same way as the interpretive reader.³⁷ Interpretation, then, is a problem not only for the reader, but also for Polite's characters. Jimson and Ideal's engagement with race is reliant upon an endless labor of interpreting its every instantiation, effect and causal relation. In every scene in which they appear, individually or together, the protagonists feel trapped—this is Polite's expression of their 'being different.' Perceiving the world through a hermeneutic lens, seeking to define what it means to be a black in mid-century Greenwich Village, Jimson and Ideal come to interpret their every experience as hatefully calculated or unfolding according to some malignant plan.

Preoccupying reviewers and scholars just as much as Jimson and Ideal, the novel's conception of race—in its links and distinctions from 'being different—seems to be *the* element joining the narrative's apparent focus upon personal experience (or, 'being different' as understood given the ideological construction of one's past) and its incantation of 'race' (or, difference, particularly as it is emotionally felt in the world of the novel). Thus, the novel's seamless movement from one marital fray to the next, *seems* to identify the ramifications of being black in America as the original cause of the protagonist's abject self-images. Along these lines, Ebert notes: "Jimson and Ideal shout at each other about the symbol of the Negro matriarch, putting on fat as if it were authority; the myth of Negro sexuality and white desire; [...] the possibilities of escape through [...] learning an accent and pretending to be from Jamaica" (683 – 84). Race, as ostensibly tied to emotion and personal experience, may even be blamed for the unhealthy maintenance of Jimson and Ideal's abusive (and arguably masochistic) relationship. Conditioning all black male/ female relationships, Hammet Worthington-Smith notes that race itself prevents the possibility of peace between the sexes: "Jimson contends that all males in American culture are victims of a matriarch which the African American female learned to emulate from her work assignments in the plantation house" (1992, 30).

My own reading of the novel will focus less upon Jimson and Ideal's altercations and pay more attention to the function of the narrative voice; I will show how the affective expression of the novel is deployed through the narrator's dissonant interaction with the protagonists. My reading will begin with an examination of the narrator alongside Ideal in *The Flagellants'* prologue; through the narrative voice, I

will map how various forms of rationalizing difference are affectively constituted, exposing the prologue's prefiguration of race. Here, I argue, the narrator projects onto the interpretive reader the affective paralysis which constructs and qualifies the novel's race problem (which obsesses Jimson, especially), in order to express the limitations and destructive potentials of interpretive, affective labor.

The second part of my reading will track the manifestation of race's personalized, emotionally-driven form of difference through one of Jimson's customary rants; I will comparatively analyze this manifestation, in light of Jimson's relation to the narrator, alongside other telling events within the novel. Rather than reading racial difference as a reservoir of historical associations, a principle, or an end (as Jimson and the narrator do), I maintain that *The Flagellants* adapts the Black Aesthetic's literary blackness as an association via difference in order to present it as a production of an affect, perpetuated by the rationalizing machinery of the American social formation. Finally, re-incorporating Ideal into my reading of the novel, I will unpack a revelatory moment during which she uncovers Jimson's rhetoric and labors to affect him with the very dissociative, rationalizing form of difference he degrades in African Americans. Ultimately, I will show how this contemporary text explodes the unity upon which the subject relies for 'knowledge' (which is an interpretive, and therefore affective, labor) through confounding, perpetual reconfigurations of racial difference, disrupting the structure of racial allegiances and associations.

Reliant upon the presumed centrality of race within *The Flagellants*, the protagonists' personal experiences of their race have been erroneously interpreted as both the cause *and* effect of their difference, or oppression. By contrast, I will explore

the role of difference in *The Flagellants* as a conceptual figure; this figure synthesizes and distributes (not only the arguments proliferating in response to the novel, but also) the arguments which are made *within* the novel. Paralysis, then, is presented as a connective element that takes hold of particular ideas within the novel, opening them to reabsorption by the reader. By overcoding *paralysis* as racism, or difference, Polite shows blackness to be a site troubled by reabsorption, or *recognition*. This recognition occurs for the protagonists as well as the reader, driven by the repetitious nature of Jimson's diatribes, as well as by the obsessive recycling of racist generalities which surface *during* these repetitious rants.

II

Polite's narrative voice does its most powerful work in *The Flagellants'* prologue, which presents a chronicle of scenes from Ideal's childhood. In its flat, impersonal tone the narrator relays images and events from Ideal's young life that are rather strange; upsetting images and troubling events that ultimately mark Ideal as 'different' in her hometown. Interestingly, the odd and cruel behaviors of the adults around her are expressed with a flattened affect; there is no detection of the troublesome nature of her upbringing, nor any direct indication that the behaviors of the adults are, in fact, as detrimental as they may seem. While the reader might expect such scenes to be relayed by the narrator with some modicum of compassion for the young Ideal, the absence of affect in the narrative voice is key to its expression: By unemotionally relaying the upsetting events of Ideal's childhood, the narrator effects a deterritorialization of emotion from difference. And although racial difference does not directly come into play in the prologue, the structure and function of the other

forms of rationalizing difference, with which Ideal is aligned, prefigure the structure, function and effects of Ideal's sense of 'being different' later in the novel. Through the narrator's indirect discourses on emotion, experience and dogma, Polite literalizes the ideological construction of the past; further, through scant references to the lasting effect of this childhood on Ideal, the narrative voice *also* prefigures the past's haunting existence in the novel's 'present' (which begins following the prologue).

Although detached, the narrator acknowledges that Ideal's upbringing (i.e., her personal experience) leaves an indelible stain on her attitude and outlook of the world:

The tones she heard became her mother language. The beliefs she overheard became her first fear. She would remember these sounds and images for the rest of her life. They were her roots. She would retain this life in that part of her mind that dwelled deep within her eyes—behind a frown. The images would become less distinct with time, but she would be colored by them until her dying day. (16)

The reader learns that Ideal grew up in the religious, impoverished Southern town of Black Bottom; though her childhood is infused with Christian morals, Black Bottom, the narrator relates, is a place where "the devil [is] a permanent resident walking, talking visiting freely among the dwellers" (13). This affects Ideal for life and consequently, the prologue unfurls as a register of images and scenes that, presumably, haunt her for the rest of the novel. It is in this way that *The Flagellants'* prologue functions as a site of synthesis and distribution, prefiguring Ideal's later emotional state.

For example, in the prologue's opening pages, the reader is introduced to Ideal, who is apparently trapped at an adults' jazz party. Here, she is being forced to dance atop a brass bed:

One of her hands grasped and held together the woman's nightgown that she wore. A black bird in snow tracks the same patterns as she did atop the big brass bed that night. [...] Every moan and coaxing cheer whirled through the confines of the room. (4)

Confined within the dark room, the grotesque, "Matisse-like" adult guests "implore" her to dance—to surrender herself to "writhing," like themselves (4). Ideal reacts to this Dionysian revelry by crying and hollering, "I want to go home" (4). Although the narrator does not mention any physical harm being perpetrated against Ideal, in this scene the sparse indications of Ideal's anxiety reveal her experience of the party as akin to a nightmare. Her posture on the bed, described as "fixed in an arc"—whilst trotting like a "blackbird" to avoid the encroaching "Black Cats"—further suggests the girl's desperation and shame (4). Clutching the over-sized nightgown that she wears, the reader senses that Ideal is exploited by adults who, one might assume, should be her protectors.

Troubling though this scene may appear, Polite's narrative voice is as inhospitable as the party at which we meet Ideal. Compared to a snowbound blackbird, the reader senses her fear, but these personal emotions are *not* directly communicated by the narrator. Instead, the reader is offered a cruel image, punctuated by metaphors which serve only to suggest the young girl's fear. This narrative voice does not evaluate or interpret the scene, it invests it with no significance whatsoever;

therefore, any expression of causality, insofar as Ideal's conditions are concerned, is completely precluded. As a result, the party scene's intensive dimension (rather than internalized by the scene; explored or described) is *projected* by Polite's narrative voice. Thus, the scene's affective paralysis comes to the surface: in the relation, the compound created, between the apparently emotional Ideal and the cold, non-human narrator. A discordance between Polite's objective narrator and the disconcerting scene is sensed in the reader's moment of judgment, and the resultant transference affects the reader.

Inversely, the reader *may* interpret this scene as the shaping of Ideal's individuality, the dawning of her disillusionment and self-consciousness; this *seems* to mirror the narrative voice's discord with the scene it relates. However, it is important for us to note (particularly at this early point in the novel), that the difference which is internal to the scene's action—this individuality—does *not* mark the synthesis of affect. Rather, the beginning of Ideal's individuality is a *product* of the scene's affective dimension. With the emergence of the personal, indirectly expressed as entrapment and shame, Ideal becomes aware that she does not 'belong' at the adults' party—"I want to go home." This is a form of interpretive, rationalizing difference; in her situation, Ideal feels out of place. However, this experience is personal—it does not comprise a relation extending beyond the artificial bounds of filiation. Accordingly, the trouble in which the reader finds her (i.e., the scene's trap, or false problem) is comprised of two, bifurcated points: emotion and experience.

The narrator's cool objectivity introduces this elemental, irreconcilable struggle between the points; the scene is propelled by the struggle that is introduced

between Ideal and her environment. However, more important is the *different* kind of difference that we may sense here, in the narrative voice; this affective dissonance, between character and *narrator*, sets up a gradual involution which will come to comprise the novel's conception of race.³⁸ Ideal's *sensation* of being different is her personal, emotional response to her environment; and her experience of this difference is related as a mechanistic reaction—a routine of bird-like movements. In this way, the indirect expression of Ideal's confinement takes hold of the idea, difference, and opens it up as potential.

This potentiality denotes the prologue's (and by extension, the novel's) second role of affect: the involution of *paralysis*. Paralysis, it should be noted, is not a matter of emotion. Ideal's emotional responses related to confinement, shame, and fear are merely offshoots of the greater affective condition which is revealed through the narrative voice. This affective condition of paralysis pre-exists any evaluations that the reader, or Ideal, might place upon it; in this way, as the prologue continues, it is able to mutate within and across its own unfolding as it undergoes its own becoming (or, involution). As an affect, paralysis is not bound to any emotional or moral evaluation given by the narrator; therefore, it may migrate among ethical situations.

In other of the prologue's scenes, the reader finds Ideal experiencing 'being different' in other, very similar, ways. Again, Ideal's sensations do not constitute the synthesis of affect; her sensation of this rationalized difference, rather, is a *production* of a pre-existing, atmospheric paralysis, intrinsic to her environment. The reader learns, perhaps ironically, that the inhabitants of Black Bottom are passionately religious; and interestingly, at church, the reader finds Ideal just as terrified as she was

at the adults' party. Aghast at the "jerkling and groaning" of the adult congregants, and the "commotion" of their screams of ecstasy, Ideal cowers by her great-grandmother's side (8, 10). The pastor's "sweating" and "spinning dervish whirls" across the church floor horrify the child (9, 10). She reacts to this display by crying "tears of ignorance": "Where was the God who created the flowers, the light, the heart of the place called Black Bottom?" the narrator asks, parroting the fearful child's musings (10, 11). Interestingly, however, the church's fitful display of religious zeal is relayed by the narrative voice, once again, as perfectly ordinary; again, no meaning or explanation is lent to the scene.

In this way, the narrator again projects Ideal's emotions onto the reader. Here again, Ideal's feeling of difference is wholly personal, and her experience of unbelonging, again, is a mechanized reaction—she cowers and cries, as if controlled by a switch. Caught up in the personal, emotional experience between character and atmosphere (with Ideal's inquisitive "tears of ignorance" marking her as 'different'), the reader may miss the second role of affect in this scene (11). The dead-end sensed here—that is, the narrative voice's un-articulated cause of Ideal's 'difference'—connects Polite's church scene to the earlier party scene. The narrator coolly relates both occasions of adult enjoyment—Dionysian and religious—with the same, un-evaluative tone. The compound produced here, between the emotional Ideal and the disaffected narrator, creates a fundamental paralysis: no causal explanation is articulated, or can be articulated, for the girl's emotional reaction. Nothing productive can come of an interpretation here, just as nothing is produced or changed by Ideal's feelings or reactions. It is only through the narrator's indirect discourses, on Ideal's

feelings and reactions, which we may perceive the affective production of a rationalizing form of 'difference' taking shape.³⁹

The affective production of Ideal's difference, particularly within the church scene, parallels her fearful interpretation of 'evil' within her hometown. Problematically, however, Ideal's highly emotional understanding of this evil is turned against her and she is ultimately singled out as resistant to the Bottom's religious dogma. As part of their religious zeal, the Bottom's adults are endlessly watchful for signs of "the devil," or sundry marks of evil, in those around them. Association with "the devil," as a type of difference, may be more difficult for the reader to understand (even within the prologue's action), as Polite's narrative voice does not interpret or evaluate the scenes or circumstances in which this difference is experienced by Ideal. In certain scenes within the prologue, however, Ideal is indirectly aligned with "the devil"; and it is through the interpretations of her fellow Bottom-dwellers, that this rationalizing (and ideological) form of difference comes to the fore. Referred to by the narrator as "an unusual child," Ideal is, of course, afraid (and at times, quizzical) of that which she hears and sees around her (16). And as the prologue's action unfolds, these emotional reactions are interpreted by other characters, marking Ideal, by default, as evil.

Over the course of the prologue, Ideal comes to learn of a foreboding presence at the heart of provincial life; however, the narrator does not directly discuss these important lessons about evil's presence, nor does the voice state their importance to Ideal's later sensations of her racial difference (or, being different). Instead, the narrative voice filters the Bottom-dwellers' beliefs about evil into its narration,

foregrounding Ideal's emotional reactions to them. For instance, Ideal's "ancient" great-grandmother interprets the weeds that she and Ideal must walk through on their way home from church as signs of "the devil trying his best to keep us from going on" (13). In this brief scene, they walk home in the evening, which the narrator states is the most dangerous part of the day: The Bottom's citizens believe that "night [is] steaming with witches, everything [comes] out to crawl, the devil stalk[s] the land" (20). Like the town's "old folks" who "[suffocate] in their nighttime hiding from crawlers and haunts," Ideal also cannot sleep, "cowering in the dark" while in bed at night (15). During this evil time of day, the local church's neon sign is illuminated; however, this offers little comfort, as "[o]nly one word of [the] sign [...] remained—'Hell'" (6).

The disproportionate faith held by the citizens in the presence and power of "the devil" accords with their experience of life in Black Bottom. Outside of the ecstasy found in church, or the release affected from sensuality, their lives are saturated by the miseries of poverty. Thus, Bottom-dwellers reason that it is evil "to feel alive, warm and free" outside of sanctioned bounds; and by the same token, it is evil to feel miserable within the sanctioned bounds of a party or church (20). In this way, "the devil"/ evil as 'difference' is an interpretation, a rationalizing form of 'difference' which gives meaning to both their religious faith and their Dionysian tendencies through its direct (and, therefore, what Deleuze would call "filial") link to experience; therefore, it is another affective production.⁴⁰

It is only a matter of a few short pages before Ideal's sense of 'being different' (or, individuality) is dominated and manipulated by this Bottom ideology. One

particularly shrewd, older woman takes note of Ideal's questioning nature and constant fearfulness—a distinct form difference via “the devil.” According to the narrator, this woman “enjoyed the reputation of being down to earth, filled with motherwit”; however, the very same woman also delighted in playing jokes on Ideal (such as offering her wax fruit in order to enjoy Ideal's disappointment), tormenting the child to perform her ‘difference’ (16). Ultimately, the woman is bothered by the girl's soft-heartedness and curiosity, and she advises Ideal's mother (whom we, otherwise, do not meet) to “watch [Ideal's] every move” (16). The woman deduces that the child's curiosity and attendant apprehension must be a mark of “the devil”: “She prescribed that the only way to control a child of Ideal's looks and temperament was to lay down the law, demand that she walk a chalk line” (16). Ideal needed “the devil beaten out of her constantly,” otherwise, she would be damned to ruination (16). The reader is led to understand that Ideal's mother follows the woman's advice: “The applied advice sprouted a self-destroying root at the bottom of the poor child's free heart” (17).

Up to this point in the prologue, Ideal's emotions and her experiences have marked her individuality, personality; however, these personal responses are restricted by their own limitations. By staking a claim to individuality (crying when she is afraid or confused by Bottom-culture) Ideal stands out; in this way, she seems to resist the blinkered ideology of her hometown. However, her acting on the side of the personal is not, necessarily, a resistance to ideology. Ideal's emotional reactions merely denote the possibility of a judgment, combined with a particular/ peculiar experience, to yield a particular sensation (shame, fear, etc.). While these emotions are forms of affect, they do not *create* affect—they are not productive. They do not

constitute the pure difference, or problem of affect, lying at the heart of the prologue (and the entire novel). Thus, the discord within the prologue, between characters, or between atmosphere and character, is a trap. The forms of difference (naiveté, evil) with which Ideal comes to be associated are essentially of only one type—they are mere rationalizations. Therefore, her mechanistic, emotional reactions may, more precisely, be perceived as constructions of the very ideology that she seems to resist. Thus, her individuality, as such, constitutes a space for ideology to manipulate and dominate her, flattening her individualized mode of ‘being different’ to meld with the tenets of Black Bottom.

Ideal’s subsequent punishments for her difference (which, interestingly, go unrelated by the narrator) are not presented as upsetting to the child; in fact, we are told, Ideal comes to interpret one’s tolerance for punishment as the “divining rod” for the depth and sincerity of one’s love (17). Following the woman’s advice, the narrator makes no further mention of Ideal’s “tears of ignorance” or her inability to “distinguish the difference between the cry of joy and the cry of pain” (10, 11). In the latter part of the prologue, Ideal’s fears seem to subside to acceptance, resignation. The contradictions faced by Ideal, the reader is led to presume, are merely part of the normal process of existence—“one’s nature,” or individuality, *should* fall in line with the community’s ideology (18). Thus, with the cessation of her emotional reactions, Ideal melds with the novel’s affective paralysis. This relation, between Ideal and the atmosphere implied by the narrative voice, presents the consumption of the individual by ideology; Gilles Deleuze refers to this instance as the individual’s becoming-reactive.

Given her resignation, naming Ideal's state at the close of the prologue as 'becoming-reactive' may seem counter-intuitive, or confused. However, we should read Ideal's obeisance as a *reaction* to her environment—she obeys the command/imposition, for the sake of survival, of the Bottom's will to power (which the reader senses via the narrative voice). Through her emotional displays over the course of the prologue, we perceive in Ideal the gradual increase of reactionary forces, internalized from the dogma in which she is submerged and made apparent to the reader by her sudden concordance with the disaffected narrator; thus, the slow involution of paralysis across the prologue's scenes has induced weakness in the character and her emotional responses have decomposed into acquiescent reactions. That is, by and falling in line with the Bottom's beliefs, matching the narrator's tone, Ideal's potential for activity (or response proffering productivity or change) is precluded.

Indeed, a premonition of this becoming-reactive is offered to us when the narrator states: "She would remember these sounds and images for the rest of her life. [...] The images would become less distinct with time, but she would be colored by them until her dying day" (16). According to Deleuze, reactivity conquers the individual gradually, with the help negative and imaginary fictions—much like those with which Ideal is bombarded as a child (Deleuze 1983, 125). Further, her inability (as the reader is told) to forget her negative past names the essential condition of her reactivity; recalling Deleuze's discussion of the will to power in *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, in the reactive individual, the skill of forgetting atrophies and the sensations and affects (here, paralysis) of the reactive forces (here: acceptance, resignation) become embedded in painful memories (Deleuze 1983, 114).

The idea of racial difference, of course, does not appear in the prologue until its final page, as Ideal prepares to move away from Black Bottom. Here, a fellow Bottom-dweller warns her: “Where you are going now, Ideal, you will have to act and talk just like white folks; because if you don’t, God will strike you dead” (20). Once again, the Bottom’s dogma cuts across the narrative surface; and once again, parroting Ideal’s presumed reply, the narrative voice intervenes:

Staying next door to white people was the same as staying next door to black people, yellow people, brown people, any people. They cried the same blues, the same joys, ate, slept, had babies and funerals, went their merry and tragic ways. Simplicity, the sole quality of poverty, ignores the complexities of the disparate society. Analysis of the poor condition is directed toward how to survive, overcome. (20 – 21)

Although Ideal has not yet awakened to this other-world, she is here taken up, at the hands of Polite’s narrative voice, by a pure affective movement. Ideal will come to see the distinctions between the Bottom and the “disparate society”—between a crowd and a community (however blighted that community may be) (21). She is on the way to forming an affective genealogy that will run parallel to the novel’s following chronicle of the experience of ‘being different’ amidst overdetermined understandings of race. By extension, as the novel progresses, the idea of race will gradually become conflated with emotion, and experience with ideologies which perpetuate racism.⁴¹

III

“Political expediency, the balance of economy, the necessary conflicts without which the state would perish, supersede the social contract, the constitutional ideal, the love-thy-neighbor-as-thyself moral. Someone must be down, so that someone may be up. *Obviously*, my color is not the foe. Our lack of knowledge to simulate the divine force within us, that universal creative energy, keeps us always a light-year behind. Ironically, the closer we feel to duplicating the perfect image, the more smug we become. The more we tend to act the part of the Holy Father exercising mass murder in the name of righteousness, scattering civilizations to the hills in the name of peace-loving, law-abiding humanity, the closer we come to exterminating our self-created kingdom.” - Jimson (Polite 137-138, emphasis added)

Jimson’s above is excerpted from an imagined rebuttal against Ideal on the failings of the race, the negative effects of racial difference, and the divisions inherent to the black community given its people’s multiple shortcomings. Over the course of *The Flagellants*, Jimson appears poised, an iconic image of the stable and positioned subject. He seems a character with an authoritative sense of self and a full idea of the world. In chapter eight, from which the above excerpt comes, Polite’s narrator is silent; Jimson’s monologue dominates the chapter. In the novel’s prologue, we perceived a distinct contrast between the narrator’s disaffected tone and Ideal’s emotional individuality; and this individuality, gradually, becomes subsumed by the narrative voice. However, alongside Jimson in the rest of the novel, the narrative

voice seems to be subsumed by *his* monologues. Over the course of the novel, Jimson speaks often, and at great length; and during his diatribes, he labors to intellectually dissociate himself from his discourses on race and the (or rather, his) experience of ‘being different.’ Polite’s narrative voice, appearing only when Jimson is silent, echoes Jimson’s dissociate sentiments; much in the same way that the beliefs of Black Bottom’s citizenry were filtered into the prologue’s narration, over the course of the rest of the novel, Jimson’s dissociate beliefs with respect to race are folded in.

Jimson’s ideations and beliefs concerning race and being different reveal in his monologues a function similarly to the lessons and advice of Ideal’s fellow Bottom dwellers. That is, Jimson’s speeches fulfill a deterministic activity, standing as a differential/ differentiating element; dominating the novel much more forcefully, and interpretively, than the narrator, Jimson’s speeches manifest affective reactions in the reader. Jimson directly tells the reader how to feel, and what to think, concerning race and identity (or, sensations of being different). Laboring to narrate his own identity in contrast with other black Americans’, Jimson appears self-concerned and self-absorbed, fashioning himself an excessive supplement to Polite’s narrator; as we will see, Jimson is a disinterested protagonist and therefore precludes any response that the reader may offer. As a result, when Jimson speaks we experience a sense of domination—a persuasive compulsion to obey, believe—like Ideal at the end of the prologue. Nevertheless, Jimson’s unbendable resolve (particularly apparent in the above excerpt) exposes race as an amalgam of personal feelings (concerning race) and experiences (of ideology); effecting *paralysis*, Jimson’s interpretation of racial identity and race we come to see, is a form of reactionary, negative recognition.

At the opening of his quotation above, Jimson cites “[p]olitical expediency, the balance of economy [and] the necessary conflicts without which the state would perish,” to explain society’s disregard for “the constitutional ideal” (138). Within this ideal’s “love-thy-neighbor-as-thyself moral,” Jimson perceives race as the cause *and* effect of a population’s ineffectualness, its internalized segregation. The reader’s attention, then, may be drawn to the oddly placed “*Obviously*” within Jimson’s oration. Unclear as to whether it demarcates certainty or uncertainty, one may consider “obviously,” here, a point of bifurcation: At once, “obviously” gestures to ‘race’ as a coherent structure, suggesting its conceptually static, definite configuration; but then, “obviously” may also point to doubt within Jimson’s philosophy of American society. As Jimson asserts that “[s]omeone must be down, so that someone can be up,” he explains (and arguably acquiesces to) the irrationality lying at the heart of any ideation of a static, juridical identity. Taken this way, the quote could be read: “*Obviously*, my color is not the foe—right?”

As Jimson’s excerpted speech is meant to serve as an explanation for his abandonment of his very short-lived job at a local library, we may read his belief in balanced society’s reliance upon rebuked ideals as a rationalization for his quitting the job. In spite of the job’s simplicity and leisureliness, Jimson’s decision to quit reveals his emotional belief that race (i.e., rationalized difference) *must* determine (i.e., cause *and* effect) his perceived dominated position. At the library, Jimson’s boss is an elderly white woman: Rheba. Jimson, perhaps bored with wrapping books, cutting cord, licking stamps and stacking tomes on “his little dolly cart” quickly takes to observing Rheba’s workaday habits (116). He learns to “detect each of Rheba’s

functions,” while he revels in her presumed blindness to his “sly advantage” of “[g]uerrilla stratagem” (117). The narrator’s tone in this scene is, again, un-interpretive. No expression of causality, with respect to Jimson’s watchfulness, is offered; and we are not told why Jimson’s obsessive alertness to her movements is considered a “stragem” proffering him “advantage” over Rheba. He seems to be looking for or expecting something from her—but we are not directly told what.

We may surmise, if only from oblique references, that Jimson is waiting for some sign of sexual desire from Rheba; however, “[n]either of them scrutinized the other in that way which untried lovers taste the words pouring out of each other’s mouths” (117). Presumably in reaction to his distorted perception of desire in Rheba, the passage’s moderate tension quickly escalates to anger on the part of Jimson. Suddenly, Rheba is unbearable to him—“He was a man and trying his best to act like one, if the old hag would just leave him alone” (120). This frustration quickly turns to resentment, and hatred, for “the great white mother” (120). Though she does not appear to desire Jimson, he nevertheless imagines that she does—she *must*, the narrator indirectly states, given what Jimson ‘knows’ about white desire:

Maybe she had eavesdropped on the great white father’s retired-to-the-den discussions which, invariably, centered around the incredible circumference and length of the brother’s member, the number of times he could will its ascension, the well-known fact that women could never leave him. (120)

In his expectation that Rheba *should* desire him, the narrator expresses Jimson’s inevitable aggravation with the old woman.

He interprets her kindness as patronization; her attempts at mere friendliness enrage him: “[T]aking her tea in the cubicle, inviting him to be introduced to the honorable guests. The woman was driving the man to distraction with unsolicited attention” (119). In this way, Jimson’s emotionally-driven, reactive sense of race curtails his ability to work for (or with) Rheba. Although, the narrator tells us, Rheba “paid him on time, asked him to do nothing beneath him, introduced him to her guests and praised his intelligence to the hilt,” Jimson resentfully neglects his duties: “Long live disparity!” (121). Coupled with his distorted perception of her desire, Jimson also resents Rheba’s position of power over him; he envies her ability, as his boss, “to oppose, to express, to criticize” his work ethic, and to “spontaneously think that she was first in line” (121 – 122). In the spirit of revenge against the powerful, “great white mother,” we perceive Jimson’s uncontrollable anger over white desire, which at least in his interaction with Rheba, does not seem to exist (120). Thus, after only a short time in the position, feeling sexually rejected and resentful, Jimson speaks for the first time in this chapter: “Oh hell, I have had just about enough of this hag. I quit” (124).

In order for his dissociative form of attachment to race to be maintained, Jimson cannot endure the anomaly presented by Rheba; his faulty ideation of how he (i.e., his race) is perceived by Rheba restrains any ability he may possess to relate to her, or even coexist with her at work. Jimson’s experience of ‘being different’ is preemptive, in this way. His sensations here are, arguably, paranoid: whether or not Rheba feels or perceives any of the things he presumes, we shall never know—but Jimson is so convinced of her racist desires, that it makes no difference. To correct for

his misguided intellection, Jimson perceives in his failure to fulfill the presumably white-prescribed role of sex object as confirmation of his own good sense. As a result, his long speech in chapter eight functions to rationalize, not only his odd behavior on the job, but also his taking comfort having left the job.

In this way, Jimson's chapter eight diatribe and the passage with Rheba connect via Jimson's reactive perception of himself as a different being who will never be surprised by life in the "disparate society" (21). In chapter eight, Jimson claims to understand that "[p]olitical expediency, the balance of economy [and] the necessary conflicts," dictate that the "constitutional ideal" cannot endure. And according to Jimson, the black community's "lack of knowledge" about "universal creative energy" prevents the actualization of true freedom (i.e., it is *not* "political expediency," etc., which precludes freedom for black Americans); he notes a problematic smugness which attends one's misguided impersonation of "the perfect image." Albeit inadvertently, here Jimson speaks to his own inability to *respond* to the alleged racist patronization that he believes is perpetrated by Rheba; that is, in acting out against this woman on the job—by reacting angrily rather than productively—Jimson executes the very ignorance he claims to reproach in the black community.

In this way, we witness Jimson smugly enact the exact inverse of "the perfect image." While he does not fulfill the prescribed role of 'objet du désir' for Rheba, he does expect that this should be his role in their unequal working relationship. In fact, even though the narrator does not mention any signs offered by Rheba, whether verbal or otherwise, bespeaking her interest in Jimson, Jimson nevertheless reacts against Rheba as if she does desire him. And since this desire, according to Jimson, is (or,

would be) based in the exoticization of black male sexuality, Jimson's reactions are, of course, angry and resentful: "If Rheba wanted forgiveness, eradication of guilt, restoration of self-respect [...] Jimson could not hear her" (121). Here, we may note Jimson's revelation of the actual cause of his odd workplace behavior. Believing that he is rejecting the expected "perfect" performance of the desirable black male, Jimson smugly becomes the reactionary, recognizable thing that he has come to trust: the unreliable, the uncooperative, that which is stably held in antagonistic, dialectal opposition to whiteness. In this way, Jimson precludes his own freedom and productivity just as effectively through his reactionary behaviors, as he would have if he had actually fulfilled some racist, white-prescribed role.

At once, then, race may be perceived here as that which affirms *and* negates; race is that which moves and manipulates Jimson's interaction with and perception of the world; it is a production of affect, and manifests in the character as a negative/negating force.⁴² Struggling to remain intellectually distanced from this simultaneously intimate and depersonalizing atmosphere, Jimson falls to contradictions: In his speech in chapter eight, he claims that his color is not a foe. Yet, "the more *we*" labor to enact an ideal image, "the closer *we* come" to turning, essentially, into the *ultimate foe*. Here, as well as in the passage with Rheba, Jimson reveals a preoccupation with a certain contingency, perceiving himself under the constant threat of dissolution by ideological machinery which maintains, as he sees it, fraudulent allegiances. Fantasies of racial equality, racial allegiances—Jimson rebukes and resents them all. The intellectual dissociation that Jimson assumes in relation to his race (and therefore, his emotions) ultimately leads him to believe that he

possesses an objective, observational ability to speak through absolute truths concerning the black community and American racism, in general.

Given his obsession over the problems of race, within and without the black community, one might presume (in contrast to Ideal) that Jimson must have personally faced incommensurate racism over the course of his rather young life. However, this is not necessarily the case; the reader learns that Jimson was raised (in the mysterious absence of his mother) by a very indulgent father who endlessly labored to shelter his son from racism. In raising Jimson, his father's ostensibly sole interest lay with protecting the boy from poverty's agonies and the feelings of inadequacy which attend racial injustice. Such feelings of lack and self-hatred were cornerstones of the father's own youth, and so he vows "that no child of mine would ever know that life" (68).

"I knew what it was to be poor and hungry [...] living in a clapboard shack [...] I swore that no child of mine would [...] hold his hat in his hand before a living soul; and that he would be better off than everyone I knew, and able to match wits with all that I did not know." (68 – 69).

From this speech, given by Jimson's father to Ideal, the reader learns that Jimson was raised "to be a gentleman, an esquire," he was given tennis lessons, equestrian lessons, piano lessons—"anything he thought he wanted" (68). Growing up, all of Jimson's clothes "came from the finest stores in New York" (68).

For all his father's efforts, however, Jimson is unable to elude the psychological or material (i.e., *affective*) drawbacks of racial difference in America. This is largely due to the deep and lasting influence of one particular boarder who lived in Jimson's childhood home: an elderly, former slave named Papa Boo. Unlike

the small passage spoken by Jimson's father, the portion of the novel exploring Papa Boo's effect is narrated by Jimson himself (again, amidst a row with Ideal). While his father had labored to instill in Jimson a sense of confidence and irrelevancy with respect to race, Papa Boo directs a potent simulation of white racism on the young Jimson. He "waited until no one was around before beginning his persecuting discourse on [Jimson's] intense brown skin"; Papa Boo, Jimson relates, did a thorough job convincing him that he was "the Prince of Darkness, a shame before God, [and] the ugliest child in the world" (58). Presumably incapable of opposition because, first, he "had been taught to respect and never dispute [his] elders"; and also, because his privileged upbringing (unlike Ideal's) did not include lessons and 'being different' or the ideology of obeisance, over time Jimson internalizes Papa Boo's negating force.

Although he was cruel to him as a child, Papa Boo was, according to Jimson, able to empathize with other African Americans on the general iniquity of their common lot in life; however, at bottom, Papa Boo was little more than a "miserable old Uncle Tom," according to Jimson (57). The reader learns from Jimson that the deep resentment that has grown in him against Papa Boo is not, as it turns out, for the racial epithets that Papa Boo muttered at the spoiled young boy. Rather, as Jimson says: "Papa Boo, God bless his sweet soul, is my experienced definition of the pitiful huckster of the American Negro's paradoxical tragedy" (56). According to Jimson, a deleterious and crippling longing to be white devoured Papa Boo; as a result, he shamelessly, and thanklessly, acquiesced to any menial task demanded of him:

"[He] was the hypocritical flunky who could be trusted with [his] master's life and household operations. [...] The master died and left Papa Boo enough

money to pay my father exactly seven dollars a week for his temporal existence. That works out to approximately one dollar a day for forty years of emulation, puppetry, and scab labor. The inheritance rendered him too worthless to afford a proper linen collar to go with his suit.” (57 – 58)

Thus, for all his “initiative,” Papa Boo is described—through the lens of Jimson’s personal experience—as a pathetic, deluded old man (57). And although we never learn from Jimson how he discovered this information about Papa Boo’s life, he has nevertheless convinced himself (and the reader) that Papa Boo stands as the portrait of the affective production of race, a negative and reactionary manifestation of the will to power.

However, although Jimson resents Papa Boo, along with everything that he associates with his “dogma,” he nevertheless matures into an intellectualized, sophisticated version of the old man. Unwittingly undoing the self-stylization that his chapter eight monologue is meant to endorse (namely, that he is an objective and insightful thinker on matters of race) Jimson’s self-revealing characterization actually suggests that the individual subject is merely a loosely-knotted cluster of impulses and apprehensions, driven by his misguided conception of race through life. Thus, for all his self-proclaimed stability and alleged racial objectivity, the reader may note an unsettling precarity which attends Jimson. He asserts, “Obviously, my color is not the foe”; with “foe” pointing to a structure of antagonism, which his “color” is (if mistakenly) associated. While he may situate his “color” within this structure, Jimson dissociates himself—*as thought*—from this configuration. Of course, Jimson is affected by an impingement of affective relations, largely learned from Papa Boo,

which are expressed via race—try though he might to deny this fact. Jimson's conception of race operates within and is produced by a necessarily negative relation, which ultimately reveals his self-proclaimed autonomy to be a façade.

Jimson's primary occupation consists of reflecting on the state of his racial community, philosophizing and attempting to conceptualize race—as well as what it means to be different, given race's presumably static structure. Jimson's tendency for reflection (particularly upon painful memories), driving reaction via affect, may be observed and summarized through the means by which the literary mode constructs its systems of intelligibility and meaning-making; that is, Jimson's discursive notion of race is of utmost importance to understanding the negative/ negating effects that it has upon him. Jimson's dissociation from race is figurative—a fabrication of his mind.⁴³ And further, its affective attribution, as a site of difference, renders Jimson's notion of race a mere interpretive labor; thus, it is an affective labor born of a negating will to power, which the reader comes to perceive (registered in the novel's critical reception) as futile. Thus, given Jimson's problematic formulation of race as a third, rationalizing term poised to maintain a connection between his highly emotional understanding of 'being different' (derived from his anger at Papa Boo) and his personal experiences (of hypocrisy via ideology), the reader comes to see his efforts as disingenuous.

The direct attribution of affect to race enacted by Jimson reveals his allegedly objective, self-deterritorialization to be a mere reification of his racial identity via negative difference.⁴⁴ That is to say, by aggressively opposing, in actions and words, the illusions associated with race via racism, Jimson only succeeds in reinscribing

himself into the ideology (or, abstract machine) which produces the very rationalizing fantasy of ‘difference’ that he seeks to rebuke. Polite figures this apparent difficulty of Jimson’s personality as his sole defense against *being affected*: by whiteness, black women, his personal history, the history of his race, and even himself. Thus, we can see that Jimson’s apparent extreme solidity of form is a façade; and in this way, for Jimson, race becomes the very cause *and* effect of an internalized differentiation which his poised, ‘orating’ persona seeks to hide.

Further proof of his false autonomy, perhaps more simply, can be seen through Jimson’s diversity from Ideal, particularly concerning how he *senses* his difference. Prior to gaining the position at the library, Jimson remained unemployed wholly by choice and his wife Ideal (unhappily) ran their household on her meager clerical pay. Jimson’s refusal to work, we learn, is an emotional offshoot of his paralytic self-conception: Though he has lived in the greater New York area all of his life, Jimson nonetheless feels like a foreigner within his community (not unlike Ideal did in Black Bottom); however, Jimson believes himself to be a *superior* foreigner, having been born into the black middle class, well educated, and a self-proclaimed poet/ prophet. By contrast, Ideal, early on in the prologue, reacts with fear and confusion to the Bottom’s cultural norms and contradictory morality; by the end of the prologue, she resigns herself to its dogma, if only for the sake of survival. Over the course of the rest of the novel, her attitude is not much different: she is purely reactive, haunted by flashbacks of her experiences in Black Bottom, hers is a power of obeying and being acted upon (Deleuze 1983, 53 – 54).

Jimson, on the other hand, possesses a distorted image of dominance/ domination; his own reactive potential is stronger than Ideal's. This is dangerous as it manifests as an aggressive, resentful affirmation of his being different (from other African Americans and whites alike) (Deleuze 1983, 54). Thus, Jimson is no more an active or productive agent than the emotionally crippled Ideal, as his is power of turning against the self, separating productive potential from what it can do (Deleuze 1983, 114 – 115). Jimson's outspoken short-temperedness disallows any relationality—even to other characters within the novel. Combined with his self-centeredness and lack of patience, no other character can be fully in the scene alongside Jimson. In scenes where Ideal is present with Jimson, she huddles under this secret which protects him. And his effect upon the reader is not discrete. Jimson's perpetual editorializing and pseudo-philosophizing constructs for the reader a sense of his troubled state—we need not interpret Jimson's emotions or perspective, he is happy to do this himself. Thus, the reader, like Ideal, comes to sense the contingency which haunts Jimson, becoming increasingly more obvious as the narrative unfolds.

IV

Over the course of the novel, Ideal does not tell Jimson that the pathos of his efforts are obvious to all but himself. It is not until one of their final altercations, following a tirade by Jimson much like his monologue in chapter eight, that Ideal suddenly, and for the first time, speaks back to Jimson—not through a veil of emotion, but—in his own idiom. In the novel's penultimate chapter, Ideal finally articulates her views on

Jimson's unconstructive relation to race, and for the first time, Polite's narrative voice is silent as Ideal speaks:

“Now let me ask you, do you ever stop and think about what comes out of your mouth? Do you wonder why it is that you have given the history of your people, the black people in America, such a negative, lascivious, unintelligent depiction? The way in which you see it, Jimson, is a tragedy, a travesty. [...] You mean what you say about being out here by yourself, the social anchorite detached from life, don't you? [...] It would be a pitiful sight to behold hearing you preach this doctrine from a black church's pulpit some Sunday morning, or before an audience of Masons and Grand Lodge members, before the good brothers of any fraternity. You name the group. The people would massacre you.” (185-86)

Ideal's incisive rebuttal extends for several pages, folding back onto Jimson's earlier oration and revealing an alternate perception of race. Revealing Jimson's negative/negating conception as the narrative's primary, affective mover, Ideal simultaneously un.masks Jimson as the novel's primary vector for this atmosphere. Ideal's quip pushes the limits of race's dialogic incarnation as excuse via Jimson, opening a site where, at last, expressive exchange may finally occur between him and Ideal.

A foil for Jimson's intellectual machismo, Ideal's own excessive characterization via race (i.e., as stereotypical image of self-sacrificing black womanhood) further forecloses hope for expressive exchange between the two. At earlier points in the novel, Ideal would have either goaded Jimson's tirades or sat by passively, allowing herself to be flagellated by his words; yet here, the reader arrives

at an articulation of that which has been simmering beneath the narrative's surface for almost two hundred pages. As a character of surfaces himself, Jimson literalizes the paralytic lamentation of subjectivity, in all its permissible, processural incoherence and contradictions; therefore, rather than reiterating his tired theme of race's problematic codification of his own difference, Ideal brings under examination Jimson's relation to race, abruptly cracking the narrative's surface.

Ideal brings depth into the foreground through her adaptation of the same faith-oriented metaphors used by Jimson in chapter eight. In this way, she allows race and 'being different' to potentialize—rather than foreclose—this key scene. Her essential goal is to affect Jimson with his own idiom, bring him to face his fear of his own contingency, and expose race as a robust site of complexity; the essential goal here is the re-loading of race's atmospheric force toward mobilizing an affect *other* than paralysis. She calls Jimson's outlook a "tragedy, a travesty"; this draws the reader's attention to the morbidity of Jimson's view of race. Ideal implicitly agrees that his color is not the "foe"—but the epistemic attitude Jimson adopts, in his pseudo-intellectual dissociation from race, *is*. That is to say, the "foe" in question is the repetitious iteration of race as paralyzing atmosphere, which is then too literally appended to an enraged/ing state of 'being different.' For Jimson, Ideal points out, race is mistakenly equated with an embodied state of affairs, and by extension, a sensation—of anger, revenge, flagellation.

Yet, the anticipatory mood of Ideal's decisive scene compels the reader (who has primarily 'heard' Jimson's 'voice' throughout the narrative) to finally think his character in terms of what surpasses him, as well as what fractures him. In the face of

Ideal's potentialization, Jimson's interested, excessively-personal declarations suddenly seem vacuous; his perceived struggle, a paltry effect—not of his race, but—of his own disinterested, self-concernedness. Thus, we come to see that Jimson's problem has little to do with The Man, his race, or his marriage to Ideal, and everything to do with a fundamental fracture, a seething resentment which lies at the heart of his self conception.

The sad paradox, however, is that Jimson does not sense this fracture in himself, this internal differentiation which he tries to express via race-as-being-different. By this point in the narrative, the reader perceives Jimson's proclivity for intellection, and smug ignorance of his own contradictions, as a mere simulation of enlightened clarity—much like the dogma faced by Ideal in *Black Bottom*. Language is inadequate to express his circumstances and desire, so he supplements pure expression for style. Jimson flamboyantly chronicles the obvious problems within his social formation concerning the codification race and various enactment of 'being different'; in so doing, he enacts a mechanized, self-estrangement from *both* his social formation *and* his immediate community. He fails to understand that his own partial engagement with this externalized struggle is *no less* perverse or misguided than the interests of the black "we" to which he refers. As he labors to dissociate himself from race's seemingly multifarious, negative associations, Jimson inevitably figures himself as a concentration of these very associations. Thus, in *The Flagellants*, race dismantles language's expressive function, finding itself concentrated and expressed in Jimson, via his internal differentiation.

In the movement of thought, then, race is linked to ‘being different’ via an unsymbolized, affective atmosphere: paralysis. This allows us to perceive more clearly in Jimson the problem of the allegedly autonomous, politically responsible subject: this is a problem of affect, and the perspectival gap which accompanies the affective production that Jimson understands as race. The problems which arose for Ideal in Black Bottom, via her individuality, thus, are not too different for Jimson: By design, the autonomous subject is nothing more than the condition for a certain kind of historical progress (namely, the progress of justice within American capitalism) generated by critically rational subjects scrutinizing social and cultural norms. The perspectival gap of the autonomous subject, of course, is framed by Jimson’s static, fantastically cohesive conception of his race, combined with his dissociating experience of being different: a fully developed, self-reflective, self-conscious individual who harnesses his acuity for reason as a means of overcoming the burdens of ignorance and social injustice. Within this self-stylized subject position, Jimson perceives himself as an individual who shapes his own life, as opposed to being governed solely by custom and authority.

Ideal’s incisive critique finally opens the space for his perspectival, affective shift, potentializing a perspective which does not put the black American, or his conscious mental activity, at the center of social or political actuality. Her interjection, thus, constitutes a purely Other perspective. Ideal asserts: “It’d be a pitiful sight to behold,” if Jimson were to preach his determinisms from the pulpit of a black church; and no less pitiful, indeed, than if he were to lecture “before an audience of Masons and Grand Lodge members, before the good brothers of *any* fraternity”

(emphasis added). Here, Ideal suggests to Jimson that being different, if it is given thought at all, should be thought in a way which goes beyond the political and social contradictions upon which Jimson's diatribes rely—"You name the group. The people would massacre you" (186). The procedure which Jimson outlines in his musings on race and being different necessitates the function of race via opposition; however, Ideal's pointing up the contingency of symbolic, rationalizing difference, equalizing the imaginary (i.e., the stereotypical) with quotidian reality, expresses how Jimson's faulty logic merely neutralizes *real* difference—failing to acknowledge how race is a product and perpetuator of affect. Ideal acknowledges Jimson's wasting his intellectual energy on the specter of what *might* have happened in his life, had he not been born black in America; alternatively, in a move away from that which paralyzes/ is paralyzed, Ideal brings to light a productive atmosphere which moves with and through race (not unlike Jimson's missing "divine force"/ "universal creative energy"). Loosed from its phantasmatic associations and direct, affective attributions race, as a mode of 'being different,' Ideal seems to suggest, may mobilize an abstract sense of *reassurance*.

Reassurance, that is, that race need not be reflected upon as a type of being or as a position; being different, via race in itself, is thought.⁴⁵ Constructing a radical, immanent ontology of becoming, Ideal gives race back its real power. This is not a power of the negative, as gleaned in Jimson's 'politics'; rather, it is a power of pure difference. Polite's novel marks the conceptual un-belonging of race as a definitive position within the encounters of American social actuality—the novel diagrams the sad decomposition of potential coexistence within this present schema. Hers is a

literature of precarity, a situation crisis of endless adjustment in which we perceive how people labor to maintain fantasies of themselves in the face of evidence that they are not adding up. Portraying economic and political precarity, Polite forces the reader to face the dissolution of race as a stable position—a mimetic, representational fantasy. Race, for Polite, is not a site for defining and/ or rationalizing some particular state of ‘being different’ in accordance with representation; rather, it is a surface of causes and effects which produce limitless repetitions. And on this level, Polite’s novel functions to show us that race ceases to represent deterministic difference, and instead becomes productive. For Polite, the discourse in which identity speaks explicitly affirms the differences in itself; identity, then, is not really a question of particular attributes or associations, but of relations—she acknowledges the sense of identity as a production of pre-political, unsystematized affects.

Race takes center stage in Polite’s narrative, but its function in the novel is complex, dissociating and too easily mistaken as ‘understood’ (or, given, absolute). As Polite show us, race cannot be grasped through identificatory formulas—the term ‘difference’ cannot contain it, it is more than just a color. Race, thus, is inevitably marked, imported and naturalized from a multiplicity of discourses—as we see in the prologue—wrongly associated with naiveté, evil, particularization. As a form of knowledge, art constructs fictions or material reconfigurations of signs and images, relationships between what is possible and apparently impossible. Thus, the compound problematic of black American history, literary history and capitalism seem to have, ironically, aided the essential exile of Carlene Hater Polite’s *The Flagellants* from cultural legitimization. And indeed, the novel explores exile from cultural

legitimization through its expression of identity as finally non-unitary, multiple and diasporic. Through *The Flagellants*' replaying of the same argument between Jimson and Ideal, Polite exaggerates dialectal thinking within race; through this manipulation of language, the notion of 'difference' is thus disengaged from any organizing life-world or culture and rendered as a process. In this way, Polite establishes an equivalence between the signs of the novel and those describing/ interpreting the phenomena of contemporary America.⁴⁶

For Polite (unlike Jimson), history is not merely a compendium of personal feelings or fabricated tales that we tell ourselves; rather, she labors to show us that the logic of narrativity and the ability to positively *act* as an historical agent is necessarily linked. According to *The Flagellants*, we must unmake the organizing principles through which we create phantasms of meaning: this cannot lead to salvation or sustain life, particularly where freedom of expression is concerned. Race and 'being different' are ultimately poised in relation to imperceptibility and the seeming impossibility of effecting salvation/ freedom through the organizing techniques that Americans apply. In this way, *The Flagellants* teases us with the possibility of reconciling the original with particularities, the inhuman within the American (Deleuze 1997, 84). This is not to say that racial difference is meant to be aligned with 'inhumanity,' in any conventional sense, of course; the problem, for Polite, concerning race's processes of construction and continuance, is that the *human* propensity for population group organization (whether through the rhetoric of literature or social constructions such as the nation or the family) is delimiting and repressive and finally *not* capable of sustaining truly meaningful existences. Thus,

The Flagellants links the relations which conspire in realism, exposing the narrative traces which are candidly inscribed in actuality—refusing to erase the artificiality which constructs our machines of understanding. The *inhuman*, the imperceptible, stands as the condition of possibility for the salvation of humanity (and not just the salvation of any race): an imperceptible humanity without particularities.

Chapter 3

The 'Sorcery' of History:

An Auto-Critical Reading of *Almanac of the Dead*

Leslie Marmon Silko's *Almanac of the Dead* (c. 1991) probes the intersection of ethnicity and hegemony.⁴⁷ According to Silko's novel, the concept of ethnicity implies a relation between self and other, the key dichotomy which undergirds separatist notions of ethnic identity. In *Almanac*, Silko positions this essential, knowledge-based relationship as the driving force of linear, Western forms of historical narration. Refusing to validate any nationalist impulses that linear historical narrations tend to generate, Silko de-hierarchizes her exceptionally diverse cast of characters.⁴⁸ By flattening both history and its subject, Silko finds immanence within the relation between self and other; as a result, I argue that this enables *Almanac* to probe the affective core of cultural knowledges and, by extension, Western notions of American history.

I will also show how *Almanac* relentlessly calls the academic discourses of the 1980s and 90s into question, particularly debates surrounding ethnic studies and nationalist literatures. Implicitly incorporating these concerns into her treatment of how the self/ other relation drives history, Silko activates and examines the historical subject's affective investment in recognition. This revelation, I argue, fashions *Almanac of the Dead* a call for readers to enact an auto-critical approach to the novel: that is, a mode of close reading which, in the act, is simultaneously mindful of and

takes into critical consideration one's own intellection and purported understanding of that text's content and context. Incorporating mythical/ didactic and discursive elements, to challenge both historical and academic assumptions, Silko troubles multivalent understandings of both literary realism and historiography.

The novel enacts its probity, first, through Silko's de-hierarchization of character relationality; as many critics have noted, regardless of ethnicity, gender, class (and in the absence of a single protagonist), Silko's characters are linked by their universal propensity for vice. This common degeneracy more deeply joins the characters, by way of their common involvement with, as the novel calls it, "sorcery" (478).⁴⁹ Within *Almanac*, this term adds up to the means by which an individual, group, or system—intentionally or unwittingly—sanctions a ruthless lust for power on behalf of recognition and immortality. This sorcery generates hegemonic distinctions between self and other, which manifest as fear, hatred, and/ or suspicion among groups; on the most basic level, this sorcery is figured as a form of historical narration. Consequently linear time and cultural knowledges are important components of sorcery, and are conspicuously figured in the text. In sum, sorcery is conceived in *Almanac of the Dead* as a specific, nationalist brand of historical narration which problematically isolates events and individuals from a continuous conception of time; I use this concept to explore Silko's interweaving of relations between people and events across mythology, historical time, and geography.

In a second move, which takes to task critical and academic discourses surrounding ethnicity within Silko's own historical moment, *Almanac* probes the affectivity of historical narrative. This is accomplished in the novel's flattening of the

hegemonic relation between the self (especially of a presumed reader) and the largely disenfranchised Others of American society. Through *Almanac*'s figurations of both dominant and disenfranchised populations on a puzzle-piece landscape, the novel's discontinuity, narrative digressions and historical gaps re-contextualize about five hundred years of national (and Western) history. In so doing, Silko illustrates how the selection and narrative positioning which constitute history are, in fact, merely forms of sorcery.⁵⁰ In light of the deeply divided reception that *Almanac* received at publication, this chapter will examine how the novel extends its critique of history's construction by exploring the ways in which it speaks back to the circumambient literary and social discourses which influenced both Silko and her readers.

A less convenient question raised by Silko's rendering concerns the degree to which naturalized assumptions about temporality and concepts of self/ other which prevail in the narrated historical past remain unchallenged in the novel's moment of creation; and, as time moves on, in its continuing reception. Through the exploration of this question, Silko moves beyond (the popularly misunderstood idea of) Native American writing, the representation of Indian experiences, toward a critical inspection of the naturalized discourses that, across ethnic lines, pervade American culture today. Here, the writer's point of view realizes a surplus of humanness, showing us that the contemporary American social formation is not arbitrary or inevitable, but bears potential for real change—real difference—within it.

Interlaced with my examination of *Almanac*'s reception and the critical academic discourses out of which its reviews speak, I endeavor to enact the very auto-critical reading that I perceive the novel desires. My reading will reveal the affective

links between seemingly unrelated narratives—mythical, fictional and historical—within the novel. In so doing, I will show that Silko’s vision of a post-1960 literature does not privilege any history or ethnicity above any other, but rather seeks to explore and promulgate the dignity, sovereignty and integrity of all Americans. This reading will show Silko’s apocalyptic image of the United State to be hopeful; the novel’s revelation concerning the end of history (i.e., the end of humankind’s ideological evolution), in this way, is actually positive—a shrugging off of the palimpsest of history in favor of a truly immanent, liberal understanding of dynamic human life.

Most of the main action in *Almanac of the Dead* takes place in Tucson, Arizona; radiating out from this point, are seemingly unrelated narratives that take place in Mexico, Africa, California, New Jersey, Alaska and elsewhere. Set mostly at a point in some presumably near-future, many others of this non-linear novel’s narrative threads are situated within historical time, taking place at numerous points within the last five hundred years of Western colonial history. As a means of linking these apparently unrelated fictional and non-fictional narratives, Silko intermittently incorporates mythic Indian tales and/ or inexplicable, mystical occurrences within the real world (present or historical). These unexpected relationalities seem to uncover an ostensibly non-rational atmosphere (referred to, in the novel, as “sorcery”) which links the novel’s diverse set of narratives, locales and eras.

Populated by almost seventy self-interested main characters of various races, ethnicities, sexual orientations, classes, regions, communities, and times, the ‘present,’ or actuality of Silko’s world consists of thieves, drug and weapons runners, con men, enthusiastic perverts of varying stripes, murderers, kidnappers, and so on. In Silko’s

post-1960 Western world, federal judges and police are easily bribed, the CIA participates in the black market, land developers are—at best—unscrupulous, and the supposed ‘Résistance’ is comprised of paranoid conspiracy theorists and visionaries who communicate with the spirit world through animals—namely, macaws. One anonymous writer for *Kirkus’ Reviews*, described the novel as “a dizzying montage” of the motley characters’ stories, mingled “with others involving revolt in Mexico and Central America, as the native population rises up against hated European and mestizo masters.” Interestingly, however, whether master or subordinate—irrespective of race, sex, class (etc.)—every character that we meet in the novel harbors some all-consuming (often illegal) personal degeneracy and conducts their life pursuits according to either a hatred or dismissive callousness felt toward some other group. In other words, Silko’s characters all seem to be fundamentally bad people.

When it first appeared in 1991, the novel’s reception was deeply and definitively split: Reviewers from mainstream print media outlets disapproved of the novel, while smaller and academic publications lauded the text. *Time*, for example, referred to Silko’s piece as a vehicle for the writer’s “half-digested revulsion” toward white Americans, which was revealed, according to *Publisher’s Weekly*, by her inability to create “a single likable, or even bearable, character,” (Skow 86; *Publisher’s Weekly* 94). Mainstream reviewers largely saw the novel as unfair in its depictions of white Americans; writing for *Entertainment Weekly*, Gene Lyons accused Silko of “underlin[ing] Caucasian iniquity” by concentrating, in “considerable—one might even say loving—detail” upon the presumably white predilections “for dope snorting, murder and buggery. Especially buggery” (Lyons).

By extension, *Almanac*'s expression and exploration of the United States' underclass violently re-taking the land also did not sit well with mainstream reviewers. In the *New York Times Book Review*, Elizabeth Tallent found trouble with the novel's revolutionary overtones; she was bothered by "the novel's blurred equation of 'justice' with random violence," and critiqued, as she read it, the novel's assertion that "whites must vanish, through massacre or migration, for the continent to be redeemed" (6).

There are very few exceptions to this mass-market, mainstream dismissal of *Almanac*. One positive mainstream review by T.C. Marshall, however, appeared in *American Book Review*. Indeed, where many reviewers saw *Almanac* as a foreboding and imbalanced tale of the underclass's eventual, violent revolt, Marshall saw in Silko's text an educational and promising communication. He asserted that the novel's most prominent achievement was also the source of its hopeful, core message; that is, "in [Silko's] bringing forward ignored facts and forces, in telling untold histories" (5). While Marshall notes, like some of Silko's negative reviews, that the novel does not offer any conventional character development—particularly not where any one protagonist is concerned—he does assert that this presumed lack is a productive force within the text. Personal and communal histories alike are linked to mythic narratives first—that is, to storytelling. Any individual or community connections to grand narratives of Western colonialism are made only in passing—as if they are 'known,' or given. This seemingly unreflective stance toward Western knowledge, Marshall alludes, allows Silko to make the separatism and "traditions" of "contemporary life" her primary focus, via the "larger and older discourses" that she imparts (5). In this way, historical figures and events which hold symbolic value with

respect to Western identity “are put to new use”; their conventional significance is stripped away for examination (5). For instance, in two of the novel’s chapters, the story of Geronimo is transformed into “a nobly humorous tale of mistaken identity”; coaxing the reader to question “what’s in a name,” an old Yacqui Indian woman explains that “there were actually three or four different men” who were called Geronimo because they “all looked alike to the fearful whites and their cameras” (5).

For all the negativity that the novel seemed to incur, *Almanac* managed to win a considerable constituency with reviewers at smaller-press and academic publications; these supporters of Silko would endure in their praise and intellectual curiosity about the novel well beyond the realm of reviews, into later academic examinations. Writing for the *Wicazo Sa Review*, Annette Jaimes acknowledged that, “for all its harshness and the sheer discomfort induced by its passages” *Almanac of the Dead* was “a work of life and liberation rather than of death and despair” (57). Many reviewers and subsequent scholars have voiced interest in Silko’s treatment of her characters and how these depictions speak to her investment in the expression of relations between times, spaces, and communities. Linda Niemann published a glowing piece on *Almanac* in *The Women’s Review of Books*. Here, she credited the novel’s affective transmission to the reader of a “feeling of total immersion and disorientation,” which she reads as calculated: this sensation is “the outcome of Silko’s skill in creating a world that is recognizably in the present, but an edited present liable to become future or history at any moment” (1).

Since Silko's *Almanac of the Dead* has many characters but no protagonist, it becomes clear that the novel's primary concern is not character development, but fields of relation. To bring the reader closer to an understanding of the web of indigenous, disenfranchised and dispossessed peoples that Silko constructs via intersecting characters and circumstances, I work to distance my examination from the novel's intricate, character-level development. Instead, my auto-critical approach to *Almanac* will focus on the macro-organization of the more abstracted relationships (specifically, between power and time, where conceptions of identity are concerned) on a holistic scale.

In the novel, the elderly twin sisters Lecha (a recently retired television psychic) and Zeta (a weapons and drug smuggler) are charged in their teenage years with the task of transcribing an ancient almanac, from old Spanish to English, by their grandmother, Yoeme. Products of colonialism, the twins are half European, a quarter Mexican and a quarter Yaqui Indian; their mother was the daughter of a powerful Mexican named Guzman, and of Yoeme, an Indian woman from the Yaqui tribe. The marriage between Guzman and Yoeme was very unhappy, but pragmatic on Yoeme's part: "Why do you think I was married to him," she asks Lecha and Zeta when they are teenagers, "For fun? For love? Hah! To watch, to make sure he kept the agreement" (116). Guzman had agreed to protect the Yaqui people and their resources during a time when increasing numbers of Europeans were eager to file claims on Yaqui land, as it was rich with mineral ores. Ultimately, Guzman failed to fulfill his promise, and Yoeme fled with the ancient almanac when her children were young; she feared that she would be executed by hanging for her land, and that the almanac would

subsequently be lost, given the hostile climate. Yoeme secretly checks up on her children and grandchildren as the years pass after her escape. Until Lecha and Zeta are born, she begins to lose hope as all the family's children grow up to take after Guzman. However, once Lecha and Zeta reach their teenage years, Yoeme approaches her family's home once again, with the intent to educate the girls and pass the insights of the almanac onto them.

The almanac itself, Silko explains in an interview, refers to actual Mayan codexes; these historical artifacts have survived since the earliest of colonial conquests in the Northern Hemisphere. Four manuscripts survived the inquisition and persecution of the Mayan Indian, and all Indian, people once the Spanish and Portuguese arrived (Barnes 82). Silko suggests that some Mayans who had learned to write the Latin alphabet from Spanish priests took to transcribing the almanac—from its original glyphs to old Spanish in the Latin alphabet—for the sake of its preservation. Though its contents were traditionally transmitted orally, it was decided that oral transmission would not suffice, given “the cataclysm of the coming of the Europeans”; memory would not be adequate to preserve the book, “if humans themselves were being destroyed” (Silko 64).

It is important to bear in mind that Lecha and Zeta are not the novel's protagonists. They are figured only as the keepers/ transcribers of the almanac; their presence in the novel, then, merely seems to give purpose to the almanac's role within and inherent influence upon Silko's text. Figuring ethnic identity—and cultural futures—as a text, rather than as an individual or group, the almanac's function within the novel is well beyond the reach and understanding of its keepers. The integration

of its suppressed/ threatened forms of indigenous knowledges and paradigms fundamentally trouble Western knowledge's dominant positioning and suggests a revised logic of identity which runs counter to hegemonic conceptions of self/ other.

Silko's narrative of resistance against Western cultural hegemony proceeds from a set of temporal coordinates that are decidedly nonlinear and cyclic (i.e., non-Western). This is first made apparent in the reader's encounter with the Five Hundred Year Map, located on the opening pages of the text. On the most basic level, the map is a visual figuration of the codices' five hundred-year timeframe; though the text's narrator subsequently elaborates the relations envisioned on the map, a basic understanding of the Five Hundred Year Map's function is crucial to grasping the novel's cyclic conception of time and anti-hegemonic revision of self and Other.

Perhaps most obvious, the map offers a list of characters, all of whom are connected by dotted lines that seem to accumulate in the direction of Tucson, Arizona. With the list within the Five Hundred Year Map, Silko presents relationships between seemingly disparate groups of people; however, all are united across ethnicity, race, and class via their associations with Western notions of self/ other and the common difficulties they encounter within this structuring agent, across time and geography. Significantly, all of the major figures from within her approximately seventy-member cast of characters are present on the list, irrespective of the historical moment to which they belong (whether Western historical, mythical, or contemporary) or whether they hold a dominant or disenfranchised position within society. By listing her figures together in this way, Silko detracts from the ostensible differences; this not only anticipates the relations between them, which her narrator will reveal as the novel

unfolds, but Silko's heterogeneous accumulation of figures on the Five Hundred Year Map also unsettles the perspectivist functions of conventional cartography.

For example, Silko's map has no center, it does not feature a primary focal point or perspective from which to read the map. Although character and geographic relations all seem to accumulate toward Tucson (note that the dotted lines have arrows pointing toward the city), the city itself is decentered on the map. While Tucson does appear in boldfaced print, the reader will undoubtedly note that none of the characters are listed as residing within the city. Silko appends a box, next to Tucson, Arizona, with a description; however, this seems to suggest that Tucson is a rather arbitrary point through which her characters pass, or a site around which they orbit.⁵¹ Just below Tucson, Silko represents the Mexican border, a comically straight line. Echoing the arbitrariness of Tucson, the Five Hundred Year Map's Mexican border amplifies the contingency of national separatism and the border's arbitrary impact on the characters of the novel. As further proof of the map's approach to the unnatural particularism of historical/ geopolitical space, Silko presents Cherry Hill, New Jersey as approximately the same distance from Tucson as San Diego, California.

The work of *Almanac of the Dead*, as illustrated by the Five Hundred Year Map, lies in its creation of an entirely new, perspective-less mode of reading America as, at once, an historical and geographical space; and moreover, the map's relation of the peoples that exist within that continuous space speaks to and anticipates the novel's reliance upon a cyclical conception of time. On the map itself, in fact, we find a cue to this notion of time inside another explanatory box that also contains the map's title:

Through the decipherment of ancient tribal texts of the Americas the Almanac of the Dead foretells the future of all the Americas. The future is encoded in arcane symbols and old narratives. (14).

The “decipherment” to which the map refers presumably falls on the shoulders of Silko’s reader, as passages and fragments from Lecha and Zeta’s as-yet-transcribed almanac are scattered throughout the novel. The “future” of America, then, may be found by reading these passages and fragments. Of course, this task, this reading, is not as easily accomplished as the map’s text box may imply.

In an article published in 1999, David L. Moore speaks to this impulse within the novel, drawing his readers’ attention to the dissociating, yet engaging, aspects of the Five Hundred Years Map and the novel itself. Recalling Jaimes’s and Niemann’s readings, Moore asserts that the narrative’s “fluctuation” circulates “between fiction and reality”—history and myth—revealing the many discourses that comprise a subject’s knowledge of the present (166). Calling forth, for example, *Almanac*’s comical assertion of the existence of several Geronimos, Moore asserts that this mythic/ historical figure (like many others) functions in the novel to unmoor the historical past from its symbolic (i.e., meaning-making) associations:

Without accounting for the differences [between the men named Geronimo], Silko repeatedly misrepresents, or rather un- or re-represents, the exact number of historical Geronimos in the tale, now four, now three, now four again, effectively breaking up any semblance of order in the telling, and letting the Joke reach farcical intensity. (166 – 67)

Moore's point speaks to, not only Silko's incorporation of mythic narratives as a means for troubling the past's symbolization in the present, but also *Almanac's* continual rejection of the idea that the historical past—its events and figures—may be 'known.'

First indicated to us in the presentation of the Five Hundred Year Map, *Almanac of the Dead* seems to incite the reader to examine his/ her own assumptions and expectations regarding a work of American literature. Speaking back to the Five Hundred Year Map, and indicating—not the almanac's importance for both the Mayans and people of today, but—how we should understand the crucial role of *Almanac's* non-Western conception of time, Silko's narrator states:

Narrative is analogue for the actual experience, which no longer exists; a mosaic of memory and imagination.

An experience termed *past* may actually return if the influences have the same balances or proportions as before. Details may vary, but the essence does not change. The day would have the same feeling, the same character, as that day has been described having had *before*. The image of memory exists in the present moment. (574)

Narrative is described here, and echoed in the Five Hundred Year Map, as a means to present the fundamental relation between the past and the present. The past, once it is deployed through narrative, becomes an amalgamation of memory and imagination—in other words, written narrative, Silko tells us, is presumably not so different from oral tradition.

This is important to our understanding of the novel, as it indicates that the reader is not to rely on the Five Hundred Year Map, or the ancient almanac, as any sort of guide to reading or understanding of its linked conceptions of time and experience. The past, as experience, exists in the present when it is narrativized, and the future lies in the continued narration of old stories. However, since these stories must pass through the filters of imagination and memory, they must be understood as malleable; past experiences (or, history) should be understood as imperfect human creations. According to this model, the past is necessarily steeped in its narrator's own interests and affects. This understanding can have revolutionary potential, opening up the past (and the future) and its experiences to imperfections and revisions—not for the sake of correction, but—for the sake of establishing a mindfulness to the means through which identity (via experience) is codified, as well as a broader understanding of time and place. By the same token, however, the model presented by Silko's narrator also implies a warning: History is an imperfect human creation, and is therefore insufficient material on which to base rigid definitions of self and/ or other. Linear (i.e., Western conceptions of) history, as it is driven by such static demarcations, is dangerously naturalistic and perspectivist, presuming in its narrator a particular, unquestionable authority. Against the model presented by the Five Hundred Year map, as well as Silko's narrator, a linear understanding of history is not open to change—it does not perceive itself as an imperfect work of memory and imagination.

In this way, the novel demands that the stories of the past are allowed to change; this crucial point informs *Almanac's* presentation of cyclic time. The

mythical-historical tales from the almanac, as well as those related to us by certain characters and narrative digressions, serve merely to color, or inform, the characters' relationality across time. "Details may vary," and, in fact, do vary. According to the novel, time and self, understood in any other way, necessitates a blindness to the connections between all peoples and times. A fragment from Zeta's portion of the almanac echoes this warning offered by Silko's narrator. The passage, a message from a major Yaqui spirit, implies that people have not been mindful of the true nature of time. In spite of the codex's long-lived warnings, people have not been vigilant or paid any attention to the patterns that have been unfolding across the last five hundred years of Western time. Therefore, people have become incapable of protecting themselves against the impending ruin of the coming days:

I have been talking to you people from the beginning

*I have told you the names and identities of the
Days and Years.*

*I have told you the stories on each day and year
so you could be prepared*

and protect yourselves.

What I have told you has always been true.

*What I have to tell you now is that
this world is about to end. (135).*

These core notions set the tone for the whole of the novel; yet, since the almanac, like the novel, does not stipulate time, the supposed end of "this world" may be years to

come, or just about to transpire. The point, really, is that there is no difference; a sense of anticipation coalesces as the novel's stories unfold, the characters—whether explicitly linked to the almanac or not—become attentive to signs of change.

Narrated time in the novel refers to both overlapping and corresponding historical moments. *Almanac of the Dead* embeds its critique of historical narration and separatist ethnicity in narratives populated by characters who live their fictional lives at one point or another over the course of this historical period. Moore's article points up this crucial facet of *Almanac*, concerning the immanence it insists of time and place, over and above the sorcery of Western temporality and territory. In the same way that events and figures of the past cannot be rendered meaningful through either symbolization or linear narration, neither, *Almanac* illustrates, should ethnicity name singularity or agency. The notion of ethnic belonging relies upon a relation between identity and knowledge, as noted by Moore; however, the very idea of 'belonging' does not exist in *Almanac*, as the characters' racial or ethnic associations are never discussed as culturally specific, separate phenomena. Further, no character or group is poised as heroic, righteous, all-powerful or omniscient. Silko's characters are selfish, weak, debased; it is their sameness, not their labeled 'differences,' that become immediately apparent to the reader.⁵² Because all characters are the same, Silko evades elaboration of any difference between these characters and her readers.

This, of course, engendered very emotional, and interestingly bifurcated, responses from readers, which, according to Silko, was precisely the effect for which she had hoped: "When I was working [on *Almanac*] I wanted [the novel's interwoven narratives] to have an after-effect in the unconscious" (Niemann 108). Some readers,

Silko contends, were able to be “honest” about the visceral effect that the novel had “in the part of them that writes reviews” (she cites the reviews in *New Republic* and *Newsweek*); while others were not “honest about where the emotion was coming from,” and so rejected the novel wholesale, as a piece of self-righteous nationalism (Niemann 108). In this way, we may perceive Silko’s recognition of relevant contingencies within the relationship between the writing of literature and literary criticism.

II

The iniquity with which mainstream critics have charged Silko’s characterizations speaks to the critics’ own privileging of particularist, delimiting notions of American identity and authorship. These critics’ complaints reveal the contingency of their ideations concerning self and other. That is, the claim that the actions and ethnicities of Silko’s characters are unfair, insincere or inauthentic beseeches the ethnic writer to fulfill a nationalistic aim in her text. She should, the mainstream seems to say, write only what she knows: an ‘authentic,’ and therefore perspectivist, Native American experience in which whites are, presumably, not given to “dope snorting, murder and buggery” (Lyons). This calls for a narrativization of otherness which constructs for the (ostensibly white) reader a possible space for meaning, regardless of American actuality’s systematic racial discrimination, disenfranchisement, and its problematic colonial past.

In the field of Native American fiction, David Treuer stands against this tendency to overemphasize authenticity and identity, as such an emphasis merely

serves this impulse for meaning-making in ethnic literature. Treuer asserts that readers must stop “looking at Indian fiction in terms of origination,” and instead, begin “thinking of it in terms of *destination*” (5; emphasis added). According to Treuer, Native culture should be regarded in literature as an outgrowth of writerly style—“style creates the convincing semblance of culture on the page” (5). Thus, he continues, “[i]t is crucial to make a distinction between reading books as culture and seeing books as capable of *suggesting* culture” (5).

As Treuer points out, cultural studies’ approach to literary examination can prove problematic when applied to ethnic literatures precisely because, as concepts, race and ethnicity are informed by particular discourses; the manner by which literary scholars and critics read literature is dependent upon their own orientations, with respect to cultural knowledge. On reading American Indian literature, Moore asserts that the racial and ethnic context tends to move “the discussion of ways of reading Native American literature toward issues of epistemology” (7). If one’s knowledge of the world begins, Moore argues, with “how we know the nexus of self and other,” then any relationality via the text is dependent upon how we understand that nexus (7). Rooted in a colonial history, American definitions of race and ethnicity are shaped by “colonial cognitive structures,” implicitly presuming a superior ‘we’ over and against a marginalized ‘they,’ or Other (Moore 7). Indeed, one may note that dichotomies such as self/ other and culture/ nature—exemplary of the Western historical tradition—have contributed to the concentration and scope of institutionalized slavery within the U.S., as well as its related and more recent issue of systematic racial discrimination; Moore extends this argument, asserting that these very dichotomies

continue to inform the suppositions which underlie scholarly readings of ethnic American literature. This raises questions about the sociopolitical influence of certain cultural, critical approaches.

Wendy Brown, in her work theorizing genealogy of identity claims in late 20th-century America, touches directly upon this concern, calling to mind Moore and Treuer's critiques: "Just when polite liberal [...] discourse ceased speaking of us as dykes, faggots, colored girls, or natives, we began speaking of ourselves this way" (1995, 53). Brown asserts that a paradox inheres to the discursive, moralizing revenge of the powerless—or, as she quotes Nietzsche's verbiage, "the triumph of the weak *as* weak" (1993, 400; emphasis added). According to Brown, this contemporary American construction finds its cause in suffering; in effect, its creativity emanates from its reworking of this historical—and presumably formative—pain into a unified and disenfranchised "I". This reactionary "I" is inscribed by its exclusion from a white Western "we" (Brown 1993, 398; 1995, 69)

Writing specifically on Native American literatures, Arnold Krupat's critique of ethno-nationalistic methods of literary discourse resonate strongly with Brown's concerns; Krupat argues that, even where scholarship acknowledges the long-term effects of colonialism's distressful and domineering history within the States, its stance is insufficient to effectively change deep-rooted dynamics of supremacy and subjugation. He asserts:

Just as dichotomized, binary, oppositional, or Manichean reasoning once served as a justification for imperial domination, so, too, is it too often retained today to justify that form of postcolonial revisionism that produces [...]

‘[v]ictimist [...] history,’ a very specific form of narrative which ‘tells how one person was damaged by another.’ (20).

This construction determines cultural identity as two essentially different things; the shift in focus, where the subaltern other becomes the paradigm, nevertheless continues dualistic thinking. In this construction, it is merely “the second term of each dichotomous set that is valorized,” and such a construction still operates within the same normative, cultural mode as the narratives of domination which it claims to oppose (Krupat 20); that is, the Western dualism of self and other remains intact, constitutive of both constructions. For Krupat, the most upsetting effect of this mode, where ethnic literary discourses are concerned, is that it safeguards the image of the demoralized African American, intelligible only through discourses of racial inequality, as well as the ‘noble savage,’ eternally positioned as the “vanishing Indian” (20).

Many initial readers of the novel felt that Silko’s depiction of America’s aggregate oppressed was excessively nationalistic and problematically untethered to any principle or origin. With respect to the novel’s theme of an underclass revolution, numerous literary reviewers met *Almanac of the Dead* with explicit frustration, annoyance, and even anger. For instance, in *The New Republic*, Sven Birkerts stated that Silko’s novel speaks to the author’s presumed belief “[t]hat the oppressed of the world should break their chains and retake what’s theirs” (41). While he acknowledges that this is not, necessarily, an “unappealing” idea, (qualified by: “for some”), “it is so contrary to what we know both of the structures of power and the psychology of the oppressed that the imagination simply balks” (41). According to

this overall evaluation of the text, one might think that Birkerts believed Silko to be plotting the insurrection of the underclass herself; what, after all, does he presume “we” should “know” about the “psychology of the oppressed”?

While Birkerts is unclear in his definition of “structures of power,” as well as how they are necessarily linked to the “psychology” of the oppressed (not to mention how this relationship presents a totalizing problem within the novel) we may perceive in this evaluation evidence of the very assumptions and expectations of self and other, as noted by Moore, which Silko tries to un-work. Recalling Brown’s critique of political discourses, Birkerts’ “we” presumes to “know” the mind of some aggregate, “oppressed” population; yet, while he names this population’s uprising as “not an unappealing idea,” the “premise of revolutionary insurrection [within the novel] is tethered to airy nothing” (41). In this way, the very idea of a revolution by the “oppressed” is dismissed due to its presumed failure to articulate a specific principle, its terms, or desired outcome; that is, Silko’s “failure” to reveal the texture of her others’ consciousnesses renders her novel a mere “enactment of wish fulfillment scenarios” (Birkerts 41). Birkerts’ appraisal begs the problematic questions: What, after all, could the oppressed want—that is, what do they lack? And how, exactly, will this revolution happen—or, on what grounds, within which arenas, will ‘they’ attack ‘us’? Such questions reveal the concomitantly blind and panoptical impulses of Western history’s conceptions of self versus other.

Birkerts’ annoyance with *Almanac* speaks to the novel’s falling outside of its expected boundaries of meaning, particularly concerning American conceptions of self and other. Silko’s subject of American history, regardless of race or ethnicity, is a

monster: perverse, grotesquely avaricious, blindly narcissistic. Many reviewers of the novel reacted according to these depictions, seeming to cast blame—along a spectrum of intensity—upon Silko’s own ethnic association. For instance, some reviewers of the novel allude to an expectation that Silko should offer ‘us’ insights into the minds of her marginalized characters. Writing for *USA Today*, Alan Ryan described the novel as lacking “that special insight into the lives and minds of Native Americans that *we* have come to expect” from Silko’s earlier works (qtd. in Jodi Adamson Clarke 95; emphasis added). Perhaps because Silko’s revolutionary, malcontented characters are not all of Native American descent, one may come away from the novel feeling as though they ‘know’ even less about America’s marginalized populations than before reading. Similarly, Gene Lyons referred to the novel as a “vastly ambitious” project and a difficult read— “[w]e’re talking homework here, folks.” For Lyons, however, Silko’s ambition ultimately amounts to little more than “the windiest kind of bombast served up in the name of ‘multiculturalism.’” He then goes on to note how Silko’s ethnicity, despite her talent, “looms large as a critical consideration” within the circles of which she has won celebrity status.

Such cynicism toward Silko and her novel—as implicitly pointed out by both Krupat and Brown—speaks to the very problems with dichotomous conceptions of self/ other which *Almanac* examines. The above reviewers’ anger with the novel ostensibly stems from their sense of a certain disorientation toward its characters—no comfortable identification, between the reading ‘self’ and the characterized ‘others’ in the world of the novel, can be easily made. Reviewers interpret this immanence as a simultaneous jab to both white Americans and Native American cultural specificity, as

these (along with the novel's many other groups) are not represented as distinct; neither groups' characters exhibit consistent actions or attitudes that might distinguish them from one another, neither demonstrate or explicate an adherence or reverence for traditions or ancestry—both groups are populated by lawless, self-interested degenerates. Reviewers misguidedly interpret this as a malevolent reversal of conventional, ethnic particularity; that is, an articulation of Native disgust and hatred toward whites. The problem with this interpretation, of course, is that it presumes that an 'authentic' discourse of Otherness must include an explicit, culturalist expression of identity and experience; however, such expressions are problematically limiting, grounded in symbolically-based typification, and are no less essentialist or troublesome than the articulation of Native hatred that reviewers mistakenly read in *Almanac*.

Anticipating critics' problems with Silko's novel, in 1981, Simon J. Ortiz addressed this point in his seminal, critical piece, "Towards a National Indian Literature: Cultural Authenticity and Nationalism." Interested in fusing rigorous intellectual attention to cultural traditionalism, Ortiz's work encouraged an articulation of the relations which exist between American Indian communities and literature. Ortiz asserted that indigenous literature did not—and effectively could not—seek to promulgate a nationalistic superiority of American Indian cultural thought over and above Western ideas and configurations of 'knowledge'; citing Silko's work (particularly *Ceremony*, c. 1979), Ortiz argued that, as was the case within Native cultures following colonialism, Native writers adapt and incorporate Western concepts and ideas into their creations, extending and explaining them to their readers (and

themselves) by rendering them on their own terms. That is, Indian writers creatively “make use of” the many, Western “forms of socio-political colonizing force which beset them,” giving meaning to these forms and their role in Native life according to their own perceptions (Ortiz 8 – 9). Ortiz continues:

This perception and meaningfulness has to happen; otherwise, the hard experience of the Euroamerican colonization of the lands and people of the Western Hemisphere would be driven into the dark recesses of the indigenous mind and psyche. (9)

These hard experiences, of course, do not belong solely to the indigenous population of America; as Silko’s novel makes clear, many groups within and without America’s borders suffer similar brands of disenfranchisement that are all too often associated with postcolonial Native American life. In his essay, Ortiz speaks to this reality. A key point—if not the most important—made by Ortiz (and echoed by Silko) is that American Indian writers have, and continue, to acknowledge:

[Their] responsibility to advocate for their people’s self-government, sovereignty, and control of land and natural resources; and to look also at racism, political and economic oppression, sexism, supremacism, and the needless and wasteful exploitation of land and people. (12)

Contrary to popular, misguided belief, Ortiz explains that indigenous literature is not focused upon any form of cultural supremacy. Its focus, rather, is on sovereignty—the sovereignty, in fact, of all peoples within America, in light of its systemic problems of racism, sexism, economic oppression, and so on. Thus, the “character” of the nationalism being formed by Native American fiction writers is one, Ortiz contends,

that is “wealthy in being without an illusion of dominant power and capitalistic abundance” (12). In other words, the fundamental concerns of these writers, akin to the themes of their texts, are related to “human dignity, creativity and integrity”; not a mere expression of direct, sociohistorical experience, the contemporary literature of Native Americans is concerned with finding liberation within the daily struggle of life in America.

Interestingly, the positive reviews and scholarly articles that were published on *Almanac of the Dead* echo sentiments very similar to Ortiz’s. In one article titled, “Human Debris” Ann Folwell Stanford explores how *Almanac* makes use of the American medical establishment, discussing the institution’s capitalistic, unethical function, through the depiction of the character Trigg. In the novel, Trigg is a paraplegic predator who is “legitimized, supported by, and necessary to medicine” (Stanford 33). He recruits the homeless, hitchhikers, drug addicts—“the filth and scum” of society, as he calls them—to donate blood, plasma, organs, and other biological commodities at his ‘center’ (Silko 386). Trigg illegally sells his rendered biomaterials to the American medical establishment, as well as overseas. His ultimate goal is to rid the nation of its “human debris” while simultaneously procuring for himself a formidable profit. Stanford asserts that Silko makes use of the medical establishment—so often perceived as ground-breakingly heroic and righteous—and reveals it as the “context in which murder, poverty, war, and the commodification of bodies and body parts all undermine any semblance of moral order” (25 – 26). In this way, Stanford echoes Ortiz’s assertion that Native American literature need not—and should not—have anything to do with cultural particularism or arguments of

supremacy. Rather, indigenous writers are focused upon examining society's assumptions and expectations, the often hidden perpetration of human injustices, and the enduring integrity of American life irrespective of race, class, creed, and so on.

Similarly, appearing in the Summer 1993 issue of *Prairie Schooner*, Melissa Hearn's review acknowledges that the vast array of (commonly degenerate) characters within Silko's novel—rather than misleading or aggravating—is a positive, productive aspect of the text:

From the accumulation of these voices, *Almanac of the Dead* forms a powerful, destructive revelation for our world, in which the destroyers of Mother Earth must confront their legacy: a dying planet full of disenfranchised people. (149)

The “reign of havoc” which has shaped America's colonial past may finally be exposed and explored in this novel, as Silko enacts and recounts events through a compelling admixture of “academic, mythic, and poetic” registers (149). Annette Jaimes, for *Wicazo Sa Review*, voices similar sentiments; she maintains that the novel's oblique character-focus, upon the disenfranchised/ dispossessed of America, is a figuration for Silko's larger, more abstract vision: the “menacing portents of the convergence of diverse but immutable cosmic forces destined to correct the conditions of imbalance and disharmony” (56). The novel's mixing of discourses—academic, poetic, and mythic—therefore, contributes to the characters' figuration.

Driving the history of American literary criticism, much in the same way that formulations of self/ other motor Western history, *Almanac* takes to task the deep-rooted, formalist impulse to focus upon novelistic content and form. The novel

suggests that literary criticism must incorporate into its function a reflective critique of its own premises. If criticism hopes to avoid reductive readings of cultural encounter, abridging complex non-white cultural formations via modes of meaning-making and symbolic ideal-maintenance, it must shrug off dualistic paradigms of thought characteristic of Western hegemony. Of course, such an auto-critical method is difficult to achieve, as ingrained suppositions may escape examination. Arnold Krupat, writing on self-critical approaches to ethnic literature, argues that literary criticism runs the risk of perpetuating precisely that which it claims to oppose. Arguments concerning style and identity continue to pervade ethnic American literary study, and the split reception of Silko's *Almanac of the Dead* only affirms the fact that no easy answers are to be found to any of these problems.

III

Discourse's claim to truth is contextualized and changes over time, which Silko's circuitous narrative—much like the Five Hundred Year Map—registers by bringing past discourses into contact with the present. Narrating the trans-historical relations figured in the map, Silko's third-person narrator helps the reader to see, not only relations among seemingly disparate peoples and circumstances, but also the co-implication of linear time and hegemonic discourses of self/ other in colonialist violence and contemporary disenfranchisement. In this way, the novel connects the incomplete, continuing temporal transitions of the present with an inconclusive past; the linking of this present with a mythical story, emerging unexpectedly from the depths of indigenous cultures, develops a relationship between the various modes by

which we symbolize the past (for meaning) and the unpreparedness which (ironically) symbolizes the present.

The Western outlook, the reader learns, is the result of a centuries-long process of religious institutionalization, largely via missionaries from Europe. A key story is recalled by the character Menardo, which his indigenous Mexican grandfather told to him as a child; in the story, the Westerners' religion is relayed through an indigenous perspective. In the grandfather's story, he relates how the Europeans' legacy hearkens to their own persecution by a world-management system not unlike the one to which they subjected the Natives of the Americas. The Westerners' God "had created them but soon was furious with them, throwing them out of their birthplace, driving them away" (258). These "orphan people" wander the earth aimlessly; the grandfather had noted, "as with orphans taken in by selfish or coldhearted clanspeople" the Europeans had suffered deep spiritual harm as a result of their "insane" God's abandonment (258).

Permutations of this story appear again and again in the novel, depicting various peoples—Western and indigenous alike—who have lost touch with their spirituality and ancient cultures. The result of the people's abandonment, whether white or otherwise, is constituted by their turn to what the novel refers to as "sorcery." Over time, institutionalized religion falls away as the direct structuring agent of life—strictly demarcating good from evil, inside from outside, and so on—but vestiges of its principles of organization and categorization remain intact in political and economic realms. That is, people's conceptions of self and other no longer pass through religion itself, but the institution's fundamental, empiric perspectives on territory, order, and

conduct hold strong. The colonialist structures of hegemony stand, even after the veil of religion has long fallen away; and as a result, regardless of ethnicity, the novel alludes to the fact that people have long learned to cling to these dichotomous, structuring agents for the sake of safety, power, and a false sense of legacy—that is, immortality, within the confines of linear narratives of history. In this way, Silko gestures towards the fundamental, if abstracted, functional links that exist between supremacist, nationalistic impulses and institutionalized religion. These links play a central role in the novel's diagramming the work of sorcery.

We hear echoes of the Native grandfather's story on religion in another key passage: a digression made by Silko's narrator. Interrupting during a discussion between the twin brothers, Tacho and El Feo, the narrator shifts the reader's focus off of the brothers and onto a short fable about a village of sorcerers—lovers of power and wealth in the name of recognition and immortality. This story may be an ancient Indian fable or an excerpt taken from the almanac—although the reader is never made certain of its origins:

Someplaces there were entire villages populated by sorcerers, all living together by mutual pledge to prey only on *outsiders*. Their pledges were frequently broken, and they turned upon one another in the most bloodthirsty manner [...] [T]his sorcery, this witchcraft, occurred among all human beings. The killing and devouring occurred behind bedroom doors, inflicted by parents and relatives, and the village of sorcerers continues generation after generation without interruption. (478, emphasis added)

In the swift movement from one sentence the next—with the sorcerers’ making and breaking their “mutual pledge”—the narrator’s fable exposes the foundation of European colonialism and progress in the Americas. The idea of promises broken brings to mind the loss that is entailed in change—codified as progress in the colonial imagination. More interestingly, however, the image of the sorcerers’ broken “mutual pledge”—to harm only “outsiders” with their magic—calls to mind the Western focus upon the individual (and his welfare) over and above the community. The narrator’s fable goes on to describe how villages of sorcerers became wealthy by selling their “tribal healing magics” (“assorted elixirs, teas, balms, waters, crystals, and capsules”) to the eager, nearby city-dwellers, who were “mostly whites” (478 – 79).

Interestingly, this digression appears as Tacho and El Feo—recently discovered by the media as seers who speak to ancient spirits—are, in fact, discussing the nature of sorcery and its existence/ function in the contemporary world. Tacho asserts that “95 percent of supposed witchcraft and sorcery was superstition and puffed-up talk” (478). El Feo laughs at his brother, seeming to know better. The brothers’ powers had gained them a certain notoriety, as “according to rumors and television reports,” they use the spirits’ guidance in leading a revolutionist struggle against the Mexican government:

[S]pirits talked to one of the twins and told him what the poor people must do, what the poor Indians must do. Spirits talked to him and scolded the people for being lazy and weak, for selling out to the Europeans. (589)

These “rumors” are questionable, as the reader learns at other points in the novel that spirits speak to both brothers through two, big macaws. The macaws tell them that the

people (ethnicity unspecified) must act; the spirit realm is angry with people who have allowed their victimization at the hands of their government.

Although Tacho and El Feo are never referred to by the narrator as sorcerers, the affect that their stories have, once filtered through the imagination and memory of rumor and media, constitute a dangerous and divisive force—i.e., sorcery—to the American and Mexican society. In the media and through rumors, Tacho and El Feo's abilities, indeed, become “puffed-up talk” and so many stories of “superstition.” Without warning, the indigenous people's conception of a ‘spirit world’ is relevant to the ethnically unspecific public; anticipation of the end of civilization arises as the spirits' messages are broadcast on radio and television. The general reaction of the public is one of anxiety, manifesting as either a frenzied rush to be allied with Tacho and El Feo, or as an uneasy and defensive concern over impending possibility of an underclass uprising. As news of the twins' powers and the imminent uprising breaks, “thousands of Indians and mesizos as well as hundreds of whites” came to “learn what spiritual messages had been received” by the brothers (590). Many flock to the brothers' village in order to make their allegiance, as “Friends of the Indians,” known—an act of individualistic self-preservation, no doubt (471). Those who are uneasy with the notion of revolt immediately perceive the brothers and their sudden mass of followers as enemies. Tacho and El Feo's small village, which “had been just another group of pitiful rural squatters,” is suddenly overrun with the Mexican army and police after intelligence of the resistance reaches the media (589).

The twins' abilities poise them as out of sync with the logical, linear conception of time and the smooth running of Mexican and American society. Like

the Five Hundred Years Map, the narrator's digression to the fable about sorcerers, amidst the psychic brothers' discussion of the subject, suggests a revised logic of identity which runs counter to hegemony. The interjection of the fable blurs distinguishable differences between the presumably 'good' brothers, Tacho and El Feo, and the 'evil' sorcerers of the narrative digression; this presents to the reader, not only the problem of origins/ authenticity with respect to linear histories, but also the difficulties inherent in cleanly separating good from evil, self from other, when the linearity of historical narrative is abandoned. The true sorcery that is at work around the brothers, the reader learns, exists in the stories that are made of them by the media and people's rumors—to which almost none the reader is made privy.

In the link that opens up here, between sorcery and the concept of self/ other, the reader comes to understand that these concepts encompass one and the same principle: sorcery. Sorcery is an analog for the effects of a specific variety of historical narration, engendered over time from the empiric, colonialist world-management system structured around institutionalized religion across both Europe and the Americas. In the fable, we perceive Silko's disagreement with nationalist—or perspectivist, Western-style—histories, which isolate events and processes from a continuous conception of time. The reader may glean this in the unclear distinction between the sorcerers of the digression and the spirit-communing twin brothers, El Feo and Tacho. The brothers, much like the fable's sorcerers, draw the curiosity and interest of hundreds; and like the sorcerers, the attraction is largely based on the brothers' obscure, indigenous knowledge.

The narrator's story shows the perseverance of sorcery across unspecified time (and geography); this reveals the novel's 'present' as—not arbitrary or an automatic result of any past or origin, but—a state of affairs which has been assembled from repetitious ethical failings. Here, we may also distinguish Silko's opposition to the ritualistic isolation of inward-turning individualism, which (like nationalist narratives) problematically elide the links between all people, excusing harm done to any "outsiders." Thus, at the heart of the brothers' conception of sorcery is the tragedy of identity. The perverse network of information, which Tacho configures as sorcery, traverses the mysteriously linked systems of values that conspire in the production and maintenance of particularist cultural, ethnic, and/ or racial identity. This is the sorcery which attracts the hundreds of whites—along with Indians and mestizos—to the brothers' community. By extension, El Feo's view of sorcery (i.e., as something other than just "superstition" and "puffed-up talk") reinforces Tacho's, keeping these particular positions in place through implicit and explicit forms of violence and disenfranchisement. Thus, sorcery enables the co-evolving, separatist project of history, permeating nearly every aspect of—especially social and economic—life.

The work of sorcery, the narrator is careful to illustrate, should not be mistaken as a purely Western impulse, nor should white people be regarded as the only promulgators and perpetrators of this insidious force. Silko makes the immanence of sorcery clear through conspicuously repetitive, though unexpected, interjections by characters over the course of the novel. Another of Silko's characters, a Native American named Sterling, makes clear that sorcery is perpetuated by indigenous peoples, as well. Sterling reflects on the attitudes of people living in contemporary

Mexico, which resonates with Menardo's grandfather's orphaned Westerners: "the people he had been used to calling 'Mexicans' were really remnants of different kinds of Indians. But what had remained of what was Indian was in appearance only [...] They had lost contact with their tribes and their ancestors' worlds" (88). Largely as a result of forced assimilation via institutionalized religion, countless peoples have lost connections to their origins; however, rather than these origins representing a brand of authority or symbolic authenticity, *Almanac* is clear that a connection to one's ancestry (which, we learn, is very similar across various indigenous populations) is helpful in understanding one's present, as well as the course to one's future.

However, as El Feo points out, "[t]he white man did not seem to understand he had no future [in the Americas] because he had no past, no spirits of ancestors here" (313).

The issue of the "white man" and his deficiency of a "future," however, is not so clear cut in the novel as El Feo might have the reader believe. As Sterling states, the legacy of institutionalized religion's principles of regulation and demarcation have become a world-management system, engendering perspicitivist attitudes in the indigenous populations of America and Mexico, as well. Therefore, the problem of "no future" is, essentially, a problem that all people face—regardless of ethnicity. However, the strength of sorcery blinds most people to this fact; and due to this, anyone presenting a logic outside the bounds of sorcery's 'business as usual' is automatically seen as an outsider. This notion is cast in the figures of Tacho and El Feo, whose constituency is arrogantly perceived as delusional and defeatable, given their outside relation to the safety and security of the nation.

Clinton, an African American Green Beret Vietnam veteran presents an uncannily resonant story, which recasts the arrogance of sorcery and assumed delusion of the enemy in a short interlude about an indigenous revolution taking place in Africa. Similar to the uprising with which Tacho and El Feo are aligned in Mexico, Silko's narrator relates a brief account of some recent newspaper clippings saved by the eccentric Clinton; the clippings discuss the inexplicable power of "voodoo priestess," Mama Marie, and her indefatigable army of indigenous troops who are at war with their (unspecified) African country's European government and military (411). Presumably due to their love for her and their belief in her teachings, Mama Marie's insurgents are able to "[raise] hell with government troops":

The voodoo priestess and her soldiers believed that with her power, sticks and stones would explode like grenades and bees would become bullets. Mama Marie had rubbed the chests of her young soldiers with special oils to stop bullets. (411)

For Clinton, this news piece brings to mind his own experiences in Vietnam, where "the little jungle people weren't just good fighters," but had "magic and spirits on their side" (411). There is no other way, according to Clinton, to explain how or why the United States' military lost the Vietnam War; the similarities that Clinton perceives, between Mama Marie's soldiers and his own experiences in Vietnam, give him hope for the success of the indigenous and underclass uprising that is about to erupt in the United States and South American. Although the Americans "had superior firepower" and "had bombed every square foot of the entire [Vietnamese] country," the

Americans lost, Clinton reasons, just as the government against Mama Maria's constituency is on its way to defeat (411).

The Americans' loss in Vietnam, like loss that is imminent by the government in Africa, is brought about by a spiritually bankrupt center and an investment in sorcery. As Calabazas, a Yaqui Indian who runs a smuggling network through Tucson, Arizona, asserts, Western thought stipulates a "sort of blindness to the world" (224). This is a blindness perpetrated by the army and police forces rising against Tacho and El Feo, as well as a blindness enacted by the Americans' in their attempts to conquer Vietnam. Of course, this blindness is not a new phenomenon, brought on by arrogance attained after so many prior victories; rather, it has been an epidemic of those under the spell of sorcery's stratifying logic since the times of colonialism. Late in the novel, Wilson Weasel Tail, a minor character who is a Native American activist-poet, relates a story about the Ghost Dance and how the Western settlers had become "disillusioned when the ghost shirts [worn by the Lakota Sioux in battle] did not stop bullets"; the Europeans, who "feverishly sought magic objects to postpone their own deaths," had misunderstood the function of the shirts (722).

Belonging to the "realm of spirits and dreams," the shirts were meant for spiritual protection—like Mama Marie's voodoo and the spirits protecting the Vietnamese—and were effective for the dancers who wore them. Bullets, on the other hand, "belong to the everyday world" (722). The Ghost Dance—or, the processes through which one connects with all peoples of all times in the present—Weasel Tail continues, was not curtailed at Wounded Knee by the American military (724). The forces of resistance against sorcery, or Western standardization, have endured and

become agitated amidst the world's mounting climate of systematized racism and disenfranchisement. In light of Clinton's ruminations and Weasel Tail's story, *Almanac* suggests that the powerful potential of sorcery is grounded in symbolism and belief; when symbolically deployed within a rationalizing system that perceives the self as superiorly 'different' (constituted by an overwhelming, contradictory, fear of death) and its relation to the other is necessarily conflicted, sorcery's potential for harm is deployed.

According to the Five Hundred Year Map, "[t]he future is encoded in arcane symbols and old narratives" (14). El Feo's point concerning the Europeans not having a future in the Americas resonates with the map's definition of the future. Yet, all people's within the novel possess symbol systems—forms of sorcery—to which they adhere. The key, however, lies in how they are codified and deployed. Symbols posited as mechanisms of control through standardization are consistently harmful in the novel, regardless the ethnicity of the adherent. This formulation plays out in the case of Menardo, who is wryly defined by Silko's narrator as a "self-made" man; that is, a mestizo "of darker skin and lower class who had managed to amass a large fortune" (277). The character Menardo recalls Sterling's conception of the people living in contemporary Mexico: akin to the indigenous Mexicans only in appearance and strikingly apart from the old cultural knowledges in nearly every other conceivable way. Menardo owns Universal Insurance, an outfit contrived to cater to its clients' every concern for protection, no matter how odd. However, recent political unrest in Mexico and America threatens Menardo. Although "Menardo's had been the first insurance company to employ a private security force to protect clients from

political unrest,” news of “agitators” and “Bolsheviks” communicating with the indigenous and working classes shakes his corporatist hubris (261).

Menardo’s growing fear springs, first, from his heightened self-consciousness of his cultural identity: Menardo’s ties with his indigenous family “had nearly dissolved,” though residues of his grandfather’s stories about civil disaster haunt Menardo and awaken in him paranoia regarding his constructed, ‘white’ identity (301). Menardo’s allegiances reside with El Grupo Gun Club, an all-male clutch consisting of a wealthy former ambassador, friends of the CIA, and politically powerful military and police officials of both Mexico and the United States. The members of El Grupo circulate drugs and cash through Tucson, Arizona where they exchange Mexican cocaine for military armaments and aircraft. One member, a client of Menardo’s named Sonny Blue, gives Menardo a top-of-the-line bullet proof vest as a gift. As a result, Menardo comes to see himself as “a man to be reckoned with—a man invincible with the *magic* of high technology” (509, emphasis added). Menardo quickly makes a habit of wearing the vest all the time—out to functions, to work, around the house, to bed, and even in the exclusive company of his friends, El Grupo Gun Club.

Menardo’s obsession with the technological “magic” of the vest calls to mind the narrator’s digression, amidst Tacho and El Feo’s discussion, concerning sorcery. For Menardo, the vest symbolizes the power and influence of El Grupo Gun Club; but it also stands in for his forsaken alliance with indigenous superstitions. The stories told by his grandfather comprise little more than charlatanism and superstition for Mendardo; however, the obsession that awakens toward the technologically advanced

bullet proof vest fulfills the same function. The magic of both technology and superstition functions on the level of the preservation of life, rather than the threat of death. This magic, or sorcery, is a tactical and productive power generated from the subject's affective state of fear; for Menardo, who relies upon discursive forms of authority for his very self-actualization, this fear hinges on the possibility of a disaster that will explode the symbols structuring his understanding of himself, and the world, in the face of catastrophe.

The sorcery to which Menardo succumbs is, then, necessarily based upon his affective investment—based on years of insecurity driven by stereotypes and childhood teasing—in shrugging off his Native heritage. As he has poised himself, financially and emotionally, against the natives and working class of Mexico, the lessons of his grandfather cannot dissuade Menardo from the sense of empowerment and freedom from fear that his trust in the values of capitalism and technology (over superstition) have affected. The same, of course, may be said of the technologically advanced Americans' defeat in Vietnam; and like the Americans in this case, Menardo's affective investment in capitalism and technology engender his "blindness" to the world, as noted by Calabazas.

The introduction of the vest to Menardo detonates an increasingly conservative and limiting anxiety in him about the future. He senses that the freedom promised by his technologically advanced, wealthy worldview is not complete. While the symbolic logic of the bullet proof vest implies protection, reassurance and freedom, the commodity is nevertheless accompanied by a parallel (and arguably overwhelming) emotional state of fear. While the vest is a symbolic site of power—an analog for

membership in El Grupo—it also represents a system of control based upon technological advancement and the denial of death. And although Silko’s narrator does not explicitly state this to be the case, the careful reader may note that Menardo’s feelings of fear for his life and the anxieties he harbors toward El Grupo (even after receiving the vest) calls to the fore the dangers inherent in the maintenance of such artificial, stable structures. The affective turmoil experienced by Menardo reveals, within meaning-making structures such as El Grupo Gun Club and the vest itself, the very formula for sorcery’s centuries-long stronghold: that is, co-evolution and mutual dependence of power and fear. In this way, potential for the destruction of meaning-making structures (which define the very content of ethnic and economic power) by an underclass uprising is put to work in the service of El Grupo Gun Club’s political and military authority. Thus, the vest also symbolizes the possibility of Menardo, the self-made man’s, similar destruction.

Of course, Menardo does die of a gunshot wound while wearing the vest—a “freak accident” at the hands of his chauffeur, Tacho (509). The cause of Menardo’s untimely demise might facilely be attributed to the dangers inherent in one’s reliance upon flawed, man-made technologies; however, the narrator suggests that we read a deeper cue in Menardo’s death. The core problem is not the presence, and eventual failure, of the vest. Rather, Menardo’s death reveals how one’s whole-hearted, invested faith in a symbol of superiority may warp one’s perception—much as Wilson Weasel Tail relays in his story about colonists and the ghost shirts. In this way, Menardo’s death begins with his shift in perception, negating fear and attaching himself, wholesale, to symbolic forms of power and superiority. This structure of

thought is the work of sorcery. Once Menardo wholeheartedly allows his perception of himself and the world to be filtered through this individualist, deterministic sorcery (a standardizing and stratifying logic, evidenced by his affective investment in the formal logic of identity) he is “devoured,” just as the narrator’s fable relays.

Menardo’s case relates conversely to the abilities of the ghost shirts. Like the Americans of the Ghost Dance era, who believed in the effectiveness of the shirts, Menardo eventually comes to fully believe in the “magic” of his bullet proof vest. However, like the Americans of Weasel Tale’s story, he believes in the vest in relation to an incorrect set of coordinates. The Americans believe in the practical, “everyday world” effectiveness of the spiritual shirts; as a result, they were disillusioned. Menardo’s bullet proof vest, on the other hand, is a practical commodity of the “everyday world”; yet, he comes to invest in it a belief that is akin to that which the Indians placed in the ghost shirts. The bullet proof vest, unlike the shirts, is not a spiritual fabrication which promises to place him in touch with a spiritual, or trans-historical, realm of affective forces. Nevertheless, Menardo generates this spiritual, affective atmosphere for himself when he places all of his faith in the vest; with it on, he feels secure and is able to deny his vulnerability. Without the vest, he is completely vulnerable and open to the possibility of death (which is also the case when he has it on, it turns out). Thus, in spite of the vest’s myriad other symbolizations (with respect to El Grupo Gun Club, and so on) it functions, first and foremost, as an agent of denial.

In this way, the vest represents a denial of death, while it simultaneously presupposes the wearer’s false ‘difference’ (via its promise of invincibility) from non-

wearers. By contrast, The Indians of Weasel Tail's story, prior to the American military's intrusion, were able to successfully utilize the ghost shirts because they were not perceived as symbolic manifestations of superior might; like Mama Maria's voodoo, rather than functioning in relation to death through fear, the shirts/ voodoo function in relation to *life* as an understanding of all time's convergence in the present. This perception of the self hinges on the dignity of life and its direct relation to all times and all peoples; there is no fear of death in this structure, but a willingness to die for the sake of that dignity, for the sake of all times and all people.

In this sense, the spiritual bankruptcy with which many of the novel's indigenous characters associate Westerners speaks to the colonial clash between diverse modes by which people come to 'know' themselves and the world around them. The symbolic violence of institutionalized, standardizing religion and culture challenged the Natives' long-held, existent assumptions about what kinds of violence are possible within a particular context. This is a violence that takes as its object mediated forms of experience, or relations between self/ other (i.e., good and evil); this is a violence of representation. And, as Yoeme points out, this violence was also visited upon the Westerners of centuries long passed, with the institutionalized and governmentally-sanctioned spread of Christianity throughout Europe. However, since people (of all races and ethnicities) have failed to perceive the breadth of this symbolic violence, allowing such violations to run rampant on both the macro and micro-level, connections to ancient ways of perceiving life and the relations among all peoples and ideas has slipped away and been replaced by a politics of fear. At this point, we may come to understand that the novel's larger-scale clash between Euro-Americans and

the indigenous peoples of the Americas is not one of contradiction, nor is it the function of a necessary opposition of terms. Rather, the clash presents an impossible relationship between the two.

Silko extends this examination of sorcery and its symbols still further, testing the relations which motor history, through the relationship that develops between Bartolomeo, a Cuban Marxist rebel, and the indigenous populations of the United States and Mexico. Bartolomeo leads a pro-communism constituency of rebels, alongside El Feo and a Native American guerilla soldier named Angelita (also known as La Escapia, or, The Meat Hook). Bartolomeo's Cuban constituency runs a Marxist school in Mexico City, which is aimed at the communist "political instruction" and eventual "reeducation" of the indigenous rebels within Mexico and South America (310 & 516). Angelita attends the school, where Bartolomeo also teaches, and finds herself at odds with this "white man" and his reading of communism (310 – 311). The Indians at Bartolomeo's school are not interested in the theoretical distinctions between capitalism and communism; for them, as for Angelita, the theories are not the point. Rather, the symbolic violence and affective damage suffered by their culture are the points worthy of revolution; for generations, the natives' have not had their dignity respected by white people, so they seek retribution against white people—whether capitalist or communist.

Bartolomeo, on the other hand, is not interested in the natives' stories, cultural knowledges, or wrecked symbols. Without ever stopping to hear about massacres perpetrated and forced assimilation, Bartolomeo repetitively explains to the Indians the evils of private property, the capitalist nature of their exploitation, and the

necessity of their revolt against the government's economic structure. By refusing the indigenous people's stories and favoring, instead, a hard, anti-capitalist party line, Bartolomeo shows himself to be a sorcerer. That is, he selectively deploys Marx's ideas in his "reeducation" of the indigenous people, first, in the interest of re-symbolizing their anger at white people (such as himself) through anti-capitalist rhetoric; and secondly, toward securing for himself a comfortable and safe future back in Havana. All told, Bartolomeo works so hard toward this "ideological victory" over "treacherous tribalism" because he hopes that his success will gain him the good favor of authorities in Havana, who may "reward him with a promotion in Mexico City" as a government official (514).

Eventually, Bartolomeo's sorcery is unmistakably revealed: he is connected to the dissemination of "cheap Marxist propaganda" following the death of capitalist Menardo (525). This act seals his fate. Angelita calls for Bartolomeo's arrest by the rebel army and he is charged with "betraying the revolution with capital crimes against history," due to his indifference to the Indians' history of uprisings and revolutions—in the face of capitalism, communism, and without the help of white men such as himself (517). The council decides that Bartolomeo will be hanged (517).

Silko's narrator is very subtle, but as the scene of Bartolomeo's trial unfolds, the reader may note that Bartolomeo is not cast as the definitive enemy of the Indian population; and by extension, the Indians are not presented as righteous or victimized by Bartolomeo's attempts at "ideological victory." In the trial scene, the narrator relates:

The Committee for Justice and Land Redistribution had no time for mere personal matters. This was a trial of all Europeans. More than five hundred years of white men in Indian jurisdiction were on trial with Bartolomeo. (526)

While Bartolomeo may be deluded and disillusioned with all Natives due to their refusal of his Marxist ideology, Silko shows us that the indigenous people are likewise deluded regarding all “white men.” The Indians’ desire to rid themselves of the hindrance posed by “white men” to a fully actualized indigenous identity is as much based in the ‘sorcery’ of deterministic belief and affective investment as Bartolomeo’s assertions that they should become Marxists, like him. Though the trial is not a “personal” matter, *per se*, insofar as the Indians have nothing personal against Bartolomeo purely on the basis of his race; the trial of Bartolomeo for “crimes against history” is indeed a function of deep-seated, affectively-driven Western ideals of self and other.

The Indian council’s belief that “white men,” like Bartolomeo, are obstacles in the way of self-identity engages them—not in the circularity and immanence of all peoples in all times, but—in the “everyday world” matters of social reality. This reality, as we have seen in the case of Menardo, the ghost shirts, and the Americans’ loss in Vietnam, is an assemblage of both abstract and material symbolic formations, invested with misdirected confidence, in the face of one’s affective fear of death (or, as it were, loss of identity). According to Bartolomeo, the narrator relates, the people’s insistent tribalism is “the whore of nationalism” (526). One might argue that here, Bartolomeo makes an excellent point. The indigenous people’s distaste for whites problematically presumes that both subject positions, the Indian ‘self’ and the

Western 'other,' are fixed in advance—one is 'good,' if downtrodden, and the other is 'evil' and despotic. What this arguably nationalistic impulse ignores is that the signification of either subject position is wholly changeable. Subject positions, self and other, are marked by the metaphorical surplus of other positions and continually change, according to their articulation within a series of social and political equivalences. Bartholomeo deftly tried to tap into this metaphorical surplus via pro-communist propaganda, aligning the mestizo, Menardo, with the Indians' deep resentment of rich, white people. In spite of his heritage, Menardo's position as Other to the Indians was negotiated in accordance with his relation to wealth and white despotism; within Menardo's own social and political actuality, however, he endlessly felt the precarity of this very, symbolically constructed identification.

Thus, the Indians who execute Bartolomeo—much like Bartolomeo himself, Menardo and countless others within the novel—are part and parcel of the same, instrumental sorcery: the five hundred year system that has simplified and repressed people's reliance upon perceptual complexity via its abstracting rationalizations of the world. Menardo's grandfather's fabled Reign of the Death Eye Dog will reveal these abstractions as the sun's "burning eye" casts a "deadly light" upon the five hundred year system's worldview—an objectifying enmity of self and other (257). The almanac's prophesied disappearance of all things European, as Tacho relates, will be based "in the realm of dreams"; that is, in the Western worldview's spiritually bankrupt center. Yet Silko's narrator does not to demonize Westerners—or glorify the indigenous figures in the novel—for harboring this deep-seated understanding of the world.

None of this is to suggest that Silko's novel figures all rebels, indigenous peoples and/ or members of the underclass in, either, positive relation to sorcery or assuming some necessarily righteous position in light of their opposition to government as it stands in the 'present' of the novel. All of *Almanac*'s active characters—that is, those characters who are not related to us through some form of a story-within-a-story—enact their discursive contingency. It may not come as a surprise to the reader, then, that the only figures within the novel for whom sorcery offers any protection are those who are relayed to us through another character's story, a digression by the narrator, or an excerpt from the almanac itself. All of Silko's characters are interested agents, embedded in social, political and economic processes; sorcery, therefore, cannot positively 'work' for any of them. Driven by panic, worry, resentment and envy, Silko's characters all figure as disillusioned—hypocritical, depraved, self-interested. What this figuration shows, through each of the characters' respective perceptions of antagonism as originating from without, is the discord and antagonism residing at the heart of the One's relation to itself. Thus, their invested experiences of identity emerge as the novel's cumulative critique of the Western conception of self versus other.

IV

Precisely because we cannot construct meaning, from either Menardo's accidental death or the ideologically-driven execution of Bartolomeo, the figurations of sorcery in the novel reveals the fundamental irrationality of transcendent meaning-making. Though the reader—much like Silko's reviewers and critics—may not realize his or

her labor, in attempting to apprise Menardo and Bartolomeo/ their respective deaths, the reader participates in the very epistemological individualism for which the ancient almanac criticizes contemporary society. Yet, the novel's contemporary 'present,' fraught with identitarian battles, indicates that the appearance in actuality of fixed notions of self and other *cannot* be invested with complete, literalizing faith. Instead, the transcendent can only be conceived, it can only appear, as internalized difference which actualizes itself in the human-being through its differing from itself.

Additionally, we might note that the many characters' assembled perspectives—which are all particularized positions demanding recognition—are constructed in the very same way that critics like Birkerts, Ryan, Lyons and even Jaimes and Hearn construct their respective readings of *Almanac*: at bottom, each of these readers rely upon a common dream of formal cohesion—for the novel, in particular and ethnic identity, in general. For these critics, the conventional 'work' of ethnic American literature should yield a definitive and recognizable figuration of self and community. Silko's characters' common dissatisfaction with their society is based in precisely these very problematic expectations: meaningfulness, superiority (whether technological or presumed spiritual) and therefore, virtue. The seeming inability of the literary text (for critics) or the person (for the characters) to show forth a resonant, perceivable sense of ethnicity is, thus, to be condemned as "vastly ambitious," "homework"-reminiscent or unreadably meandering.

At the end of Silko's novel, none of the planned revolutions are carried out; she leaves the reader, in the end, with no sense of when or if any change will be achieved. Her characters have made no formal revolutionary plans; rather, they wind

up in New Mexico, where they plan to attend a healing convention. With this deadlock, Silko shows us that there is no actual polarity of the indigenous and white people, just as there is no polarity between the novel's many poor or rich characters, the homeless or those with homes, black or white, Marxist or capitalist, and so on. An external enemy, therefore, is but a form—a symbolic reality—upon which the impossibility of transcendent identity is externalized. A figure of fascination, this enemy plays a central role in blinding the novel's identity-assertive characters to the fundamental *bloc* that attends their identity. The transcendent identity, then, functions as a kind of perspective illusion, a reality that can never be seen as 'whole' because that reality contains an aporia which constitutes the transcendent identity's inclusion within reality. This perspective illusion is a misperception of the discord inherent to immanence; so, this antagonism is not an opposition between two poles/ elements/ terms, but a gap between identity as such and itself—the void of one's own place of inscription.

However tragic this may seem, at its zero-level, *Almanac of the Dead* vibrates with a fundamentally positive figuration of identity. The novel provokes us to imagine an inoperative form of community and a trans-historical notion of identity. Rather than validating historically-fixed individual or group interests, Silko's work suggests that concepts such as identity can reflect an experimentally connective and potentially productive striving. While *Almanac* emphasizes the various social processes that constitute and frustrate this striving, its vision of identity is performative and immanent only to itself—not constituted by these processes. *Almanac* functions to encourage possibility through a denial of historically affirmed

and arbitrary, institutionally secured boundaries, refusing through narrative the effects of strong material constraints. In this way, *Almanac of the Dead* encourages an emptying of identity of modernity's various regulatory contents; ethnic identity here becomes potential movement away from abstracting particularities, a dispersal within immanent time. Silko suggests that identity is *not* the assertion of a coherently predestined subject, but an eviction of that subject: a performed extraction of the particularities of life propelled toward an unknown future.

Chapter 4

Affectation and Desire:

The Human Stain's Alternative Images of Ethnicity

In this chapter, I will work to unravel the crucial relationship between ethnicity, desire, and affect that lies at the heart of Philip Roth's *The Human Stain* (2000). Roth's novel has been widely read and referred to by many as a tale of racial passing. Some of the novel's most positive readings, touting its revolutionary and inventive appeal, have sprung from discussions of Roth's adaptation of this historical genre of American fiction. Mark Maslan, for example, suggests that the novel productively departs from its predecessors in early twentieth century fiction by "[r]ejecting the idea of a racial identity persisting beneath the performance of inauthentic social roles," and instead, imagining through protagonist Coleman Silk, "the idea of a national identity" that is founded on "historical discontinuity" (366). Maslan asserts that Coleman's decision to pass for white conceals neither a wish to re-join his African American family nor to acknowledge his past in any way; therefore, the novel's form, a limitedly-narrated biography by Nathan Zuckerman, serves to demonstrate to the reader that there is no viable means for deploying history toward defining oneself or others (368). This, he claims, stands as *Human Stain's* contribution to narratives of national identity formation.

Similarly, Dean Franco has read Roth's tropological use of passing in *The Human Stain* as a means for dislodging the notion of race, and especially blackness,

from any “larger, stable, and knowable social condition or way of being” that is based in history or convention, whether familial, communal, or literary (90). Franco argues that Coleman’s choice to dissociate from his black parentage does not represent the genre’s conventional, tragic “muting or repressing of something rich and knowable” (89 – 90). Rather, the blackness passing into Jewishness that one encounters in Coleman represents for Franco an image of “fluid and malleable” ethnicity within the social sphere’s “zero-sum game” of racial relations (94). Derek Parker Royal, whom Franco cites in his piece, also maintains that Roth’s fiction—even beyond his work in *The Human Stain*—directly confronts “the ways in which issues of identity formation help to establish the subject within certain ethnic-specific assumptions” (2). Readers addressing the roles of passing and race within the novel all credit Roth with confronting, through Coleman, the fact that a choice between one historically pre-determined position and another is really no choice at all.

However, other readers, focused on the novel’s modes of character presentation rather than on issues of ethnicity and passing, found many problems with *The Human Stain*’s management of identity politics within its politically correct, multicultural world. Importantly, the whole of the novel’s action stems from one, initial catastrophe: After a long and influential tenure as dean of students (and a white man) at Athena College, the seventy-one-year-old Coleman returns to his professorial duties. He is swiftly accused of uttering a racial slur (“spooks”) against two students who are chronically absent from his class—two students whom he did not know were black. In light of Coleman’s clandestine lineage as a black American, readers have presumed that Coleman’s damning use of the word “spooks,” in reference to his two

absent students, constitutes a set of tragi-comic circumstances leading to his professional demise. Coleman's colleagues have been read as cruel and ridiculous in the aftermath of Coleman's utterance, illustrating, according to Jay Halio, Roth's "powerful indictment of political correctness" (173). Elaine Safer similarly describes Roth's depiction of Athena College itself, as a "microcosm for the political correctness fever"; which Roth refers to, she cites, as a "calculated frenzy" (212). Both readers, among others, collapse the novel's cynical outlook on multiculturalism's political correctness and Roth's own personal sentiments.⁵³

In this way, such readers have voiced criticism against how Roth depicts certain of his characters. Coleman Silk, for instance, is read by Safer as a tragi-comic victim of irony. After all, Coleman's indictment, embarrassment, and subsequent flight from Athena is only possible because of his life-long passage as a white man. Safer asserts that "Roth makes us aware that we live in a bizarre, cartoon world where the ludicrous and the calamitous coalesce" (Safer 213). This is particularly true in Coleman's case, as his downfall is brought about by Delphine Roux, an absurdly-rendered, "deeply confused" young French professor (Roth 185). Delphine, Coleman's professional nemesis, has been repeatedly critiqued as a flat and patronizingly simplistic depiction of circumstances deserving of more sensitivity. Delphine's characterization, readers note, speaks to Roth's actual, conservative opposition to multiculturalism and his personal distaste for certain of its marginalized groups; for some readers, this flaw (associated with Roth, rather than with his narrator) deflates his inventive conception of race and passing. According to Lorrie Moore, Delphine is portrayed as an out of touch, "lonely classics professor"; her

characterization recalls the villainous, “spoiled” and “oddly dangerous” schoolgirls of Roth’s other novels (Moore). Delphine’s depiction of infantile egoism borders on hysteria, and Moore asserts that this characterization amounts to little more than Roth’s indulgence in a “fierce but unconvincing” “tirade against political correctness” (Moore). Rather than extending any understanding toward “the possible discomfort of minorities or women” in the largely male and white academic setting of Athena College, Moore argues that Delphine serves to simply “make fun” of “trickily atmospheric and institutional” forms of prejudice (Moore).⁵⁴

Some readers, on the other hand, do not note Delphine’s characterization, specifically, as a damning indicator of Roth’s own insensitivity toward certain groups; yet, her character has nevertheless been widely read as a commentary by Roth on the “unhappily contiguous” identities, as Igor Webb has put it, that inhabit the multicultural landscape (Webb). For Safer, Delphine’s characterization represents Roth’s commentary, not on academic women specifically, but on the absurd, grotesque potential of multiculturalism’s politically correct, “persecuting spirit” (Safer 218). Halio concurs, describing characterizations such as Delphine’s as contributing to Roth’s overarching “portrait of our times”; this is an image relayed to “force [Roth’s] more thoughtful readers to contemplate our society, not with distaste only, but with a sense of shame” (173). In this way, Webb contends, Roth’s purpose in *The Human Stain*, as in so much of his later fiction, is to relate how “supremely secular and thoroughly social matter[s]” (such as multiculturalism and its aspirant inclusivity) are also, importantly and emphatically, “existential” matters, as well (Webb).⁵⁵

Yet, while readers alternately credit and critique *The Human Stain* for Roth's bold confrontation of race's limits and his slanted depiction of multiculturalism, very few have held Roth's self-disclosing unreliable narrator, Nathan Zuckerman, in any way accountable for these schemas. Despite Zuckerman's careful maneuvering between "private choice" and the ways in which it "invites public response," Zuckerman's embedded position on the novel's landscape has provoked nary a single reader to investigate the stakes of his own narratological work (Franco 94). What is the relationship between Roth and Zuckerman, and by extension, between Zuckerman and the story that he tells—a story that Coleman, effectively, will not relay to him? To take these questions for granted is to overlook Zuckerman's personal investment, and his own inculcation, in the story he relays. Alongside Zuckerman's narrated progression of scenes comprising Coleman's life, a second narrative track chronicles Nathan Zuckerman himself, as his work is repeatedly interrupted—his endeavor to recount Coleman's life perpetually challenges Zuckerman's own image of himself as a perceptive, biographical writer.

In my own reading of *The Human Stain*, I will go a step beyond previous readers' discussions of Roth's adaptation of the passing genre, as well as his work with multiculturalism's "existential" dimension, by dislodging the narrative from its author—that is, Roth—and focusing my reading on the Zuckerman and Coleman in relation. For it is through the relationship between Zuckerman and Coleman—or, Coleman's story and Zuckerman's rendition of it—that the novel adds to the passing genre's complexities. *The Human Stain*, I argue, boldly explores the role and function of affect and desire within the concepts of race and passing: Individual identity is

rendered as a relation—but, most importantly, not merely as a relation between the self and other. On Zuckerman's multicultural landscape, the relation between self and other is already presumed, it is neutralized. Taking Webb's point further, I argue that what is more important for Zuckerman is the relation between the self and its seemingly constituent desires; that is, the relation between the notion of a creative life and the desires which actualize that life.

Issues of materiality and economy are removed from Zuckerman's narration of Coleman's life; whether Zuckerman sets the scene in the academic, multicultural community of Coleman's later years, or his Civil-Rights era youth, Zuckerman relates Coleman's possibilities for social integration as limited to ideological constructs.⁵⁶ For most of the novel (despite his better knowledge), Zuckerman overlooks the fact that Coleman has estranged himself from a family very invested in civil rights activism and its material, economic goals for justice. However, the multicultural perspective provided to the reader by the novel's embedded, unreliable narrator does not (and perhaps cannot) include these aims; Zuckerman's understanding, concerning Coleman's possibilities for passing and achieving social integration, is limited to Coleman's alignment with charged images and impressions. With access to only an abstract identity politics, Zuckerman's reference points for Coleman's sources of individual definition lie with his investment in highly specific images of group-oriented identities. Without recourse to materiality, Zuckerman's narration illustrates how such adaptive images of the self (and its relation to a neutralized other) can shape a life, compelling the individual to configure life's meaning through identification with a group. Through Zuckerman's intensely self-conscious writing of Coleman's

life, Roth imparts on the notion of group identification the question destructive and productive desires. The relationship that develops between Zuckerman and Coleman, then, functions to illustrate Roth's larger point concerning the affective and image-based logic of race relations and multiculturalism's identity politics; in this way, he asks the reader to consider how much of one's purported individuality is forged in erosive, institutional attachments.

Human Stain is the fictional, retrospectively-reconstructed biography of Coleman Silk, a light-skinned black American who estranges his family and passes as white to fulfill social and professional ambitions. Following Coleman's death, Zuckerman sets about an authorial quest to rebuild the life story of this new-found acquaintance. His narration, however, reveals that the compiled story is mostly based upon his own impressions and interpretations of scant nostalgic tales, told by Coleman, about his various relations to women; as well as linear, didactic yarns that are revealed to the reader much later, from Coleman's apparently hyper-moralistic sister, Ernestine Silk. To the reader's knowledge, Zuckerman conducts no further research on his subject. Thus, his purportedly non-fiction work is based entirely on Zuckerman's impulse to fill in the gaps of Coleman's biography; to create meaning from a life's otherwise unspoken elements, using only the barest images and Zuckerman's (not Coleman's) perspective on them. Dissatisfied with Ernestine's sterile, idyllic rendition of Coleman's early life, Zuckerman's reconstruction is shaped by his almost obsessive focus on Coleman's sexuality and various relationships—romantic or otherwise—with women. The relations to women that Zuckerman

chronicles, finally coerce the reader to imagine a life which seeks neither to bolster institutions nor allay fear of ostracism.

This is a life, however, which Zuckerman struggles to present. Zuckerman's unresolvable dilemma concerning Coleman's life-driving desire takes shape around the precarities which structure Coleman's identity: the first, is Coleman's public image as a Jewish/ white professor of classics; and the second, is Coleman's own conception of his individuality within ethnic identification (actual and invented). On the one hand, the convergence of these precarities forms the basis of Zuckerman's impression of Coleman: A very well-known and self-possessed academic and former dean at Athena College. On the other hand, Coleman's public image and his conception of individuality also emerge in the novel as the very agents which undermine his attempts to maintain this established normality. For instance, as Zuckerman and Coleman are playing cards one evening, listening to their customary big band radio show, Coleman—who does not know Zuckerman very well—suddenly discloses some rather personal information to the writer:

He shuffled the cards and I cut them and he dealt. And then, in this off, serene state of contentment brought on by the seeming emancipation from despising everyone at Athena who, deliberately and in bad faith, had misjudged, misused, and besmirched him—[...] he began to rhapsodize about the great bygone days when his cup runneth over and his considerable talent for conscientiousness was spent garnering and tendering pleasure. (20).

All at once, Coleman begins to reminisce, and even brag, about how he used to “fish” for women in New York City's subway; during his younger days at NYU,

Coleman relates, all he had to do was “[g]o down into the subway and come up with a girl” (21). He also reads to Zuckerman from a recently-found letter dating back to 1954, from an old flame, “*The girl*”: the gorgeous blonde, Steena Palsson (21). Steena was: “Quick. Smart. Pretty.” Possessing a “statuesque recumbency” that Coleman admits to having never been able to forget, he tells Zuckerman that he used to call her “*Voluptas*,” the “personification of sensual pleasure” (23). After he and Steena mysteriously parted ways, Coleman apparently met and married Iris Gittelman—a relationship whose “imperiouness,” Zuckerman relates, resulted in a “million difficulties” and “unending friction” (13). However, since Iris’s untimely death, Coleman tells Zuckerman, he seems to have re-discovered his *Voluptas* in a new woman. He gushes about a more recent liaison, which he has been carrying on with the unconventionally titillating, oversexed Faunia Farley: an “ignitable,” thirty-four-year-old woman who “has turned sex into a vice again” (26). He elaborates to Zuckerman on Faunia’s troubled past and theorizes on the cause of her sexual appetites; Faunia is illiterate, difficult in personality, battered and debased, but somehow she is the perfect lover: “In bed she is deep phenomenon,” Coleman states (31). Zuckerman is flummoxed by Coleman’s rapid fire of anecdotes

Amidst the scandal at Athena College, Coleman’s formidable, Jewish wife, Iris, unexpectedly dies of a heart attack. These compounding events drive Coleman to near derangement. His public image is exploited, as he is presumably white; his sense of individuality is harmed as well, as it was largely configured around his marriage to the conveniently secular Iris. It is while in this rage that Coleman seeks out Zuckerman, a local writer and veritable stranger, and demands that Zuckerman

compose an exposé of the college's hypocrisy concerning the spooks scandal. Zuckerman is shocked by the spectacle of "someone accomplished and of consequence now completely unhinged" as Coleman careens around Zuckerman's workroom, alternately speaking and yelling in an almost incomprehensible rush (Roth 11). Witnessing a man he does not know in such a state, Zuckerman relates, "is like being present at a bad highway accident," the scene mesmerizing him "as much by its improbability as by its grotesqueness" (11). Zuckerman refuses to write the story. The two nevertheless fall into a fast acquaintanceship. Coleman's endeavor to write the manuscript himself—working title: *Spooks*—along with his indignant anger at the "absurdity" of Athena College, comes to define the status quo of the men's weekly visits (11).

Thus, the early scene in which Coleman unfurls to Zuckerman an array of tales of sensuality and pleasure, amounts to something very important for Zuckerman—though neither the reader nor Zuckerman can tell quite what. This scene, in which Coleman wants to talk about women, rather than his indignity and rage, forms an emergent instant in which Zuckerman quizzically finds himself pondering "the Coleman contaminated by desire alone" (Roth 20).⁵⁷ Coleman's speaking to Zuckerman about women interrupts the writer, causing Zuckerman to question his own perceptiveness and presenting him with a new demand to focus:

It wasn't until Coleman told me about himself and his Voluptas that all the comforting delusions about the serenity achieved through enlightened resignation vanished, and I completely lost my equilibrium. Well into the morning, I lay awake, powerless as a lunatic to control my thinking. (37)

When Coleman, for the first time in their short acquaintanceship, wants to discuss something other than his ruined life, the shifting registers of ambivalence defining the two men's limited discursive scope suddenly seems to point something out for Zuckerman.

This introduces the beginning of Zuckerman's imaginative reconstruction of Coleman's life, as Coleman's carnality—not his resentment at a smeared public image—tips the balance of Zuckerman's original impression of the man. Zuckerman is suddenly interested, captivated, with a seeming mystery. However, his thinking about the carnal register of Coleman's life is not merely thinking; Zuckerman is stopped in his tracks by it. This 'thinking' is a gathering up of affectively saturated information, contributing to Zuckerman's new sense of the everyday, and requiring a new sense of realism: "One would have thought that never again would this man have a taste for the foolishness of life, that all that was playful in him and lighthearted had been destroyed and lost" (26). Zuckerman's thinking bottlenecks his ability to make his ordinary impression of Coleman—"the great man brought low and still suffering the shame of failure"—to take shape neutrally and automatically as they sit playing cards (18).

Zuckerman's break to think becomes a process of reconfiguring his perceptions of Coleman's identity in a new, and suddenly intense, present. Henceforth, Coleman's various relations with women become the situations on which Zuckerman's questions about his actual ethnic identity dilate; they become the ground on which he works to develop an architecture for apprehending the perturbed inner world of Coleman Silk—from the rationally processed to the affective. As Zuckerman

will later reconstruct, the women with whom Coleman has affairs bestow on him a sense of “impassivity,” as Lauren Berlant has defined it: a manner of maintaining “composure” amidst crisis, a means of clarifying “the relation of living on to ongoing crisis and loss” (5). This crisis which Zuckerman supposes is the perturbation Coleman experiences toward his own identity—a continual tension between his self-possessed, respectable public image, and his audacious proclivity for social autonomy. Thus, Zuckerman configures Coleman’s affairs as so many “gestural economies” which serve to register norms in Coleman’s management of his own structural precarities (Berlant 5).

The narrative arising from Zuckerman’s process of reconfiguration, which comprises the bulk of *The Human Stain*, involves all of his possible knowledge about Coleman’s interiority, however disproportionate its idioms or sources. Thus, while Coleman’s affairs emerge as central to the continuum of Zuckerman’s narrative, providing Coleman with temporary spaces of respite, overall, his relations to women develop as catalysts that threaten to destroy his public image and his sense of individual autonomy. Whether intimate or not, then, the intensity and consequences of these relationalities differ in Zuckerman’s narrative according, first, to whether they impart on Coleman any confidence about the entitlements of their context and social location; and secondly, how Coleman manages the threats posed by each relation. Thus, Zuckerman’s highly conscious handling of Coleman’s female allies and enemies work to form a coherence—for himself as much as for the reader—of Coleman’s structural precarities in relation to his ethnicity.

This chapter will examine the importance of women to Zuckerman's thinking about Coleman's public image and the consequences he faces as a result of his determined autonomy. I will consider how these personal relationalities direct the reader to perceive, not a deterministic event of racial passing, but an emergent historical environment, hinged on desire, that is sensed atmospherically and collectively. Zuckerman's difficulty with the affects he senses in Coleman's relations disallow him to complete the mimetic circuit of authorship; instead, these affects place him in a relation with Coleman, forcing him to question his craft, while these affects also structure various consequences of Coleman's secretive attitude toward his ethnic heritage. The issue of desire—Coleman's desire, and by extension, his sexuality—which drives Zuckerman's narration speaks to a historical arc that is rarely explored in critical work on black American 'passing' narratives.⁵⁸ However, in *The Human Stain*, in the guise of an unwitting tale of black-Jewish relations, Roth exposes, as he has so audaciously done in his works on Jewish American lives, the often confusing and risky current of affect and desire underlying, not only heterosexual relationships, but group associations.

Zuckerman relates his story after Coleman's death, after he has learned that Coleman is black; this story, awash in vignettes chronicling Coleman's various relations to the opposite sex, conceives a revolutionary (but not entirely neutral) mode for considering the other as a life. In this way, Roth's novel raises questions concerning identity to a new pitch, warranting new investigations that go beyond descriptive appraisals of the text's representations of multiculturalism or narratives of passing. I begin this investigation by considering Jonathan Freedman's reading of

Coleman's sister, Ernestine, and the seemingly misplaced sentimentality that she imparts on Zuckerman's narrative. I will juxtapose this with my own and others' readings of Coleman's nemesis, Delphine Roux, whose undesirable image of Coleman further shapes Zuckerman's thinking. I will consider how these readings—much like Zuckerman's characterizations of these women—function to both confuse and inform the reader about Coleman's desires and identity. Finally, I will examine Zuckerman's reconstructions of Coleman's affairs with Steena Palsson, Ellie Magee, and Faunia Farley, paying attention to the various ways that these women mediate and affect both Coleman's public image and his conception of individuality within ethnicity, and the stakes of this mediation on Zuckerman's relation to his subject.

I

When Zuckerman meets Coleman's sister, Ernestine Silk, he does not know Coleman's actual heritage, though he reveals to the reader that Coleman is black long before this meeting takes place. Until well into the novel's second chapter, Zuckerman participates in Coleman's passing, drawing an early characterization of his subject that consists solely of what "everyone knows" about the former classics professor: that he was "one of a handful of Jews on the Athena faculty when he was hired and perhaps among the first of the Jews permitted to teach in a classics department anywhere in America" (Roth 5). In this introductory discussion, Zuckerman notes how Coleman, during his tenure as dean of faculty, instated a "revolution of quality" at Athena, making "the place competitive"; which, Zuckerman is quick to point out, "as an early enemy [of Coleman's] noted, 'is what Jews do'" (9).

This allows the reader, as Timothy Parrish has pointed out, “to understand Coleman as Jew before we see him as African American” (211). The scenario that these traits evoke touches upon the adversity that members of religious and ethnic groups encountered in occupying professional positions traditionally reserved for white (i.e., presumably Anglo-Saxon Protestant) males. Coleman “is the first and only Jew to serve as dean of faculty” at Athena College (5). Marginalization and discrimination, therefore, are the content of Zuckerman’s rendering of America’s social system; they also constitute the context in which Coleman’s act of passing is based. In spite of Coleman’s successful crossing, Zuckerman’s diction highlights the cultural stakes that are being played out, and these stakes are importantly echoed by Ernestine, during their discussion much later in the text.

Zuckerman and Coleman’s acquaintanceship tapers off not long after Coleman’s disclosures about his personal life; soon thereafter, Coleman inexplicably dies, having never revealed to Zuckerman his racial identity. Zuckerman’s impression of Coleman, then, is borne of only a handful of conversations, in addition to information that he gathers from Coleman’s sister, Ernestine. Ernestine appears very late in the novel, well after Zuckerman has offered the reader his reconstruction of Coleman’s life. She is a devout school teacher, extremely self-possessed—“a very proper looking woman”:

[F]rom her dress and from her posture, from the meticulous way she ate her lunch, even from the way she occupied her chair, it was clear [...] that her inmost reflex in any conflict would be to act automatically as the mediator—entirely the master of the sensible response. (324)

Over the course of their conversation, the reader discovers that Ernestine has furnished Zuckerman with much of the source material on which his earlier narration is based. However, she distills the facts very differently from Zuckerman, as her propriety and orderliness is echoed in her version of Coleman's younger years. She draws a portrait of Coleman that is, at once, light-hearted, nostalgic, and tinged with tragedy. Aside to the reader, Zuckerman observes the tenor of Ernestine's story, as she refuses to discuss Faunia Farley, and seems to know little—if any—details about Coleman's affairs.⁵⁹ Zuckerman feels compelled to try to discuss Coleman's relations to women with Ernestine, but he bites his tongue.

Jonathan Freedman reads Ernestine's appearance in the novel as purely "sentimental," "in the technical, generic sense of the word" (172). Her interjection in the novel offers an orderly "sense of history" to Zuckerman's tale, providing the "didactic payoff," presumably, for his audacious reconstruction of Coleman's life (171). However, Freedman maintains that the sentimental didacticism imparted so late by Ernestine squares rather awkwardly with the rest of the novel. Over the course of *The Human Stain*, Roth "will have none [of the conventional passing narrative's] return to the racial under the sign of sentiment" (Freedman 169). For Freedman, the insertion of Ernestine late in the novel unsettles this paradigm. At the center of Ernestine's story is the Silk family, not Coleman himself; however, Zuckerman's narrative, up to this point, has centered entirely on Coleman and the details (albeit reconstructed) of his personal life. Even after her brother's death, her focus is not on Coleman's apparent personal destruction, but on their inconsolable mother and a case of sibling rivalry gone awry, between Coleman and their brother, Walter. She tells

Zuckerman about how their mother was heartbroken and confused by her son's choice to marry Iris Gittelman and abandon the family, "[w]hat with all the success he had," both socially and academically, while growing up (324). Ernestine's piety and orderliness, her commitment to her family's story over Coleman's is, for Freedman, simply "*too* earnest, to make the inevitable pun," and she "ends up undercutting Roth's own attempts to move through and beyond the passing narrative" (Freedman 171).

According to Freedman, the bulk of the novel configures passing as a principled enterprise, a discipline: "Coleman cleaves to the bitter and unsentimental end of the passing project, one that comes, therefore, to have the force of principle as well as that of convenience" (169). And Ernestine's contribution adds, not only an ill-conceived sentimental register, but an ineffective, pedantic politics, as well. Ernestine relates a story of a young Coleman who was "the breeziest, most optimistic child you ever wanted to see," a child who "never in his life chafed under being a Negro" (Roth 325, 324). However, this picture quickly dilates, as Freedman describes it, into "a defense of the traditional canon" and a "scathing attack on academic p.c." (171). When Zuckerman tells her about Coleman's ostracism from Athena College, Ernestine states, "What happened to Coleman with that word 'spooks' is all part of the same enormous failure" (Roth 330). She intones her distaste for Black History Month, relating its "concentrated study" to the decline of classics and civics in high school pedagogy; according to Ernestine, these changes have created a culture of "only opinions," whose "reactionary authorities" are too quick to pander to students who "assert [their] incapacity as a privilege" (Roth 329, 331).

Freedman sums Ernestine up as little more than a “mouthpiece” for Roth’s own opinions on post-Civil Rights multiculturalism—“Roth’s surrogate”—rendered into a “stick figure,” rather than a “representation of a complex human being” (172). However, Zuckerman, too, is slightly unsettled by Ernestine’s blindness to “the perplexity pumping the human imagination” and her “unswerving allegiance to the canon of time-honored rules” (Roth 333). In an aside to the reader, he notes that, by telling her story of Coleman’s life in this way, it becomes clear that Ernestine “preferred not to contemplate the specific details of [Coleman’s] destruction” (332). He, too, is not entirely satisfied with Ernestine’s representation of an “optimistic” Coleman who merely sought “social advantage” (Roth 326). Unable to reconcile her story, Zuckerman is left feeling even more confused about his subject:

I couldn’t imagine anything that could have made Coleman more of a mystery to me than this unmasking. Now that I knew everything, it was as if I knew nothing, and instead of what I’d learned from Ernestine unifying my idea of him, he became not just unknown but an uncohesive person. (333)

Like his earlier conversation with Coleman himself, Zuckerman’s talk with Ernestine gives him pause. Her activation of sentiment moves him, not only to “rethink” everything he presumes about Coleman; but more broadly, to consider Ernestine’s biased story in terms of how a figure such as Coleman—“real apart and beyond the social determinates defining him”—managed to maintain an image and individuality which may very well have caused him endless angst (Roth 326, 333).

Ernestine, therefore, is not to be dismissed. The disarray and confusion that she introduces, to Zuckerman and his narrative, contributes an important perspective

to the reader's understanding of Coleman. Early on in her story, Ernestine mentions that Coleman's divorce from the family is made permanent by their brother Walter, a civil rights activist and educator who fought relentlessly "for the integration of schools in New Jersey" (324).⁶⁰ Walter—who believes, "what you do, you do to advance the race"—was so angry with Coleman over his decision to live as a white man, that he forbade Coleman and their mother to ever speak again (327).⁶¹ Ernestine's juxtaposition of Coleman and Walter's attachments to specific ideations of self bespeaks alternative modes of surviving in a society that is "dedicated to a picture of itself" that is deeply flawed—a society that is not there for black Americans (333). By casting Coleman's story in relation to Walter, in "the wider picture of what was going on back then [...] years before the civil rights movement," she suggests that Coleman's situation is part and parcel with Walter's (323).

According to Ernestine, Coleman "couldn't wait to go through civil rights to get his human rights," he wanted to lead a "full and regular and productive life," unhindered by any association to blackness (327). As the upset caused by the spooks incident evidences, however, something has happened in history's movement from civil rights to multiculturalism. Ernestine's story cannot simply be about the sentiment of race, ethnicity, or the conservatism of pre-multicultural pedagogy, just as Coleman's passing was not merely about being white. Ernestine reminds Zuckerman, and the reader, of the material and economic circumstances that accompany racial identification in the United States. Walter's banishment of his brother speaks to his distaste for Coleman's forgetfulness of his own, material—both corporeal and economic—roots in the black community; Coleman's decision to disown his family

and pass for white is to cast off these fraught material conditions in the interest of a political, ideological purpose. Thus, Walter's righteous indignation at Coleman's choice is born of Coleman's disregard for the fact that his family—like so many other black Americans—cannot simply walk away from this materiality on the basis of image: their skin is too dark.

Ernestine's role in the novel functions to point up, as Jennifer Glaser puts it, "the epistemology and institutionalization of race" which began, following the Civil Rights Movement, in the 1970s; and, I would add, the stakes of understanding oneself—and others—always already within the strictures, however ideologically neutralized, of relation (Glaser 1474).⁶² Zuckerman's uncertainty of Ernestine's accounts, uncannily echoed in Freedman's critical reception, speaks to their embeddedness (and unwitting investment) in non-material, ideological images of the subject. While neither Zuckerman nor Freedman suggest that these images are fully capable of accounting for one's place in the world—as either an individual or as a member of a group—both nevertheless overlook the important, material beginnings of the multiculturalism of which they are so critical. While Ernestine and Zuckerman (like Freedman) share a cynicism for multiculturalism, and harbor a distaste for its institutionalized, image-based politics of identification, their critiques spring from diverse sources: Ernestine's critique is based in the ideology's blindness to the continued concrete, existential effects of American race relations, even after Civil Rights; and Zuckerman's concern lies with multiculturalism's systematic preference for certain marginalized groups over others. That is, both take issue with race relations insofar as they dictate an unequal distribution of power, but Ernestine reads

this unequal distribution as material while Zuckerman interprets it as ideological. Thus, the disjuncture via narration, which opens between Zuckerman and Ernestine on the subject of Coleman, reveals how neither a totally material or totally ideological/abstract understanding of power's relation (as a distribution of resources) to resistance (of its unfair distribution) can fully account for Coleman's process of identification. Coleman operates on both registers, and so cannot be pinned down by either interpretation.

Ernestine's commemoration of Coleman's life marks, for both Zuckerman and the reader, the dis-unity of the self and a seemingly necessary incompleteness that lies at the heart of biographical endeavors; for all the orderly linearity of her heartrending tale, then, Ernestine reveals a gap within the image of race. Her story begins at the beginning of Coleman's life: a "breezy" child Coleman, unbothered by his African American parentage. This beginning seems to contradict Zuckerman's, which presents (a presumably Jewish) Coleman enraged at charges of racism by an African American student; however, rather than pitted against Zuckerman's narrative reconstruction, the addition of Ernestine's perspective sheds important light on Coleman's own blindness to the material circumstances which are central to identification with his family's racial group. According to Ernestine, growing up, Coleman rarely, if ever, encountered the bigotry and segregation common in pre-Civil Rights America. For the light-skinned Coleman, the race question did not construct and position him within social circumstances that caused him to feel inferior or lacking in relation to a perceived 'majority.' Coleman was fortunate in his appearance—his image—as a light-skinned African American; and because he never experienced 'being black' in the same way as the rest of his family, he was never able to draw any connection between their father's professional failure, the

family's subsequent economic struggles, and the fact that they were black. The concrete link to the social, or ideological, was lost on Coleman in this way. Such (arguably negative and negating) experiences, to which Ernestine alludes in describing Walt's anger at Coleman, should have garnered meaning to Coleman's life as a black man, effecting in him a sense of identification and attachment to his family and the black community through a collective sense of experience.

As these experiences are absent, Ernestine suggests, so too are the attachments that may be forged in them. And indeed, outside his biological relation to the Silk family, Coleman is, for all intents and purposes, not black.⁶³ Therefore, Ernestine prefigures Coleman's abandonment of the family as his sole, and necessarily permanent, means for excluding himself from subjection to the circumstances and experiences of racial identification. And theoretically, she is correct. However, the uneasiness with which Zuckerman meets her formulation alerts the reader to the flaw of Ernestine's constructivist, biographical image. Zuckerman notes, rather quizzically, that Coleman's death, whose life "had seemed like one long, perverse, willfully arrogant defection" to their family, arouses no interest in Ernestine to explore either "how he lived his last months" in the exclusive company of Faunia Farley, or "any biographical connection between the injunction to revolt" from the Silks "and the furious determination, some forty years on, with which he had disassociated himself from Athena" (324, 332).

Ernestine's material conception of race, filtered through her commemoration of Coleman, falls short of offering Zuckerman any privileged insight into his subject's interiority. His narration erupts into an endless string of questions concerning Coleman's intent:

Did he get, from his decision, the adventure he was after, or was the decision in itself the adventure? Was it the misleading that provided his pleasure, the carrying

off of the stunt that he liked best, the traveling through life incognito [?] [...]
[W]hen he came barging through my door in the clutches of the mad idea that
because of [Iris'] death I should write his book for him, was his lunacy not itself in
the nature of a coded confession? (334)

Zuckerman's questions concerning the gaps in Ernestine's story correlate with a presumption of Coleman's pleasure, his seeking happiness, through abandoning his family. Zuckerman's line of reasoning hinges on the problem of Coleman's desire, which Ernestine does not call forth in her own story—and in which, Zuckerman notes, she shows disinterest. Rather, her sentimental tale exteriorizes both Coleman and the question of race, configured as a frustrated personal relation between the individual and a particular configuration of the family—the representative system, in Coleman's youth, of racial group identification.

With this, Zuckerman is unsatisfied. Though Coleman is free from the material circumstances alluded to by Ernestine, and poised to fit within the relations comprising the early-21st century's multicultural academy, Coleman is nevertheless brought to his knees by the precarious nature of institutionalized race. The problematic connection that Zuckerman senses, between Coleman's familial abandonment and his disassociation from Athena, brings to the surface the functional, affective similarities which drive the material aims of civil rights and the more abstract, ideological goals of academic multiculturalism. Ernestine is only able to configure Coleman's story as sentimental and tragic—rather than as one of intrigue, as sensed by Zuckerman—because she cannot perceive him beyond the effects that his willful ignorance of race's material circumstances has brought on their family. For Ernestine, there is no need for abstract speculation, “opinion” has no place in her understanding of her brother. However, this is all there is for Zuckerman because it was neither social obstruction or material circumstance—whether black or secular

Jewish—which lead to Coleman’s ruin. It is “something else entirely”: “The we that is inescapable,” “the mind of one’s own country” (336).

II

In his choice to live as a white, secular Jew, Coleman adopts the exteriorized, image-driven association of ethnicity with which Ernestine (not coincidentally) aligns his negative relation to blackness. Just as Ernestine’s perspective, rooted in the concrete concerns of civil rights, cannot (and does not care to) fathom the interiority and desires of Coleman as an abandoner; neither, also, can the multicultural institutionalization of race, founded on the abstract euphemization of race/ ethnicity as pure concept, take as relevant the desires of its subjects—in this case, Coleman. That is, *The Human Stain* illustrates how the multicultural institution in which its characters are steeped—like institutionalized notions of race/ ethnicity, more broadly conceived—situates its order within the realm of realistic images. Like Coleman’s fashioned public image, the institution is concerned with appearances; this creates a perfect environment for Coleman. Zuckerman is careful to record this fact for the reader, as his second attempt at characterizing Coleman (some thirty pages before revealing that he is black), Zuckerman presents the image of him as understood by their community, even going so far as to describe him as, “the small-nosed Jewish *type* with the facial heft in the jaw, *one of those* crimped-haired Jews of a light yellowish skin pigmentation” (15, emphasis added). This shows the reader that exteriority and image are primary in, even this sophisticated and well-meaning multicultural, community’s appraisals of the subject.

Coleman is successful in never being discovered as a black American; however, his choice to live as a Jewish man, Zuckerman reports, does not turn out to be the means to normativity for which one (for example, Ernestine) might presume Coleman had hoped. The accusation of Coleman as “a Jewish anti-Negro,” headed proudly by Delphine Roux, hinges on the presumed reality of his white, Jewish identification. Delphine is a young French feminist, recently hired onto the faculty by Coleman himself, fresh from Paris via Yale. After student rumors circulated Coleman’s rhetorical slip back to her office, Delphine led the “maddened crowd,” as Safer puts it, in the spooks scandal (215). Her defense of Coleman’s student absentee, as someone “we must nurture” and “understand” sickens Coleman: The primary issue, he asserts to Zuckerman, is the student’s “flagrant and inexcusable neglect of work”—or, the concrete evidence of her negligence—and Delphine’s defense (as appropriate as it is ironic) clouds this problem with “narrow, parochial ideological concerns” (Roth, 18, 7, 191). The dissolution of Coleman’s carefully orchestrated, ambitious image of conscientiousness is threatened by the circumstances that Delphine creates. And perhaps even more jarring, though Delphine cannot know Coleman’s actual ethnic identity, the spooks scandal seems to bait Coleman to preserve his place in the college community and clear his reputation by revealing an alternative image of himself—as a black American—in his defense against the charges of racism.

Coleman, however, does not reveal himself as black as a result of the spooks affair and instead resigns from the college and alienates himself from the community. He suddenly wants nothing to do with the college or its surrounding town in which he lives; Coleman cuts ties with nearly everyone at the college—with one, seemingly odd

exception. After being ostracized, Coleman meets and begins a secretive affair with Faunia, who works at Athena as part of the custodial staff. With the additional exception of his brief acquaintanceship with Zuckerman, Coleman associates with no one else within the community. By taking these rather drastic steps to separate himself from society, Coleman works to forge for himself a sense of autonomy that is configured by a fantasy of social and material disregard, demonstrated by his abrupt divorce from the school in which he garnered decades of success, as well as through his exclusive, secret affair he has with Faunia—about which, the reader presumes, he only informs Zuckerman. Coleman indignantly removes himself from the institutions of his community, hoping to be left alone; however, this self-imposed alienation has great, perturbing consequences for which neither he or Zuckerman can apparently account.

Once again, Delphine Roux, his most prodigious critic of conduct, launches a further interrogation of his character, threatening the abject unraveling of the autonomy he has forged following his disappearance from the Athena scene. After the spooks scandal begins to reside, Delphine somehow learns of Coleman's secret trysts with Faunia Farley. She pens an anonymous letter to Coleman himself, stating: "Everyone knows you're sexually exploiting an abused, illiterate woman half your age" (38). Coleman shows the letter to Zuckerman, who notes that Delphine's additional, "provocative meddling" sends Coleman into a fury, "nearly as enraged as he'd been back during the crisis with the college" (55). Just as she cannot have known Coleman's actual ethnic parentage, Zuckerman is unable to account for how she discovered the secret of Coleman's affair. However, the perturbation caused to

Coleman by the situations that she creates, forges such a jarring disequilibrium in his experience of himself as to drive him to near derangement.⁶⁴ Coleman swiftly hires a handwriting analyst to compare documents from the spooks case file with the anonymous letter; when the analyst returns with a positive identification on Delphine's penmanship, Coleman swiftly orders his lawyer to forward the report to Delphine's attorney.

Although all allegations are denied by Delphine and her lawyer, in spite of evidence, and the case is thrown out, the anger that erupts from Coleman as a result of the letter inspires in Zuckerman another thoughtful pause. During their conversation, Coleman describes Delphine's "métier" to Zuckerman as consisting of "the stories that the peasants tell to account for their misery. The evil eye. The casting of spells" (43). While he admits: "I knew something like this was coming. Forget that I was once the dean and she cleans the toilets. I'm seventy-one and [Faunia is] thirty-four," Coleman is nevertheless unable to articulate a position on Delphine's actions apart from the "insanely stupid" nature of her anonymous letter (41). And while Zuckerman replies that he "won't pretend [to] understand why she should care so passionately about who you are screwing in your retirement," he nevertheless proceeds to commit considerable space in his reconstruction of Coleman's life to theorizing Delphine, her misdirected anger, and apparent desire to undo Coleman Silk.

The precise cause of Delphine's ire, however, is not described in any systematic manner over the course of Zuckerman's narrative. The reader is not told why she wants so gravely to ruin Coleman's reputation; therefore, the reader cannot know why her recurrent mischief inspires in Coleman the particular brand of

deranging perturbation that prompts Zuckerman to write about her. Zuckerman's free indirect discourse of Delphine's inner monologue suggests that she perceives her job at Athena as "déclassé," not providing her with "the kind of recognition she was trained to get" (Roth 189, 190). Delphine was educated in the most elite French institutions, studying some of the most vogue and cutting-edge French feminist theories; she completed her PhD early, having transferred to Yale, finding herself ahead of her peers in her research. Zuckerman describes her as "smart for her age, even too smart"; but, he relates, Delphine plays at "self-importance like a child, an imperfectly-governed child, quick to respond to the scent of disapproval" (Roth 187). Since Delphine has "won over just about every wooable fool professor" in their department, according to Zuckerman, she believes herself to be entitled to recognition from Coleman—if not for her intellect and "École Normale sophistication," then—on the basis of her attractiveness, youth, or the exotic appeal of her French-ness (190).

Delphines is like a "precocious child" with "a considerable talent for being wounded," Zuckerman relates a Delphine who is so easily unsettled when not positioned as either an object of envy or desire, as she is accustomed (185, 187). Thus, when she is unable to gain this recognition, and in effect ally herself with the influential senior professor, Coleman gains a particular power in relation to her. However, his disinterest in any aspect of Delphine—whether it is her education, careerism, beauty, etc.—is not a power relation grounded in Coleman's own image-based sense of safe superiority, on the basis of his tenure and campus reputation; nor is it necessarily a concrete superiority, based in particular accomplishments or accolades. Rather, according to Zuckerman, Coleman is unmoved by Delphine because she has

apparently never been “out of [the classroom] ever”; she is “edified,” having forged an “intellectual commitment” to stylish, perspective-based theories that are divorced from concrete experience (191). According to Zuckerman’s relation of Coleman’s distaste for Delphine, she is so invested in cultivating an image of herself as Athena College’s top-tier French sophisticate, that she is as “abysmally ignorant” as her students (191).

One semester prior to the spooks incident, Delphine calls Coleman to her office to discuss with him a small controversy over a female student’s complaint about his reading of *Hippolytus* in class. Zuckerman reports that Delphine’s aim with the meeting is to flirtatiously “unsettle” Coleman as he unsettles her (185). His sustained disinterest has made Delphine “fear that she is being seen through” while simultaneously “not being seen enough”; she seeks to affect this same feeling in him (185). Elaine Safer has cited Delphine’s antagonistic conquest and “eagerness to punish Coleman for racism and exploitation of women” as a means for her to compensate “for her frustrated desire to be the object of his affection” (222). However, this reading of Delphine must be taken a step further; while Zuckerman’s rendition of Delphine’s interior monologue similarly reports that it is both “the way [Coleman] had sexually sized her up” and “had failed to sexually size her up” which leaves Delphine feeling that she must gain his recognition by any means, it is Delphine’s relation to the image she has created of herself—and not her relation to Coleman—which fuels her antagonism (185).

Given her flair for the melodramatic—“one of the impediments to her adroitness”—when Coleman does not pay the homage due to her image, Zuckerman theorizes that Delphine sets out to garner his attention through still more antagonistic

means (Roth 190). In her inner monologue concerning Coleman's affair with Faunia, Delphine reasons Coleman's desire for his "drastically inferior" mistress is the result of his fear "of any woman with a brain" (198). In fact, Zuckerman reports, Delphine even goes so far as to convince herself that Coleman's affair is a way of "striking back at her" for her involvement in the spooks incident (195):

Who else's face and name and form does she suggest to you but mine—the mirror image of me, she could suggest to you no one else's. By luring a woman who is, as I am, employed by Athena College, who is, as I am, less than half your age—yet a woman otherwise my opposite in every way—you at once cleverly masquerade and flagrantly disclose just who it is you wish to destroy. (Roth 195)

Through her meddling, she manipulates the institutional images which comprise Coleman's identity (i.e., Jewish, white, and "anti-Negro") in order to arouse in the Athena community seemingly concrete fantasies that expose "Coleman Silk for what [she deems] he is"—an "insatiable" and "pathologically sinister" misogynist (Roth 195, 292, 293). As an agent of disorder, Delphine destroys the comfortable exteriority of the images on which Coleman relies. From early on in the novel, she emerges as the primary disruptor of his composure, implying the impossibility of either his public image or personal autonomy enjoying the established norms of his careful self-management.

A "self-deceiving hypocrite," Delphine is sympathetic to academia's underrepresented groups, but her understanding of herself as superior blinds her to her own place among those marginalized populations (Safer 215). Zuckerman presents

Delphine so as to reveal the institutional surface on which personal autonomy, which is presumed to be contained at the interior of the public image, is excavated in order to reveal a despicable dimension of the public self. That is, through her melodramatic interjections, Delphine threatens to align Coleman's surreptitious affair with Faunia—"a misogynist's heart's desire"—with his utterance of the slippery term, "spooks" (194). In so doing, she distorts Coleman's disgusted resignation from Athena into an implicit confession of "his malice in the spooks affair," making his relationship with Faunia appear as an act of "enraged contempt"—given his lost ability to "ridicule" "young black girls needing nurturing," and being free from "women professors" who "threaten his hegemony" (193 – 194, 292 – 93, 194). Yet, the "mechanical inelasticity" of Delphine's convictions, and the distorted enthusiasm with which she seeks to harm Coleman's image, reveals Delphine as drastically incapable of connecting her own circumstances—not only with the African American student in whose defense she has Coleman indicted, but—with Coleman himself (Safer 215).

Delphine's characterization is, indeed, offensive and "comic-grotesque"—which is precisely Zuckerman's point (Safer 218). She has no alterity, no image of herself other than her own ideal; this ideal image reifies Delphine and she considers it sufficient for her sentiment of unspeakable, superior singularity. She has spent no time fostering her own relation to herself or the world because she has not had to: her image of French sophistication and elitism has "won over" most influential characters who have crossed her path thus far. The disinterested Coleman, however, forces her to consider a conception of herself outside of this image, and she cannot do it. In this way, Zuckerman's melodramatic management of her interiority represents the image-

driven institutional claim (in which both he and Delphine are arguably invested) that when one is authentic, one feels a singular, known thing at a time. Her simplistic portrayal, then, is deployed to reveal the flattening of identity as it exists within institutional parameters.

Indeed, Delphine can only offer students and the Athena community her reactionary opinions; and in this way, she serves as a foil for Ernestine's grievances about Black History Month and the reduction of education to a culture of "opinions" (Roth 331). For Zuckerman's purposes, Delphine serves to suggest a propositional and aspirational form of identity that is pure public image—affectation—as well as this identity's dark consequences. In this way, Zuckerman uses Delphine to help him think through the concept of institutionalized identity and Coleman's late-life dismissal of its a priori order of the image. However, through Delphine, the reader comes to understand that the images which comprise this system—such as that which Coleman adopts for his own principled use—are the very images which also undo its purportedly neutral and inclusive order.

The danger inherent to this system, where images may be both creative and destructive, is that it also contains gaps which undermine the system's order and render it powerless. While these gaps are, in fact, contained in the system, they actually reveal the insolubility of that very containment; that is, these gaps are represented by figures who may be identified with several groups. These figures are properly uncontainable, occupying multiple positions and often contradictory affections—while they are nevertheless contained—within the particularizing order of 'authentic' identities. According to Zuckerman, both Delphine and Coleman are

figures which represent these frenetic gaps. Thus, the deranging anger which Delphine produces in Coleman signals how his state of regulation, within a single image—the image of a conscientious, Jewish professor—is confronted by a reality that is stronger than its will to maintain that regulation. This is the reality of desire.⁶⁵

Delphine is “oddly dangerous” *not* because a sexual liaison with her could cost Coleman his career, as may have been the case in other of Roth’s novels. Delphine’s danger does not lie in a direct, socially-constructed opposition (in fact, this is more the case with Faunia) to Coleman’s image and career. Rather, her danger manifests through the antagonistic relation that she fashioned between her image of herself and the disinterested Coleman; that is, the particular (if contradictory) image of herself that she wishes to uphold. She is dangerous because she will stop at nothing in the name of this image. Zuckerman records Delphine as perceiving Coleman solely through her own desire for “affection,” as Safer puts it, or recognition. Since he fails in this, Delphine recasts her desire through the pure concept of a negative idea of this same image: since Coleman does not desire her, he must not desire any “female with a brain”; ergo, there must be something villainously wrong with his conception of women. Delphine arouses such derangement in Coleman because she vulgarly raises the interiorized, individual (and properly unknowable) power of desire to the general surface of the image—naming the cause of his desire through more general images. She at once seeks access to, and presumes knowledge of, Coleman’s interiority; and while he never publically reveals himself as black or is deterred in his liaisons with Faunia, the image of his interiority with which Delphine confronts Coleman brings about disconcerting perturbation.

Coleman's experience of interiority, then, is presented through Delphine as affected by disequilibrium. Thus, while Delphine creates disorder in Coleman's life she also sheds light on the disorder that is inherent to both his public image (as Jewish identification) and compound individual identity. However, it is important for the reader to bear in mind that the arrogantly paranoid isolation in which Delphine is cast stems from Zuckerman's own inner monologue, a discordance of contentious and multiple perspectives conveying unexplored proportions of his own life. In this way, Delphine's perspective—consisting solely of what “everyone knows” of Coleman—bears the mark of Zuckerman's own subject position; she thus becomes a kind of story, a perspective that reveals Zuckerman's effort to make sense of Coleman and his life. To return to Zuckerman's second, physiological characterization of Coleman: each of the man's traits are reported as belonging to an identifiable Jewish ‘type’—“the smallnosed Jewish *type*,” and “*one of those crimped-haired Jews*”—who is “[t]hrown out of a Norfolk whorehouse for being black [and] thrown out of Athena college for being white” (15, 16). About thirty pages before the reader learns that Coleman is black, the quandaries of indeterminate identity are brought to the fore; Zuckerman utilizes Delphine's perception of Coleman to extend this indeterminacy and test the ground on which identity may be based in image-driven affections and identification, with seemingly uncaused desire.

III

Zuckerman's following the order of his experience, through Coleman's difficulties with Delphine to his meeting Ernestine and discovering Coleman's ethnic identity, is

echoed in his account of Coleman's life, which appears in the novel in installments. Distinctions between ethnicity, then, are intertwined with the narratological placement (as alternately 'experiencing-I' and 'narrating-I') of Roth's narrator, revealing a subtle paradox that is addressed through Zuckerman's mixing the order of discovery. To make sense of Coleman's life, Zuckerman must place Coleman's "gift to be secretive" at the center of his story (Roth 135). This is partly because Zuckerman was never made privy to Coleman's secrets by Coleman himself; and also because, Zuckerman deduces, the charm and magnetism that he (along with Delphine, apparently) so admires in his acquaintance seems to be dependent upon that secretiveness. Thus, Zuckerman mines the aspects of Coleman's life to which he has been offered some limited access by Coleman himself—Coleman's love affairs—in the interest of exploring the simultaneous driving force of and exception to Coleman's rule of secrecy: desire.

Writing about Coleman in the way, Zuckerman constructs for himself an intimate (and, indeed, privileged) proximity through third-person narration and immerses himself in an imaginative reconstruction of Coleman's psychic space. Interestingly, in doing this, Zuckerman's narration suggests that this space is home to the cause of Coleman's desire: an agile state of "raw I," divorced from any "coercive, inclusive, historically inescapable moral *we*" for which he restlessly strives (Roth 108, original emphasis). Zuckerman utilizes Coleman's various love affairs as a means for entering into this psychic space, hypothesizing how this desire has experientially manifested in his subject's life. For instance, Zuckerman's relation of Coleman's affair with Steena Palsson appears in the novel long after Coleman's own brief

discussion of her, over a game of cards, with Zuckerman. Zuckerman's rendition of the Steena affair is an important starting point toward understanding how he conceives Coleman's desires in relation to ethnicity and individuality.

Despite their relationship being otherwise perfect, after meeting his mother and Ernestine—who are of darker skin than Coleman—and spending what seems like a pleasant Sunday afternoon in East Orange, Steena does “not phone him or try ever to see him again” (125). The scene of Steena's exit is presented abruptly—“I can't do it!” she cried, and, without another word of explanation [...] she raced alone from the train as though from an attacker” (125). An inexpressive Coleman is left alone on the train, holding Steena's forgotten hat. The matter-of-fact tone with which Zuckerman relates Coleman's reaction to the relationship's end bespeaks an acceptance, not an occasion for mourning; the end signifies the historical moment's concrete and necessarily oppositional relation between black and white. The year of the breakup is 1950, and Zuckerman relays it as ‘given’ to the context of its occurrence: “*I can't do it*. There was a kind of wisdom in that, an awful lot of wisdom for a young girl, not the kind one ordinarily has at only twenty” (126). Steena is apparently able to maintain closeness with Coleman insofar as she is able to misrecognize his image of whiteness; however, once that image is shattered and the concrete reality of his parentage is revealed, there can be no turning back.

Steena's leaving Coleman brings to the reader's attention the apriority of whiteness as a concrete position within this oppositional relation; and what is more, the nearly hysterical nature of her reaction to Coleman's ethnic identity calls forth the presence of a more abstract, affective dimension to this relation. Blackness enters

their relationship as a generic disruption, an element unassimilable to Steena's narrative of social normativity; that is, Coleman's blackness, according to Zuckerman, confronts Steena with the reality of her own desire, which is rooted in an image of powerful, a priori whiteness.⁶⁶ Indeed, Steena is not consciously aware of this productive—and indeed creative—desire, which forms an image for her of a white Coleman. Born of an image, this desire is abstract, but nevertheless real in Zuckerman's rendering.

Through Steena, Zuckerman carefully probes the simultaneously concrete and ideological bases of ethnicity, as her unconscious desire and its power are not merely ramified by her skin tone, but rather in the ways she inhabits her body at particular, intimate moments with Coleman. Jonathan Freedman speaks to the emergence of desire and “the power of her whiteness” in such moments, discussing a scene in which Steena sings and dances for Coleman to “a black man's version of a Jewish man's version of a black-inspired musical idiom”: Artie Shaw's rendition of “The Man I Love,” featuring Roy Eldridge on the trumpet (Roth 116, Freedman 182). “Prompted by a colored trumpet player playing it like a black torch song,” Steena's impromptu, “slithery” dance and evocative crooning makes immediately visible for Coleman “[t]hat big, white thing” (Roth 115). Her performance, Freedman notes, is an example of “racial cross-dressing”: addressing, at once, “the Jewish accession to whiteness via blackface minstrelsy” and a white person's enactment of “a black role in order to access for her or himself the libidinal freedom stereotypically associated with ‘blackness’” (Freedman 183).

After her performance, Steena hides her face in her hands, “half meaning, half pretending to cover her shame” for this explicit, and apparently transgressive, display of her body (Roth 116). The power of Steena’s whiteness lies in her ability to inhabit this other idiom, enacting a momentary freedom from the image of power which drives her attachment to Coleman. Her image-based desire, however, rooted in a priori whiteness comes to the fore at the song’s end when she playfully pretends to be ashamed of her momentary foray into otherness. And while the power of her whiteness becomes clear to Coleman, as does her desire, through this performance, the performance itself nevertheless makes him adore her all the more: she is powerful, she desires him, and Coleman seems to want nothing more than to inhabit the parallel, powerful image of himself in which Steena is so affectively invested. However, it is this very image-driven desire, attended by an unsettling concrete reality, which ultimately drives Steena away, presumably teaching Coleman a hard lesson about the “accidental” nature of “fate” when one is black—“or, how accidental it all may seem when it is inescapable” (127). Coleman’s fate seems accidental here because, as a black American in the 1950s, he represents the stereotypical idiom of transgression; Steena’s reaction shows Coleman that he *is* the display which inspired her to cover her face after “The Man I Love” ended. Zuckerman’s reconstruction alludes to the fact that this is likely so unsettling for Steena because all the while, she had presumed Coleman’s particular display (though this is not explicitly narrated) to be, like her own, an intimate performance.

Zuckerman only brushes the surface, implying the desire-driven cause of Steena’s distress (which she hides behind good manners that fateful Sunday), and

instead turns his attention to Coleman's reaction to her departure. Coleman seems to accept the end of the relationship as inevitable, not due to his own inability to successfully pass as white, but due problems of proximity and materiality—or, his mistake of introducing Steena to his family, thereby introducing the element of skin color into their relationship. During their short-lived friendship, Coleman briefly discusses with Zuckerman his affair with Steena. However, during this conversation, Coleman does not mention to Zuckerman how or why the relationship ended; the account that one reads, of Steena's dance, of the Sunday with his family, and of her swift exit, is Zuckerman's own fabrication. In this way, Zuckerman perceptively aligns himself with Steena, insofar as both are duped by Coleman's secret. By doing this, Zuckerman implies that, for Coleman, the relationship with Steena (much like with him) relies first on proximity—through which Coleman may constitute ongoing, neutralized relations within an otherwise marginalizing, discriminatory social system. In proximity to Steena, Coleman is white and irrelevant to the system. The focus of Zuckerman's narration, then, is on the effect that the relationship has on Coleman's competence: its contingency and instability, while unsurprising to him, nevertheless engender in Coleman new affective practices. Cognizant of sentiment's high price, Coleman searches for a sense of individuality while breaking from his family's/ community's ways of attaining normativity.

As Zuckerman reconstructs it, following Steena, Coleman meets Ellie Magee. Zuckerman describes Ellie as the “five-month interlude” who occurs just following Steena and prior to Coleman's meeting Iris, the Jewish girl who would be his future wife (Roth 132). Ellie is “a petite, shapely colored girl, tawny-skinned” who goes out

with both “white NYU guys” and “colored NYU guys,” as both “are drawn to her”; like Coleman, Ellie is a light-skinned black American who allows others to presume that she is white as the circumstance suits her (132). Coleman and Ellie begin dating after a brief flirtation in the shop where she works. Ellie’s “naturalness” and “ease” provide Coleman with a non-threatening relation in which he can finally be natural himself, and suddenly, Coleman’s ideas about individual identity undergo an affective shift (135). Zuckerman claims that Ellie is the first woman with whom Coleman feels he can be himself; and so much so, in fact, “that one night the truth just comes bubbling out” (133). He tells Ellie that he is black; and the “utterly unnarrow-minded” girl is not only unfazed, but she is unsurprised (134). He tells her about having attended Howard University, according to his father’s wishes; he tells her how he hated the school’s “false, concentrated environment,” which drove him to drop out (134).

The interlude with Ellie seems almost a transformative experience for Coleman, it is exhilarating and even educational. Ellie shows him that he is not the only black man who “plays” his ethnicity according to others’ perceptions and assumptions—“You’re so vain, you thought you’d dreamed it up yourself,” she playfully proclaims (135). At first, Coleman is impishly amused “because he is hopeless and cannot see it in others and because Ellie is his guide, pointing them out” (135). In fact, one of the great pleasures that Coleman takes in their affair, according to Zuckerman, comes from “playing the ambiguity” of their appearances within the expectations and assumptions of those around them (133):

[T]he guys he knows from school all think he's taking out a colored girl, and her friends all think she's going around with a white guy. There's some real fun in having other people find them important, and most everywhere they go, people do. It's 1951. Guys ask Coleman, "What's she like?" "Hot," he says. (133)

With Ellie, certain aspects of Coleman's "fate" no longer seem so "inescapable," as they had with Steena. Zuckerman's narration leads the reader to presume that Coleman's skin color is lighter than Ellie's, allowing him to appear the white/r member of their couple; thus, Ellie provides Coleman with the option to "play" his ethnicity any way he likes, which he could never fully accomplish with Steena (133). Ellie affords him the opportunity to play *the* audacious man par excellence, for 1951, unabashedly romancing an exotic, Other woman.

The two are content in their Greenwich Village world, "the four freest square miles in America," as Ellie calls it (135). Within the four narrative pages that Zuckerman allots to the relationship with Ellie, the reader—perhaps not unlike Zuckerman's young Coleman—believes that "she's a contender, this one" (134). Her "ease and lively innocence" reminds Coleman of Steena; only Ellie is not white, and therefore Coleman does not feel the need to bring her home to meet his family "and they don't go visiting hers," either (133). Although Ellie's being black does leave this option open to possibility; free from the anxiety he experienced with bringing Steena home, with Ellie, "if and when he wants to, he can now go home" (135). Whether this is a consideration which Coleman takes seriously, the reader is not told. Zuckerman also does not mention Coleman's being in love with Ellie, nor does he present

Coleman as considering their future together, as he had with Steena. The brief, illuminating relationship provides Coleman with a brand of intimacy that he has apparently needed, in order to gain perspective on his life and potential role within a community. Indeed, the relationship appears as a suspension of Coleman's desire for an image of himself rooted in static, if powerful, whiteness.

According to Zuckerman, by "losing his secret" to Ellie, Coleman found "all his relief," he "felt like a boy again" (135, 134). With Ellie, Coleman "regained his innocence"—but, he quickly decides, "what use is innocence?" (136). Being with another light-skinned black American, Coleman finds reassurance in his ability to successfully inhabit whiteness, affecting in himself its powerful image. Thus, while the Ellie interlude is reaffirming, it cannot completely shatter Coleman's attachment to conventional (read, white) hierarchies and ideations of autonomous individuality. In fact, in a relatively short time, Coleman comes to perceive Ellie as potentially threatening, producing a crack in the available genres of his survival:

[S]ome dimension is missing. The whole thing lacks the ambition—it fails to feed that conception of himself that's been driving him all his life. Along comes Iris and he's back in the ring. [...] [He has] the *gift* to be secretive again [...] It was fun [with Ellie]. But insufficiently everything else. (135)

While Ellie provides the occasion for Coleman to consider a life lived between the borders separating black and white, the context in which Coleman receives this lesson—among the bars and shops of Greenwich Village's annexed community—only serves to render the enterprise shallow and grotesque. And what is more, Coleman's whiteness in relation to Ellie poses a threat to Coleman's goals for normativity.

Remaining with her, he will be accepted by his family, but within the larger community where he successfully passes as white, in 1951, he risks being shunned.

In the end, Ellie inspires in Coleman a revelation somewhat like Steena's, upon her learning that he is black: the attention that the couple receives when they are out, and the interested lines of questioning from his male colleagues at NYU, demonstrate for Coleman that he has come to fully inhabit an image of whiteness. His relationship with Ellie, in this way, plays a very similar role in Zuckerman's narrative as Steena's dance to "The Man I Love." With Ellie, Coleman perceives himself as appearing to the community as a white man who is, in a sense, "racially cross-dressing." With Ellie, he is a white man inhabiting a role in order to gain access to the libidinal freedom with which his white contemporaries stereotypically associate blackness. Unlike Steena, Coleman is wholly aware of the power of his position here; rather than flee from it, he embraces it and enjoys the relationship. When he meets Iris Gittelman, however, Coleman decides he must move on: "Iris gives more. She raises everything to another pitch. Iris gives him his life on the scale he wants to live it," Zuckerman reports (136).

Interestingly, unlike in the case of Steena, according to the narration offered by Zuckerman chronicling his acquaintanceship with Coleman, the two men never speak of a light-skinned black girl named Ellie Magee whom Coleman dated between Steena and Iris; and in his very thorough register of the conversation with Ernestine, Ellie is not mentioned, either. For all intents and purposes, the four-page, "five-month interlude" named Ellie is purely a product of Nathan Zuckerman's imagination.⁶⁷ What is important in this consideration is not whether she actually existed in

Coleman's younger life, but rather what her invention by Zuckerman might imply. The brief case of Ellie is important within *The Human Stain* for the bridge that she constructs between Coleman's past, in Greenwich Village, and his present circumstances, just before his death. According to Zuckerman, Steena essentially discovered Coleman's blackness by accident; and Iris, Ernestine informs Zuckerman, was never made privy to Coleman's secret. It is only Ellie, and much later, (Zuckerman guesses) Faunia Farley, whom Coleman tells he is black.

Even of this, the reader cannot be certain, as Zuckerman merely assumes that Coleman has told Faunia—forming “the underpinning pact between them”—when the friendship between the two men dwindles before Coleman's death (Roth 213). Zuckerman makes this deduction when he runs into Coleman and Faunia one summer evening at a rehearsal for the Boston Symphony Orchestra. At this mid-point in the novel, the reader learns that Coleman had inexplicably stopped returning Zuckerman's phone calls and disconnected his answering machine. Zuckerman reasons that, since his trip to the dairy farm where Faunia worked for free room and board, on which Coleman had invited him to watch her milk the cows, “the last thing [Coleman] now wanted” was “permitting this [...] writer to nose around in his private life”—“dropping me in the middle of that summer made sense for every possible reason, even if [at the time] I had no way of imagining why” (204 – 205). Zuckerman's narration repeatedly mentions missing his friend, who had awakened in him a new attentiveness to life, which he had not before experienced.

Encountering Coleman and Faunia at the concert, and pondering their serenity—“I found them looking nothing like so unusual or humanly isolated as I'd

been coming to envision [...] since Coleman had dropped out of sight”—Zuckerman is suddenly struck by a pivotal moment which forces him to reevaluate Coleman, once again:

I sat on the grass, astonished, unable to account for what I was thinking: he has a secret. [...] Why a secret? Because it is there when he's with her. And when he is not with her it is there too [...]. There is a blank. [...] a blotting out, an excision, though of what I can't begin to guess [...]. Faunia alone knew how Coleman Silk had come about being himself. How do I know she knew? I don't. I couldn't know that either. I can't know. [...] For better or worse, I can only do what everyone does who thinks that they know. I imagine. I am forced to imagine. (212–213)

At the concert, Coleman and Zuckerman have a brief exchange, from which Coleman and Faunia are rather quick to depart; in the resulting moment, Zuckerman finds himself encased in an intense present. With the line, “I can only do what everyone does who thinks they know,” he calls to mind Delphine's anonymous letter, which begins with the foreboding phrase: “Everyone knows...” And further, in the sensation that Coleman harbors a secret which only Faunia knows, Zuckerman also implicitly calls attention to his earlier reconstructions of the relationships with Steena and the likely imaginary Ellie.

In this converging moment of interwoven perspectives, the narrating-Zuckerman in collision with the experiencing-Zuckerman, Roth's narrator deftly entices the reader along a path of existential assumptions that underlie narrative creation. He calls to the reader's attention, not merely his unreliability as Coleman's

narrator, but the necessarily impossible set of conditions that comprise the narrative act. Zuckerman's initial image of Coleman—as possessing a particularly conscientious, hard-nosed dean-of-faculty charm—is despoiled early on, as soon as Coleman speaks to the notion of himself as a lover. The idea of Coleman in this role catches Zuckerman, and this image stays with him through the duration of his narrative; a particularly intimate role in which he can never fully understand his subject. To the very end of the novel, following his brief exchange at the symphony rehearsal, the image of Coleman the lover—and the attendant privileges that this relation affords the women he loves—is replayed again at Coleman's grave site after his conversation with Ernestine:

I began by wondering what it had been like when Coleman had told Faunia the truth about that beginning—assuming that he ever had [...] Assuming that what he could not outright say to me on the day he burst in all but shouting, “Write my story, damn you!” [...] he could not in the end resist confessing to her [...] the first and last person since Ellie Magee for whom he could strip down and turn around so as to expose [...] the mechanical key by which he had wound himself up to set off on this great escapade. (337)

Folding the narrative back some two hundred pages to call forth the brief “interlude” of Ellie, Zuckerman calls attention to the discord among, at once, the image of his subject which is upheld within the Athena College community (particularly by Delphine), the sentimental image harbored by Ernestine, and his own mistaken image of Coleman as “one of those crimp-haired Jews.” Coleman the lover, outside of his

secret and its attendant perturbations, becomes for Zuckerman a more ‘true’ image of his subject.

By contrast, the images retained by Ernestine and Delphine—perhaps not unlike Zuckerman’s—leave the mark of their own, respective subject positions, their own desires for particular images of themselves. Ernestine’s conception and attendant narrative is decidedly Oedipal: he may “cut himself away” from the family through a willful ignorance of race’s material circumstances, but, she confidently asserts, he cannot cut himself away from “his feelings” (320). Ernestine’s presumption reveals her own sentimental and traditionalist perspectives on family and racial solidarity, offering the reader little resonance with the Coleman with which one has become acquainted in Zuckerman’s reconstruction. This order, however, relies upon such a detailed “canon” of tacit rules and obligations to be unproblematic that Coleman flees; learning this fact from Ernestine, Zuckerman understands that she cannot offer him the portrait of his subject’s interiority that he seeks. And Delphine’s virtually unprovoked and haphazardly-constructed image of a Coleman who is villainously racist and contemptuously misogynistic, implicitly informs Zuckerman (and the reader) as to the women—if not this particularly young and attractive one—Coleman would be willing to make himself vulnerable and, in some important sense, known.

Zuckerman illustrates Ernestine and Delphine’s perspectival distances from the ‘real’ Coleman, separated by chasms of time and space, and calls the reader’s attention to a particular privilege that is given, again, to proximity—in both one’s construction of the self, as well as that self’s image to strangers. While Ernestine and Delphine’s versions of Coleman are grounded, respectively, in the concrete and the ideological, it

is the important work of Steena, Ellie, and Faunia which reveals that it is in fact a set of shifting relations, between affectively-invested images and blunt corporealities, which shape the basis of 'true,' human life beyond either group identification or ethnicity. Beyond group identifications—whether familial or communal—and their inherent expectations, Zuckerman suggests, there is the subject's interior psychic space. As presumed home to the many contradictory desires and affectations of the subject, only the most intimate other—an oxymoron in itself—can begin to approach a perception of the subject as a self, whole in its un-cohesiveness.

While the tension between group identification and individuality, based on concerns of race and ethnicity, are central to Roth's novel, the function of these relations are far more complex than they may at first appear through Zuckerman's narration. In *The Human Stain*, Roth shows the reader that neither ethnicity nor individuality can be fully grasped through either material or abstract formulas of recognition. These terms, the novel suggests, are inherently marked by the circumstances of their iteration, imported and naturalized from competing discourses, and often wrongly associated with arrogance, dismissal, and alienation. In this way, *The Human Stain* reveals the relations that conspire in the construction and performance of self, exposing the affectations that are inscribed in actuality and inform, not only the characters', but the reader's abstract means for making sense of people and events. Through Coleman's various relations to women, Roth exposes both the virtues and the dangers of group identification, however diversely conceived: while its intent may be euphemistic or optimistic, group identification is nevertheless formed around perceived threats to the image, of both society and the self, that it

works to uphold. In this way, Roth asks his reader to consider the kind of creative life (whether collective or individual) which may be imagined if a meaningful existence were not bound to a polemical narrative—or if such a life need not lead to stabilizing institutional structures.

Conclusion

The novels read in this dissertation directly address the conventional reading methods and discourse through which readers engage with ethnic literatures and literary realism. As a result, they have been read negatively by critics and reviewers: disparaged for their controversial depictions of certain groups, failing to honor particular nationalist values, or as otherwise aesthetically deficient examples of American realism. Alternatively, I have argued that the texts demand new reading methods that reconfigure how readers understand the representational and discursive rendering of group identifications and individuality. These novels provoke readers to reconsider where these discourses come from and what their purposes are, as well as to question the goals of conventional literary realisms in representing ethnic group identifications. Thus, reading the production and transmission of affect in and through these novels, I have deployed discursive and narratological analyses in my readings in order to thicken my examinations of narrators' and characters' functions.

The reading method that I have presented looks beyond conventional literary nationalisms and cultural contextualizations. As the novels seem to demand, I read their emotional expressions (which are uncannily echoed in their receptions) in order to examine what is collective about individuals' struggles for social survival. I have used new vocabularies to address the contemporary institutions and discourses in which both the novels and their readers are embedded. I have examined perspectives borne of the texts' emotional expressions, which I argue reveal affect's central role in making and un-making the particular, nationalist discourses and institutions with

which ethnic group identification is conventionally associated. In this way, my project has proposed the existence of an alternative, untimely brand of American realism that presents America's ethnic diversity and its experiences, but which cannot be read through formalist modes of interpretation or a regulatory, symbolizing imagination.

These texts tease and trap the reader with false problematics and unresolvable crises of identity. Such points of convergence are not meant to alienate or offend the reader. Rather, these difficult, and at times controversial, novels demand of the reader a sensitivity—a combined acute awareness and analytical receptivity—to the ways that individuality and group identification rely upon boundaries formed by projecting and introjecting abstract ideas, spiritual entities, or images; that is, affects. Readers' disparaging interpretations and rationalizations of the novels' affective processes, indeed, reveal that conventional discourses concerning ethnic group identification and individuation cannot account for the unbearable circumstances faced by the novels' characters.

My readings have avoided this interpretive impulse by mapping the discourses and attendant atmospheres that emerge both within the novels and their attendant critical responses. Asserting that the novels are neither realistic nor mimetic in any conventional sense, the affective method that I use reveals how the texts participate in these institutions by revealing and subverting the elements which conspire in their production. The novels' characters—Franny, Jimson and Ideal, Menardo and Bartolomeo, Zuckerman and Coleman—struggle to make meaning from the irrational institutions and uncomfortable atmospheres that structure their everyday lives. They labor to account for the conditions of already-interpreted group identifications. To

achieve such an account, they presume, will lead them to a better understanding of, or some sense of closure about, their uncomfortable personal circumstances within their respective groups. However, because the characters' (like the novels' frustrated readers') interpretive labors yield only distasteful descriptions or rationalizations of their circumstances, the novels reveal that the discourses—i.e., abstract ideas, spiritual entities, and images—which structure their worlds and inform their interpretations are not what the characters (and readers) believe them to be. These discursive elements are not absolute, and certainly not objective. These entities, ideas, and images are atmospheric, and therefore, affective.

Like the novels' readers, the texts' narrators are unable to manage the characters' erratic behaviors and irrational inner lives; within their discursive contexts, the characters' endeavors for meaning and self-actualization seem (to both narrators and readers) little more than emotional reactions against typical social tensions. Thus, while the characters dream of a formal cohesiveness to account for themselves, narrators and readers labor for a similar cohesion of the groups and discourses into which these characters apparently refuse to fit. My project points up how the novels come to illustrate, through this discordant relationship between narrator and character, the irrational systems and affective processes from which mimesis and realism—i.e., representations and discourses relating ethnic group identification—emerge. This alternative realism works to account for the means by which subjects (both literary and actual) cope with the anxieties and tensions of contemporary life and its prevailing, if often problematic, social conditions.

In this way, the novels provide us with a portrait of the allegedly liberated and affirmative subject of the late-20th and 21st centuries: at times charming, in his/ her pseudo-awareness of circumstances; at other times, frightening or offensive in his/ her aggressive projections, superficial protectiveness, and unwavering dread of death and/ or dissolution. And indeed, although these characters are affectively at odds with their respective groups, their attempts at self-reflexivity still ultimately fail; this is because, as my method reveals, they are unable to conceive life beyond their embedded, invested positions within the very irrationality that they claim to disparage. Their interpretive labors emerge in my readings as so many products of the very atmospheres that cause them to feel ‘different’ or problematic. And yet they still suffer social injustices—classism, sexism, bullying, violence—at the hands of their respective groups, perceived as unreasonably resistant and a threat to shared discourses and images.

The arguably anti-social characters that I examine may appear to be protective of the self and defensive against institutional dependence, but they nevertheless conform to social norms for fear of external retribution. This presumed retribution comes from characters’ perceptions of others’—as well as their own—inherent dishonesty, unreliability, and investment in institutions (i.e., the university, multiculturalism, capitalism, and so on) whose atmospheres subsume and flatten the individual. These correctly presumed social ‘givens’ reveal a generally corruptible value system residing at the heart of the characters’ increasingly institutionalized worlds. In this way, the novels show the reader that no product (whether a theoretical approach, a novel, or one’s conceptions of the self/ Other) can ever be more absolute

or objective than the affective (read: spiritual, abstract, image-driven) processes of its production. As expressions of the non-existent whole from which they emerge, each character should be read as perspectives upon their own affective processes of production. The texts' sharply weakened social ties have their roots in social or cultural warfare; thus, the prevailing cynicism and pseudo-self reflexivity that is observed in Franny and Jimson mutates, in this project's later novels, into subjective experiences of extreme isolation and emptiness which I perceived in Menardo and Coleman.

The reading method that I propose meets these compounding, intertwining issues and apparent contradictions head-on, mapping their production and continuance in abstraction, spirituality, and invested images of the self. I ultimately argue that these novels offer the reader a way of understanding the emotional and psychological impact of the social changes that have occurred as the twentieth century has unfolded into the twenty-first. This alternative mode of realism addresses the peculiar forms of discursivity that express, in an exaggerated way, the era's underlying character structure. Revealed by the discord between characters and narrators, readers are presented with impulses and responses that are not given a definite object with which to find satisfaction, nor a cohesive form of control. Narrators' attempts to rein in figures such as Ideal, Coleman, Franny, et al, do not mask their underlying coolness toward these characters—a remoteness (not unlike readers') of one who gives priority to his/ her own claim on self-actualization and has little to offer these characters in terms of a future plan.

Thus, character and narrator impulses and responses are never restored to consciousness; and as a result, readers, much like these literary figures, are unable to engage with them in a productive, properly critical way. Instead, these impulses and responses are protracted and amplified, both within and beyond the novels. Through the intermediary of the literary text, the social patterns presented therein reproduce themselves in the novels' critical receptions. The perception of America as an ethnically discriminatory and forbidding place, though originating in a realistic awareness of the anxiety of contemporary social life, receives reinforcement from the aggressive projection of these impulses outward, through readers' responses. Likewise, while the assertion that—outside of one's affirmative group identification—the subject has no future, upholds a realism concerning impending social dangers, this assertion nevertheless incorporates a problematic incapacity to understand oneself as part of a dynamic, historical current.

My project develops a reading method that is particularly timely for the twenty-first century, an era which has been popularly defined as post-racial, post-ethnic, and multicultural; my method is oriented toward critiquing and changing the avenues through which readers engage with ethnic American literatures and make meaning, seeking to understand how this literature works, rather than describing or explaining these processes as given. My work seeks to reconfigure experiences of ethnicity, examining the problematic stakes of being deemed different within one's group, taking into rigorous critical account the discourses and atmospheres which attend the injustices that can exist within group identification. This project proposes a socially-progressive method for reading ethnic American literatures, asserting that

emotions and circulating affective atmospheres are crucial to politics and group identification.

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Appendix: Notes

Introduction

¹ Since before the 1960s, literary critics have perceived the job of the American novelist to be something of a seer—and the novel, a work of meaning-making. The promulgation of an American literary realism was driven by critics' evaluative assessments of novelistic form. This formalism encompassed several similar types of literary criticism (New Criticism, Chicago School) that arose in the American academy during the 1920s and 1930s, flourishing during the 1940s and 1950s. Formalists offered intense examinations of the relationship between form and meaning in a work of literature, emphasizing the subtle complexity in how a work is arranged. As a source of meaning, the novel was perceived as a form of knowledge itself; and its writer, a potentially valuable, cultural authority. A novel's 'meaning,' then, was retained and discussed via examinations of its interrelated and intrinsic elements of characterization and form. By extension, a novel's 'greatness'—as well as its writer's—was deemed according to the mutuality, or reciprocity, of its form and content; or, how relatable its characters were within the necessarily closed, consistent (and apparently mimetic) world of the novel.

² As a field of academic inquiry, ethnic studies rejects the formalizing influence and mimetic theory of previous critical approaches, including New Criticism. Privileging historical, social and cultural context, the field seeks to understand the conventions and representations promoted by cultural discourses, asserting that literary discourse constitutes the ground of social existence and personal identity. That is, beginning in the late-70s and continuing through the 80s, America's social formation came to be seen by literary academicians as the product of many converging discourses: a set of images and narratives producing perceptible, affective (as well as didactic) upshots on epistemological registers. In this way, ethnic studies perceives all acts of expression as embedded in the material conditions of a culture, and texts are examined with attention paid to how they reveal social realities, especially as they produce ideology and represent power or subversion. This project incited literary scholars to engage (not only in textual analysis, but also) the social, political, historical, and institutional grounds of literary production, distribution, and consumption. Some widely cited, historically-oriented and culturally-focused Americanist texts from this moment include: Walter Benn Michaels, *The Gold Standard and the Logic of Naturalism: American Literature at the Turn of the Century* (Berkeley: UC Press, 1987); Eric J. Sundquist, *To Wake the Nations: Race in the Making of American Literature* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1993).

With the introduction of ethnic studies came efforts to expose American literature as the problematically unquestioned source of historical constructions of ethnic identities; the field of ethnic studies self-positions against contemporary power structures and emphasizes the implications of its study in the interest of empowering traditionally disenfranchised groups. These critical developments within the American literary academy were deeply influenced and by the historiographic work of Michel Foucault (particularly his work in *The History of Sexuality*), as well as the post-Marxist historians such as the Annales School. The culminating view within literary discourse (as evidenced in scholarly works such as Linda Hutcheon's seminal text, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*) was that the novel perceived and configured history, not as some grand narrative received by the masses from above, but as an assemblage of interconnected events.

³ For some, ethnicity directly relates to group identification, linked to kinship or ancestry, while for others it is read as a product of social constructionism. To still others, ethnicity carries with it an instrumental connotation, emphasized for the sake of political interest and/ or psychological satisfaction. Essentially, these varying definitions all reveal that, at its core, ethnicity, as a form of difference, is mediated by symbolic forms; that is, neither society nor the academy present 'given' ethnic identifications that do not have a presumed meaning beyond them. However, problems of comparability arise as we forget that these symbols and their use in meaning-making are in fact judgments. Yet, as in any comparative study, a primary demand to my work in this project is the comparability of its cases, or novels. To attend to my cases' comparativeness, I begin by asserting a

broad definition of ethnicity, which includes both culturally defined ethnic groups and racial groups. I maintain an integrationist approach to understanding this broadly-defined term: ethnicity (which includes race) is socially-constructed, partly through various assumptions of the social formation, partially on the basis of ancestry, and partly via the interests of ethnic groups.

⁴ For the sake of clarity: I am defining ‘nationalism’ here in terms of ethnic nationalism: a form of nationalism wherein ‘nation’ is defined in terms of ethnicity. Here, ethnicity includes ideas of a shared culture and usually a shared language, while it is also always constituted (at least in part) by some element(s) of primordialism/ ascribed ethnic identity. While this aspect of ethnic nationalism is closely associated with ethnic sentiment and practice (stabbing toward an understanding of the affective avenues through which, I argue, ethnic difference simultaneously produces and destroys groups and individuals), it tends to neglect the economic and structural conditions that both undermine and reinforce ethnic loyalties, particularly within a professional, academic setting. See especially, “Chapter 3: Theories of Ethnicity,” in *Ethnic Studies: Issues and Approaches* by Philip Q. Yang (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000).

⁵ Over the course of this dissertation, and especially in Chapter 2, I draw from Deleuze and Guattari’s *A Thousand Plateaus* (especially chapter 10, with particular attention paid to pp. 260 – 265). Also important to my work is Deleuze’s entire, short works on Hume and Nietzsche (respectively), *Empiricism and Subjectivity* and *Nietzsche and Philosophy*; as well as the chapter on Lewis Carroll in *The Logic of Sense*, also by Gilles Deleuze (see pp. 234 – 238).

⁶ This requires an acute awareness, as well as an analytical receptivity, to the ways in which individuality and ethnicity rely upon boundaries formed by projecting and introjecting affects; thus, my readings are sensitive to the ways in which ‘knowing’ who one is depends upon depositing alien affects on an Other.

⁷ For example, Anne Anling Cheng has explored the relationship between affect and identifications with ethnicity in *The Melancholy of Race*. In her text, Cheng theorizes the melancholia of race as a way of understanding the dynamics constituting dominant white and racially other definitions of the self. Racial melancholia, she asserts, is a simultaneously dispiriting and sustaining relation with a lost object; the racialized subject suffers as his/ her identity is endlessly reified, in the nation’s contradictory ideology, as lost and imperfect (10 – 11). For Cheng, the psychical experience of melancholy provides a means for exploring new forms of agency within, as she sees it, an “identificatory formation” that is predicated on—while being an active negotiation of—the loss of self as legitimacy” (20). Thus, racial melancholia is posited by Cheng as both a “sign of rejection and a psychic strategy in response to that rejection” (20). In literature, this process manifests via abject and hysterical thematic formulas. Through her exploration of 20th-century Asian and African American novels, she shows her reader how a psychical and social apparatus of denial pervades literary culture, supporting a melancholic affect which is particular to America—a nation founded on the very ideals whose perfidies have been repeatedly obscured. Cheng treads carefully in her vocabulary of psychoanalysis, careful not to essentialize the racial subject or put forth a diagnostic literary theory providing only sociological descriptions of race or ethnicity. Instead, she uses literature to “tease out the complex social etiology behind the phenomenon of racial grief,” rather than as symptomatic of a descriptive melancholia (15).

⁸ The term “think description” is an important concept in American anthropology, and was originally coined by Clifford Geertz. See: Geertz, *The Interpretation of Culture*, New York: Basic Books, 1973. However, in my work, I call forth the term “thick description” as it has been adapted by philosopher, Gilbert Ryle. Ryle’s work essentially gives new meaning to Geertz’s concept. He suggests that a description of an action or phenomenon may be thickened by locating it in terms of its wider meaning or goals, by considering what the action or phenomenon is trying to accomplish (498). This is distinct from a thin description, which merely describes an action or phenomenon. See: Ryle, *Collected Papers: Vol. 2*, New York: Barnes & Noble, 1971.

⁹ For instance, the rise of the Black Arts Movement in the late-1960s and early 70s exemplifies this cultural/ literary resistance of assimilationism. Disillusioned by the separateness and inequality that characterized African American life and informed its art, and in reaction to integrationist conventions within mainstream publishing and African American cultural production, the Movement sought to define a full-scale rejection of cultural assimilationism. These writers worked alongside Black Power activists and directed their art exclusively in the interest of solidarity within the black community; Movement novelists generally configured their characters' experiences as ongoing processes of collective, affirmative recognition (Townes 12). Disinterested in collaborating with the presumably irrelevant, predominantly white, American publishing mainstream, the Black Arts Movement re-thought the notion of a writer's authority and singularity; it asserted that direct experience alone was the crucial element to literary creation. Advocates of the Movement asserted that black American writers should, in the interest of the black community's self-determination, use their authentic experience of 'being different' to set out a mythology, symbolism, and mode of literary critique that was separate from the white mainstream. Hence, the Movement not only sought to establish its own paradigmatic African American writing, but it also strove for writers to posit American blackness as a culturally-determined ethnicity and provide a cohesive, nationalistic explanation for the strength and persistence of African Americans within the United States.

¹⁰ Favoring of ethnic particularity, over and above comparability, holds a dangerous potential to fashion a constricting, disciplinary identity politics, precluding the grounds for various literature's comparativeness; in this way, committed to the idea of the writer's singularity via ethnicity, the academy's newer, culturally-oriented literary treatments may also be problematically allied with meaning-making. Swapping form for content in the latter third of the twentieth century, ethnic American literature has been used as a tool for bringing the Others of American society and culture into being, so to speak; and simultaneously, as a means for creating and perpetuating ideals (i.e., stereotypes, myths) of ethnic identities and cultures. However, the Others of American literature are a notoriously unclear set, and any generalizations about them are at high risk of imprecision and error; one cannot assume that all writers who have been considered part of the American literary mainstream subscribe to the ideologies that have allowed one group to oversee American culture and society. Nor can it be assumed that their creative works reflect such ideologies. Thus, ethnic studies-focused literary scholarship runs the risk of reinstating the very boundaries it originally sought to break.

¹¹ I am defining the term "auto-criticism" as an approach to literary inquiry and close reading that is, at once critical, and mindful of one's own intellection and purported understanding of a text's content and cultural context. In chapter 3, I discuss how this approach is necessary for *Almanac of the Dead*, while it is also very difficult to achieve, as ingrained suppositions so often escape examination.

Chapter 1

¹² Formalism is a term encompassing several similar types of literary criticism (New Criticism, Chicago School, etc.) that arose in the American academy during the 1920s and 1930s, flourishing during the 1940s and 1950s. Formalists offered intense examinations of the relationship between form and meaning in a work of literature, emphasizing the subtle complexity in how a work is arranged.

¹³ A number of schools of literary criticism have adopted a formalist orientation, or at least make use of formalist concepts; mid- late-20th century existential criticism, along with the New Critical approach, comprise two formalist brands of criticism. The Chicago School has also been classified as formalist, insofar as these critics examined and analyzed works on an individual basis. However, the Chicago School's interest in historical context (the influence of which is evidenced in Kazin, Updike and the Goldsteins's comments on *Franny and Zooey*) was clearly not a formalist convention. Of course, formalist critics do not deny the historical or political situation/ contextualization of a work; however, as 'organic wholes,' formalists believe that a work of literature has the power to transcend history/ politics (akin to a being with a life of its own).

¹⁴ Toward an effort to articulate something akin to a politics of its oppositional stance against the 70s' counterrevolution and the 80s conservative backlash, the American academic Left of the humanities promulgated defensive forms of identity politics. By deploying these discourses in the study of various arts, the academy sought to legitimate the status of previously ignored groups within the American arts canons. Adapting the 60s activist mantra, "the personal is the political," scholars of American Cultural Studies and its alternatively signifying counterparts (Ethnic, Comparative, Subaltern, and so on) demonstrated through discourse the Left's concern for the condition of non-normative "subjects" within the oppressive field of American social dominance and subjection.

A spread in popularity of deconstruction quickly followed in the 1970s and 80s; though met with resistance within the academy, deconstruction's 'new' philosophical tenor offered a timely theory of identity based upon an intricate relation and negotiation of the other through language and a concomitant decentering of the white, Western male core of subjectivity and knowledge. Gayatri Spivak's translation of Jacques Derrida's *De la grammatologie (Of Grammatology)* (c.1976) serves as perhaps the most memorable academic move toward the cultivation of deconstruction within the American academy's increasingly culture-centric literary and artistic critical landscape. Spivak's translation of Derrida's work broke ground in the newly culture-centric academy of its day, seeming to speak directly to the previous decade's political movements—second wave feminism, Civil Rights, Black Power, the New Left—which were largely based in claims of ideologically-driven social and civil injustices to which particular social groups were subjected. In this seminal work alone, we can see countless links to the 1970s' academic propagation of identity politics as a mode of organizing discourses on particular social groups' historical oppression; beginning from analyses of oppression within American popular media, art and literature predating the 1960s, identity politics—in concert with Spivak's laudatory description of deconstruction—posits a reclaiming and redescription of negatively-marked accounts of group membership. Scholars have noted that such academic innovations of the late-1960s and 1970s are a *response* to social changes and political mobilizations that occurred during the 1960s in America.

The 1980s and 90s saw further adaptations and hybridizations of French poststructuralist thought within the American academy; one of the most noteworthy accounts of revisionist identity politics can be found in Homi Bhabha's 1993 publication, *The Location of Culture*. In Bhabha, the oppressed subject, as much as the oppressor him/ herself, is considered anew as so many different kinds of "hybrids"; therefore, for Bhabha, a radical project of community/ nation is one that is daringly undecidable (again, a Derridian term) for the purpose of suspending the will to knowledge. Through his discussions of literature—using novelist Toni Morrison as an exemplar—Bhabha suggests that the disruptiveness of minority literature lies in its subversion of the rules of discursive nameability/ visibility/ recognition. Rather than "recalling the past as social cause of aesthetic precedent," as in earlier applications of identity politics, this literature "renews the past, refiguring it as a contingent, in-between space that interrupts the performance of the present" (7). In a manner that also resonates with Judith Butler's work during the 1990s, Bhabha's assertion that the "norms" of society/ culture are just as contingent as the oppressed's subject positions encourages a perception of all subject positions as wholly insubstantial.

¹⁵ Along this same vein, my encounter with *Franny and Zooey* will not proceed through an interpretation of character or form; nor will it examine theme or motif, such as the dialogic prevalence of Eastern religion in the novel, or the piece's dialectal tension between the phony and the genuine (i.e., the social formation versus the Glasses).

¹⁶ Here, I am adapting some remarks made by Jacques Ranciere in *The Aesthetic Unconscious* (c.2010; pp.62-65), with respect to a detail-oriented, Freudian method for the interpretation of art. He claims that the "insignificant" details of a work of art, according to this method, stand as a direct mark of "an inarticulate truth whose imprint on the surface of the work undoes the logic of a well-arranged story and a rational composition of elements" (63). For my purposes, I adapt this notion of the figurative/ visible (e.g., representational) detail and align it with the figural/ visual (e.g., the intensive).

¹⁷ One may note my implicit nod to the theory of the Other's face as expressed by Emmanuel Levinas (especially in his *Totality and Infinity*). In the service of theoretical/ comparative precision, I choose to refrain from drawing an explicit distinction between his theory and my own in this chapter: the face, for Levinas, is not thought of or experienced as an aesthetic object—as it is, specifically, in my dealings with Salinger. Rather, for Levinas, the first, unreflective encounter with the face is as the *living presence* of another person; and, therefore, as something experienced socially and ethically.

While my own theorization does sense a social experience in the reader's encounter with Franny, foremost, I take on these faces with their aesthetic/ political function in mind; fundamentally, then, I engage with the face in a manner which is fundamentally distinct from Levinas' conception of its function.

For Levinas, "living presence," implies that the other person (genuinely other than myself) is exposed to me and expresses him or herself simply by being there as an undeniable reality that I cannot reduce to images or ideas in my mind. To be sure, there are echoes of this conception in my own theory. However, due to my specific concerns regarding the larger formal criteria governing the professional association of contemporary literary study (myth/ meaning, realism, mimesis), I can proclaim neither a stark disagreement or concurrence with Levinas' decidedly diverse theorization of the face.

¹⁸ To develop a critical discourse that circumvents a politics confined to the register of inside versus outside (read: tolerant/ intolerant, 'good'/ lacking), I adopt the Deleuzian connotation of "affect," specifically in its relation to his conception of "desire." That is to say, for Deleuze, desire consists of one's involuntary impulses/ affects which have been assembled in a positive relation to (i.e., positively invested in) the social formation. According to Deleuze, then, one's desires are not her own, but are impersonal, unqualified forces of the social formation. Taken in this way, desire, affect and so on, can never be held in relation to lack. This formation thus asserts that the novel's asymmetries cannot denote lack, as so many critics have maintained; for Deleuze, lack only appears at the level of personalized interest because the social formation, in which one has already (involuntarily) invested one's desire, has produced that lack.

¹⁹ In the myopic elements which Salinger offers, we may sense the presence of something like Barthes's concept of the photographic punctum: that is, small details which strike an unexpected, unidentifiable chord with the viewer, naming the difference between a compelling image and a merely well-crafted image (here: between Salinger's prose and the conventional realist's) (Barthes 1982, 43).

²⁰ My privileging of detail (developed by Freud and elaborated/ adapted by Barthes and Ranciere) is generally applied to 'readings' of visual art; the originary end of this exemplary method is to determine the truth which provides the matrix of an artist's creativity (as opposed to the unconscious figural order of art) (Ranciere 2010, 65). However, here, I adapt the exemplary method toward literary analysis, with a Deleuzian twist: rather than seeking for any *truth* through the affective, "pregnant moments" found in these details, my analysis will focus on their intensive (read: affective, impersonally-desiring) implications. This becomes the means through which I illustrate the novel's acute awareness of the unrepresentable (i.e., the affective), demonstrating its maintenance and communication to the reader through hyperbole and excess.

²¹ I am referring to "complexity" here in reference to its application in complexity theory. Complexity theory can most concisely be defined as a set of concepts which function to explain complex phenomenon which cannot be explained by traditional (read: mechanistic, systematic) theories. Complexity theory is a hybrid school of thought, derived from various fields that deal with natural and artificial systems as they are, rather than by simplifying them (or, breaking them down into constituent parts); some integrated fields in complexity theory include ethics, immanent philosophy, psychoanalysis, evolutionary biology, chaos theory and systems theory. It recognizes that complex behavior emerges from a few simple rules, and that all complex systems are networks of many interdependent parts which interact according to those rules.

In this way, as a “central point of complexity,” I am maintaining that Franny stands, not as an isolated incident of “breakdown” or “crisis” amidst an otherwise “sane” supporting cast/ social formation; rather, I see her state as ultimately related to the contexts and affective processes of her production (as college student/ actor/ sister/ genius, and so on). As you will see, then, my approach to reading Franny/ *Franny and Zooey* is a processural relation—at once ethical, ontological, metaphysical. I assert that Franny and *Franny and Zooey* (in all its formal/ existential dissonance) forms a perspective upon the social formation from which she/ it emerges, while also being linked to *other* entities (such as race) which are related, but at a higher level of abstraction.

Thus, from this analysis of Franny, as you will see, I conclusively assert that no entity (e.g., madness, race, religion) is ever absolute, but rather an element of more encompassing frames of reference; and no product (e.g., madness, race, religion) is ever more fundamental than the process of its production (e.g., affective labor).

²² However, one may still be left to wonder: in this vacuous faciality, might Salinger not also be working to shift the identitarian relation back to Franny, creating of her visage a projection of the reader’s face?

²³ One might even go so far as to assert that, in the moment of ‘viewing’ Franny’s expressionless face, the reader may feel as though he/ she is looking into a mirror. The para-consistent logic of Salinger’s piece, therefore (whether described this way or as I have expounded upon it in the body text of this chapter), cannot merely be reduced to a symbolic “refusal” of Franny to the conventions of melodrama, or even expressive, emotional realism. The inculcation of the reader’s own perspective within the work of Salinger’s descriptions, names a much more complex dimension, coexistent with interpretive symbolic engagement: personalized, affective labor.

Chapter 2

²⁴ In this chapter, I will draw from Deleuze and Guattari’s *A Thousand Plateaus* (especially chapter 10, with particular attention paid to pp. 260 – 265); Deleuze’s entire, short works on Hume and Nietzsche (respectively), *Empiricism and Subjectivity* and *Nietzsche and Philosophy*; as well as the chapter on Lewis Carroll in *The Logic of Sense*, also by Gilles Deleuze (see pp. 234 – 238).

²⁵ Here, I must assert the crucial distinction between a *perception* and a Deleuzian “percept”—this is a point that Deleuze himself makes clear in *What Is Philosophy?* (with Felix Guattari. Trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell. New York: Columbia UP, 1994). Perceptions—as I use the term in my sentence—refer to a relation between an object and the referential experience of that object; that is, a perception is the interplay between the human and non-human, a relation between sensation (human) and material (non-human) (166). Perceptions, then, seek (and often believe they find) resemblances, meanings, and so on. Thus, in this formation, perception refers to an interpretive move.

On the other hand, a Deleuzian “percept” refers to a non-human material’s ownership of sensation. Deleuze describes this phenomenon as “this blue that is not a water blue, ‘but a liquid paint blue’”; a percept is “the smile of the oil [paint], the gesture of fired clay, the thrust of metal, the crouch of Romanesque stone, and the ascent of Gothic stone” (166). Percepts are independent of the state of those who experience them (here, the spectator of a painting) (164). These are decidedly non-interpretive phenomena and thus are *not* perceptions.

²⁶ The barely-perceptible, almost infective work of affect, as it is explained by Teresa Brennan, may be understood as operating along the plane of becoming. The Deleuzian ‘plane of becoming’ is also referred to as the ‘plane of consistency’ and the ‘plane of deterritorialization’ in the work of Deleuze and Deleuze and Guattari. This is the abstract realm of the Body without Organs, a non-place that is altogether outside the commonsense world as we know it. The plane of becoming, then, is a state that is deterritorialized in itself—it *is* pure difference, comprised of unformed virtualities (which include affects). The ‘actual’ emerges from this state when desiring machines (such as the abstract machinery of ideology, or the capitalistic steamroller of the contemporary social formation) act upon it.

²⁷ For the sake of clarity, I must insist here that I mean not to propose that race, as such, is an affect. Race, as a concept, is bound to a particular, outside perspective; in this way, race is *difference*, insofar as a [non-black] other might rationalize his/ her distinction from race. Racism, then, may be gleaned as a sort of perverse, perception-level twist of the concept of race. This conception of race produces and perpetuates particular affects (here, I examine *paralysis*), but race itself is not an affect.

Further, in the [non-black] other's judgments, which accompany race conceptualized in this way, transmission takes place. It is in this way that I assert that the *experience* of race (as a mode of 'being different') is affectively-constituted—the experience is molded by affects (paralysis) accompanying race.

²⁸ Before we move forward, I must make clear an important distinction: 'Affects' and 'feelings' are *not* the same. 'Feelings' refer to sensations that register stimuli to the senses; feelings include sensory information, insofar as feelings suppose a unified *interpretation* of that information. The distinction between feelings and affects becomes more clear when we place our emphasis (as I have in this chapter) on the transmission of affect.

When one feels *angry*, for example, one is *feeling* the passage of anger through oneself—this is an interpretive moment; thus, what one feels (interpreted as anger) and what one feels with (i.e., a sensation in relation; an affect) are distinct.

²⁹ *The Flagellants* was first published in French (c.1966), by Editions Christian Bourgeois of Paris (a subsidiary of the large French publisher, Presses de la Cité). It is worth noting that *Les Flagellants* marked the birth of this new publishing house, and as a result, benefited from greater than customary publicity, especially in Paris.

³⁰ Some seminal texts belonging to this aesthetic include Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* (1979); Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* (1982); Ntozake Shange's *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide/ When the Rainbo is Enuf* (1974); and Gayle Jones' *Corregidora* (1975)—to name but a few.

³¹ Interestingly, the only American reviews still available for reading come from *mainstream* print media sources. I discuss these piece in this chapter, including a selection from *The American Scholar* by Roger Ebert; *Publishers Weekly* by Herbert Lottman; *The New York Times Book Review* by Frederic Raphael; and a piece from *The Nation* by Nora Sayre.

³² Before we go any further, here it is crucial that I note one of my primary disagreements with Deleuze—and consequent alliance with Brennan—concerning the differentiation between the terms, 'affect' and 'emotions.' For Deleuze, 'emotions' and 'affects' must be differentiated. In Deleuze's writings, 'emotions' are defined much in the same way that Brennan (and other more recent affect theorists) defines 'feelings'; that is, as biographical, personalized, and so on.

However, in more recent years, as Brennan teaches us in *The Transmission of Affect*, the differentiation between 'emotions' and 'affects' has come to be seen as rather arbitrary; while 'feelings' are still differentiated from affects (i.e., belonging to the realm, but not fulfilling the same function), 'emotions' are not. Brennan writes: "The distinction between affects and feelings comes into its own once the focus is on the transmission of affect," as I explore in this chapter (5). She continues: "But there is no reason to challenge the idea that emotions are basically synonymous with affects (if more an evidently physiological subset)" (5 -6). Also see Brennan, p. 166 – 167, n.6 and 10.

³³ Encouraged by the 1954 Supreme Court desegregation decision, many writers foresaw the end to the separateness and inequality that characterized their lives and informed their art; as a result, many believed that, as they began enjoying the privileges heretofore reserved for whites, their work would also, eventually, come to be associated with the privilege and success of white American art (Baker 71). As the 50s became the 60s, however, black experiences in America became arguably worse and few black writers found themselves treated 'fairly' or 'equally' by publishers or bookstores. In response, the Black Arts Movement defined a full-scale rejection of earlier integrationist strategies. These artists

worked alongside the Black Power activists, relying upon the black American masses (rather than the middle class) to provide their arts' raw material *and* audience. Directing their art exclusively to the black community, writers of the Black Aesthetic were disinterested in collaborating, or assimilating, with white society.

³⁴ Schraufnagel's critical survey of contemporary African American literature, *From Apology to Protest: the Black American Novel* (c.1974) stands as the only scholarly writing on *The Flagellants* predating the 1990s. In his very brief treatment of the novel, (approximately two pages), Schraufnagel pejoratively names *The Flagellants* an example of "accommodationist" black American literature. He defines accommodationism: "[Literature which] concentrates basically on the adjustment an individual makes to function in accordance with the standards of white society" (121).

³⁵ Of the five total, scholarly articles published in peer-reviewed journals on *The Flagellants*, three appeared together in the same journal issue (*MWA Review* 7.1, 1992). Of these, Margaret Reid and Hammet Worthington-Smith revised and/or expanded their original *MWA Review* pieces for publication a second time (thus, the articles on *The Flagellants* totals 5). Worthington-Smith's revised article appeared in *MWA Review* in 1993; and Reid's, in *The Connecticut Review*, 1996.

³⁶ Interestingly (and perhaps troublingly), the only official, published biographical information available on Polite at the time of the 90s scholars' publications included 2 very short articles:

1.) Herbert Lottman's "Authors and Editors" piece, found in *The Publishers Weekly*, which focused exclusively on Polite's involvement in professional dance, American politics, civil rights activism and the praise received for *The Flagellants* by the French. *Publishers Weekly*, June 12, 1967: 20 – 21.

2.) Lauricella's piece, published in *The Buffalo Evening News* just before Polite's second (and even less successful novel), *Sister X and the Victims of Foul Play*. Rather than discussing the novel, Lauricella interviews Polite on her life and work—the result is very similar to Lottman's piece. *The Buffalo Evening News*, Nov. 15, 1975: 7.

³⁷ Brennan's *The Transmission of Affect* features some fascinating discussion of affective "inertia" (as drive turned inward) its ties to psychological depression, as well as its historico-ideological links to the "Deadly Sin," sloth (see especially, pp. 22, 98 – 112 and 192 n.19). It is from Brennan's discussion that I take my cue for 'paralysis' as *The Flagellants'* underlying affective expression.

³⁸ In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari use the term, "involution," to describe an evolution which does *not* occur through descent or filiation (see p. 238). That is, "involution" is an evolution that proceeds by repetition ("It concerns alliances."), but is inherently creative: thus, it is productive of pure difference. For Deleuze, then, creative production (as in literature) and transformation (as in the post-60s aesthetic) becomes a system of *involution* where transversal (or transmitted, as affect is here) movements engage material forces and affects.

³⁹ Further, it is in the narrator's indirect relation of Ideal's being different from her fellow Bottom-dwellers that the reader may begin to perceive the structure and function the novel's affective ideation of race.

⁴⁰ See *A Thousand Plateaus*, pp. 237 – 239.

⁴¹ By this point in the novel, we have encountered the false problem of 'emotion' and 'experience' in Ideal's Black Bottom life enough so as to sense the emergence of the novel's third term: race. This term places itself between the two, irreconcilable points, complicating their relation and changing, if only slightly, their figuration. 'Race' is thus figured as emotion or personal feeling, formulated via the characters' (and reader's) understanding of the present via the past. And while the 'experience' of race

(as a personal feeling) remains mechanistically reactive, this reactive ‘experience’ is driven by ideology, rather than fear.

⁴² Here, I am conceiving race as a production which is closely akin to Deleuze’s conception of the “negative will to power,” as discussed in *Nietzsche and Philosophy*. Evaluation and interpretation, according to Deleuze, are manifestations of the will to power; similarly, I am reading race in *The Flagellants* as a rationalizing, interpretive form of ‘difference,’ bent on lending meaning to one’s personal feelings (of race) and experiences (particularly of ideologically-determined oppression). As differential element of force, the will to power is that which determines the qualities of force (positive or negative), and thus interprets. Likewise, as that which bestows value, the will to power is also that which evaluates—it is the source of meaning and value. The problem of interpretation is “to estimate the quality of force that gives meaning to a given phenomenon, or event, and from that, to measure the relation of forces which are present” (Deleuze 1983, 54).

⁴³ Here, I work to foreground the allegedly autonomous image of thought, conceived as discursive presence (i.e., figurative blackness, a la Jimson). To draw out the complexity of race’s commensurate function (as forceful production of affect) in the text, I labor in the above paragraph to call my reader’s attention to the way in which visible presences are elements which, like the letters of an alphabet, possess value only by dint of the combinations they authorize. That is, combinations with distinct visual and intensive elements, but also sentences and words, spoken or written on the page. At the most basic level, I work here to tease out the para-consistent logic encapsulated within the relation between visible and signified, or discursive, ‘race.’

⁴⁴ In *What is Philosophy?* and *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari explain that affects *cannot* be attributed to a subject or group of subjects. Rather, the subject—when he/ she is captured in prose, for example—is a compound of affects (*What is Philosophy* 164). The subject, thus, is endlessly intersected by affects; he/ she is entrenched in these imperceptible forces inasmuch that they are not directly attributable to any one (corporeal or imperceptible) cause. By extension, as an aspect of immanence, affect cannot be interpreted as immanent to something (as it is with Jimson, for example, to race)—because when immanence *is* interpreted as immanent *to something*, “we can be sure that this Something reintroduces the transcendent” (*What is Philosophy?* 45).

⁴⁵ Here, I draw a parallel between Ideal’s criticism of Jimson’s reflections on race (and being different *via/* because of race) and Gilles Deleuze’s conception of the image of thought. Conceiving thought as independent of psychology, opening beyond the rational realm, Ideal draws the reader’s attention to the inside of Jimson’s thought (not as it appears merely through introspection) as it emerges from its own structural potentialities. As we see in Deleuze’s later works on the image of thought—namely, in his text on Leibniz—here, Ideal seeks to define the medium of Jimson’s thought independently of how it is experienced (i.e., in and through an immediate politicization of race as a rationalizing difference-between), by perceiving race/ thought as the tracing of relations within an abstract, sensory space.

Recalling Deleuze’s later aesthetic theory of thought, and its pursuit of his earlier project of a semiotics of affect (such as we may read in *Difference and Repetition*, for example) Ideal’s critique calls to mind how the destruction of the ‘image of thought’ (which, for Jimson, is constituted by the priority of recognition as the means of thought) and the elements constitutive of its power are immanent to the genesis of real thought. Ideal’s method of critique, then (like Deleuze’s) is necessarily positive in that it presents a selection of elements which collapse the necessities attached to functions of power (consider her references to religiosity, fraternity, oration). (For more on Deleuze’s/ Deleuze & Guattari’s ideas concerning the image of thought/ the inside of thought, see especially: *A Thousand Plateaus*, pp. 374 – 80; *What is Philosophy?* Chapter 3; *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, pp. 103 – 10).

This constitutes a minoritarian narrative method within Polite’s novel; rather than assembling dogma from thought (or vice versa, as the experience of the subject), Polite disengages American life from ‘culture,’ becoming from History, bodies from society and, of course, dogma from thought. In effect (via the aptly named *Ideal*), Polite offers us a radical conceptualization of race (as a mode of ‘being different’) as thought *without* an image; that is difference-in-itself.

⁴⁶ In this way, I perceive *The Flagellants* as forging a new rationality of the obvious and the obscure. Polite's exploration of race's affective production, thus, *could* become the new rationality for the history of material American life (standing in opposition to the histories of 'great' names and events).

Chapter 3

⁴⁷ Here I refer to Antonio Gramsci's definition of cultural hegemony, which would later become an influence on the work of Louis Althusser. That is, hegemony refers to the success of dominant classes' in presenting their delineation of reality/ perception of the world in such a way that these views are taken as 'given'—accepted as common sense—by other classes/ groups. In hegemony, these definitions and views become the general consensus and are believed to be the only acceptable way of understanding reality/ the world. As a result, groups presenting alternative views and definitions are marginalized.

According to Gramsci, there are, on the one hand, dominant classes who seek to contain and incorporate all thought and behavior in the terms and limits that they set (according to their interests). And on the other hand, there are other classes/ groups (dominated or subordinate) who attempt to maintain and champion the validity of their own definitions of reality. Therefore, there is a continuous struggle for dominance between definitions of reality (or ideologies)—those serving the interests of the ruling classes and those held by other groups. Culture, according to this view, is seen as the product of a much more vigorous struggle than is suggested in, for example, Althusser's view of ideology. Cultural domination arises from a complex play of social negotiations, alignments and realignments. For a great discussion and examples of how Gramsci perceives cultural hegemony playing out in history, see: *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, Eds. and Trans., Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith (New York: International Publishers, 1971): 77–80, 82–83.

⁴⁸ This fundamental point has already been made by both Hayden White and Linda Hutcheon. However, in this chapter I append these thinkers' ideas and test them, utilizing Silko's circular conception of time, the novel's hierarchically flattened characters, and its conspiring concept of "sorcery." See, Linda Huntcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism* (New York: Routledge, 1988); and Hayden White, "Historical Text as Literary Artifact," in *The Writing of History: Literary Form and Historical Understanding*. Eds., Robert H. Canary and Henry Kozicki (Madison: Wisconsin UP, 1978): 41 – 62.

⁴⁹ Interestingly, the terms "sorcery" and "sorcerer(s)" do not appear in the novel until page 478—a little past the half-way point of the book. However, as I will explain, the terms' function and influence comes into play within the text's intersecting narratives well before the point of its appearance. To my mind, this point illustrates the abstract and abstracting work of sorcery by way of historical narrative and symbolically-based meaning-making in the name of power, wealth and immortality.

⁵⁰ For a well-known and incisive discussion of history, in terms of position and narrative selection, see Hayden White, "Historical Text as Literary Artifact" in *The Writing of History: Literary Form and Historical Understanding* (Madison: Wisconsin UP, 1978): 41 – 62.

⁵¹ The note on Tucson, appearing on the map, reads: "Home to an assortment of speculators, confidence men, embezzlers, lawyers, judges, police and other criminals, as well as addicts and pushers, since the 1880s and the Apache Wars" (15).

⁵² Indeed, if there are any identifying features to be gleaned from Silko's individual characters, their distinct perversions and debaucheries are all the reader is given to separate/ distinguish among them. And interestingly, it is in this way that the characters' distinct, if not odd, names (i.e., Trigg, The Meat Hook, El Feo, Sterling, and so on) serve to remind the reader—not of characters ethnic associations, but—of their vices and/ or unfortunate circumstances in their lives.

Chapter 4

⁵³ Other readers of *The Human Stain*, and Roth's fiction more generally, align the text's arguably conservative, opposed position to multiculturalism with Philip Roth's own, personal opinions (as opposed to Zuckerman's), including: Bachman, Andrew, "America from the Waist Down," *Tikkun*, (15.6 Nov. 2000), p. 61; Jennifer Glaser, "The Jew in the Canon," *PMLA* (123.5 2008); Kakutani, Michiko, "Confronting the Failures of a Professor Who Passes," *New York Times Book Review* (May 2, 2000); Lorrie Moore, "The Wrath of Athena" *New York Times Book Review* (May 7, 2000).

⁵⁴ Other readers share Moore's sentiments about Delphine, and other characters' depictions, serving as a revelation of Roth's personal prejudices; this has been observed, not only in reference to *The Human Stain*, but in other of Roth's works, as well. These readers all propose that Roth's novels are necessarily tied to his personal life, beliefs, and attitude, leaving Zuckerman (as narrator/ autonomous persona/ literary device) entirely unacknowledged within this schema. Some similar commentaries include: Jonathan Freedman, *Klezmer America*, Columbia UP (2008), especially p. 179; Molly Haskell, "Review of *The Dying Animal*, *New Leader* (84.3 May 2001), p. 38; Judith Shulevitz, "Literary afterlife of a scandal," *The New York Times Book Review* (Sept. 23, 2001), p. 31; Andrew Bachman, "America from the Waist Down," *Tikkun* (15.6 Nov. 2000), p. 61

⁵⁵ On a basic level, multiculturalism seeks to dismantle the (formal and informal) systems of identity subordination that privilege some and marginalize others. Since about the 1970s, its social and secular aims have been directly related to overturning domination by one group over any other (whether in terms of race, ethnicity, values, religion, and so on) in order to create a neutral and accommodating space for human differences. In essence, multiculturalism's aim is utopian, insofar as it presumes to level society, rendering it more just regarding access to resources (in a basic way, multiculturalism is about the distribution of power). Relatedly, in the form of identity politics, multiculturalism overturned the idea of the (white, mostly Protestant) "melting pot" into which all identities were once expected to assimilate, undoing the ideological effects of hierarchizing cultural differences along a spectrum of "progress." Nonetheless, the ideology of multiculturalism is not simply a perspective between cultures in terms of equivalence; that is, between one person situated within a "culture" and another, of a different "culture." Instead, and this approaches the point Webb makes about existentialism, a third moment opens up. This third moment is created by the location of the multicultural perspective (perhaps conflated with cosmopolitanism, urbanity, and/ or nihilism), which in fact has little to do with "culture," practically speaking. This location lies outside any material or economic plane of identity—outside of class-relations and therefore the more materially-based aims of the Civil Rights Movement. As issues of materiality and economy are removed from multiculturalism's definitions of community and social reproduction (and by extension, political control), its possibilities for social integration are restricted to ideological constructs; that is, charged images and impressions. Thus, without recourse to a material politics, this perspective may only reference (as a source of 'Self') highly specific images of identities, rather than the material circumstances of identification (which are imposed from without).

The logic of multiculturalism, then, when read in this way, is deployed through images and expressions of inclusion/ exclusion. However, these expressions mask an ideological unfolding, which occupies the subject away from various existential crises which humanity faces. Webb seems to suggest, and I agree, that *The Human Stain* turns the reader's attention back to these crises by presenting such an excessive set of calamities—which could only occur within multiculturalism's identity politics and presumed neutrality—that one cannot help but notice multiculturalism's (arguably superficial) image-based rule book and question its sources.

⁵⁶ This conflation—of multiculturalism and Civil Rights—reveals Zuckerman's own embeddedness in the multicultural ideology which he so stridently criticizes. As the reader may note when Ernestine is introduced into the novel, the aims of the Civil Rights Movement (in which Coleman's brother, Walter, was very involved) were based in the every economic and material aims that multiculturalism's logic forecloses. That is, apart from merely leveling the social and secular playing field on a purely abstract level—that is, effecting the ways in which groups view themselves and one another—Civil Rights was also originally invested in leveling economic and material playing fields, as well. This is a logic based

in concrete outcomes: for instance, given equivalent education, Civil Rights sought for equal and unbiased access to employment at all income levels—and not merely to education; Civil Rights was also invested in labor unions and the retention of workers' pensions; the opening of historically 'white' neighborhoods to black families; the integration of America's Third-World Left into mainstream politics, and so on. For more on the economic justice sought by Civil Rights activists, see Cynthia Young's *Soul Power: Culture, Radicalism and the Making of a U.S. Third World Left* (Duke UP 2006). The perspective of this material, economic form of justice (taken in combination with multiculturalism's more abstract, social forms of integration) which may open discourses of race relations and 'passing' to humanity's existential problems.

⁵⁷ In my conception of these "moments," which force Zuckerman finally to ponder his subject, responds to and engages—without occupying in any orthodox manner—the Deleuzian model of event (which stretches the past into the future, but elides the present), and Alain Badiou's model (in which the event forces a shift in the ethical subject's mode of inhabiting an ongoing present). For a comparison, see, for instance: Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, Columbia UP (1990), pp. 40 – 41; and, Badiou, *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*, Verso (2000), pp. 40 – 57. In my version, a situation occurs—giving rise to a moment—which takes shape as an event as it is given narrative form; this occurs in the narrative present through an inner-narrative transmission of affect, out of which both the past and present are refracted.

⁵⁸ As discussed by Stacy Patton in her piece in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* ("Who's Afraid of Black Sexuality?" Dec. 3, 2012), the issue of black sexuality and/ or desire is a topic that one is hard-pressed to find explored in the field of Black Studies—cultural, political, or literary. Patton's point resonated with me, prompting me to revisit a body of critical work that was published on the concept of passing (on both literary and social registers) published around the time of *The Human Stain*. Interestingly, and apparently in spite of themes such as love, marriage, and family which pervade the genre, scholarship on this literature does not take up topics such of black sexuality and/ or desire, as such; still more compelling, and recalling Patton's observations, social and political theorizations of the concept do not venture into these territories, either. The body of scholarship I am specifically referring to includes the following texts: Kimberle Crenshaw, et al eds. *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings That Formed the Movement* NYUP (1995); Henry Louis Gates, *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African American Literary Criticism*, Oxford UP (1988); Gates' "The Passing of Anatole Broyard" in *Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Black Man*, Random (1997), pp. 180 – 214; Amy Hungerford, *The Holocaust of Texts*, Chicago UP (2003) pp. 141 – 146; Matthew Frye Jacobsen, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race*, Harvard UP (1998); Priscilla Ramsey, "A Study of Identity in 'Passing' Novels of the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries," *Studies in Black Literature* 7.1 (1976) pp. 1 – 8; Catherine Rottenberg, "Passing: Race, Identification, and Desire," *Criticism* 45.4 (Fall 2003), pp. 435 – 452; John Sheehy, "The Mirror and the Veil: The Passing Novel and the Quest for American Racial Identity," *African American Review* 33.3 (1999), pp. 401 – 415; Werner Sollors, *Beyond Ethnicity: Consent and Descent in American Culture*, Oxford UP (1999); Sollors' *Neither Black nor White yet Both: Thematic Explorations of Interracial Literature*, Harvard UP (1999);

⁵⁹ Interestingly, Zuckerman relates Ernestine's perspective on Steena only as relevant to the story of Coleman's life in terms of "how gracious Coleman's mother had been to the girl" the one time she visited the family; and Iris, only in terms of how Coleman's marrying her meant that their mother "would never be mother-in-law to her daughter-in-law or grandmother to her grandchildren" (318). Ernestine does perceive solely in terms of how they relate to the character of their mother, drawing on and apparently exploiting her generosity and love for Coleman.

⁶⁰ Ernestine somberly intones: "He could cut himself away from us, but not from his feelings." Ernestine discusses with Zuckerman a series of phone calls that took place between she and Coleman over the last fifty years when he was estranged from their family. Interestingly, this series of calls appears nowhere in Zuckerman's reconstruction of Coleman's life, which appears much earlier in the novel. Ernestine describes occasions on which she telephoned Coleman to give him "the news"—i.e.,

various births, deaths and marriages in the family; and she claims that Coleman would call her, as well, particularly when he and Iris began having children (see pp. 319 – 320). During these calls, Ernestine relates that Coleman would express concern about the children’s skin color, worried that they might be darker than he or Iris.

These phone calls are very interesting for how they amplify the sentimental tale that Ernestine offers about she and Coleman’s brokenhearted mother and the sibling rivalry between Walter and Coleman. These phone calls bespeak, not only Coleman’s leaving behind a “rich and knowable” (as Franco describes it) identity, but also his guilt for doing so. While Ernestine notes that she and Coleman were always careful about where and when they spoke on the phone, her details here nevertheless reveal that he was interested to know about the day to day occurrences of his ‘past’ life. As nothing of this is mentioned in Zuckerman’s earlier narration, the reader is left to question the reliability of Zuckerman’s unsentimental tale.

⁶¹ Ernestine alludes to a brand of sibling rivalry that has existed between Walter and Coleman since Coleman’s childhood (see esp. pp.319, 321, 326 – 327). The cause of the rivalry, however, is unknown; Ernestine states that Walter simply never liked Coleman. She mentions that her late husband had reasoned that Water was jealous of Coleman being their mother’s favorite son.

⁶² Interestingly, at the outset of the 1970s, Coleman Silk would have been about in his late thirties, establishing his identity in academia—as a boldly ambitious, new Jewish professor of classics (and prospective dean) at Athena College.

⁶³ In her wonderfully insightful book, *Relating Narratives: Storytelling and Selfhood*, Routledge (2000) Adriana Cavarero calls forth the story of Oedipus in her examination of biography. This particularly interests me as *The Human Stain* is prefaced by a chilling quotation from Sophocles’ *Oedipus the King*:

“Oedipus: What is the rite
Of purification? How shall it be done?
“Creon: By banishing a man, or expiation
Of blood by blood...”

Cavarero describes Oedipus as “ignorant of the factual truth of his birth”—a fact that makes him “able to believe himself to become another; but he was never able to become another” (11). With regard to the “factual truth” of Oedipus’ death, Cavarero refers to the material circumstances which constitute the fundamental link between birth and individual identity; in the case of Oedipus, this is played out through his tragic denial of Jocasta as his mother and the consequences prophetically attached to the denied, material fact: Oedipus can be no other man than he who dies a horrible death after slaying his father and marrying his mother—no level of banishment can actually purify him.

⁶⁴ Here, I adopt the term “perturbation” in the Deleuzian sense. That is, “disturbances in the atmosphere that constitute situations whose shape can only be forged by continuous reaction and transversal movement, releasing subjects from the normativity of intuition” (Berlant 6). Perturbation, in the work of Deleuze, stands for the interjection of a situation or set of circumstances in which the subject is disallowed his comfortable, habitual modes of perception and self-regulation. See especially, Deleuze and Guattari’s *Kafka: Toward A Minor Literature*, Minnesota UP (1986) p. 61. See also “The Three Women in Masoch,” in Deleuze’s *Masochism: An Interpretation of Coldness and Cruelty*, George Braziller (1971), especially pp. 42, 46 – 47

⁶⁵ And interestingly, Coleman effects a similar perturbation in Delphine herself. His disinterest stands as the reality which confronts her image. Delphine’s image is itself an attribute of desire; that is, it relied upon another’s recognition in order to function. She works to regulate, or guarantee, this functioning through her physical self-presentation (i.e., her stylishness, her air of sophistication, and discerning/“uppity” attitude). However, the reality of Coleman’s disinterest (i.e., his refusal to participate in the regulation she deploys) dismantles this system. In this way, Delphine’s image becomes just as destructive as it is creative, her only (flimsy) basis and also her undoing.

⁶⁶ Interestingly, as I conceive it, the realization of Coleman's ethnic identity rouses in Steena a state of frustrated perturbation not at all unlike that which Delphine Roux inspires in Coleman.

⁶⁷ What is perhaps most interesting, however, is the fact that no critics or scholars of Roth's have taken up the subject of Ellie Magee, whether to explore her as an essentially imaginary figure (and what this fact might imply, in terms of Zuckerman's understanding and perception of Coleman, black or Jewish) or in terms of her function; that is, the work that this precarious figure does within the novel.

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