

**UNEASY FELLOWSHIPS:
THE MODERN SENTIMENTAL SUBJECT AND HER AFFECTIVE SPHERES**

by

Clare Marie Sigrist

B.A. in English, Pennsylvania State University, 2003

M.A. in English Literature, The University of Montana, 2009

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Dietrich School of Arts and Sciences in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

University of Pittsburgh

2020

UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH

DIETRICH SCHOOL OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

This dissertation was presented

by

Clare Marie Sigrist

It was defended on

May 12, 2020

and approved by

Nancy Glazener, Professor, English Department

Shalini Puri, Professor, English Department

Giuseppina Mecchia, Associate Professor, French and Italian Department

Dissertation Director: Jonathan Arac, Andrew W. Mellon Professor, English Department

Copyright © by Clare Marie Sigrist

2020

**UNEASY FELLOWSHIPS:
THE MODERN SENTIMENTAL SUBJECT AND HER AFFECTIVE SPHERES**

Clare Marie Sigrist, PhD

University of Pittsburgh, 2020

Uneasy Fellowships comprehends the novel through Émile Durkheim’s insight that “any communion of consciousness, in whatever form it takes place, enhances social vitality.” Reaching back to the complex eighteenth-century intellectual history of sentimental writing and theory, and closely analyzing key texts of the Harlem Renaissance and then recent religious fiction, *Uneasy Fellowships* offers a history of sentimental form that ponders its creative vision.

Early sentimentalism summoned a certain reading practice—shaping readers who are moved by emotion, but not caught in its thrall. Harlem Renaissance novelists, negotiating sentimental inheritance, enacted a renewal that reclaimed this older readerly temperament. The modern sentimental subject emerges from their creative, critical investments. Chapter one explores sentimentalism and affect theory for the different tools they offer this subject. The modern sentimental subject grasps sentimental political storytelling’s power to supply relief, whether financial or social. A quick study, she wields affective agency with skill. This agency does not necessarily grant her the comfort of self-assuredness, nor lead to self-awareness of the kind sentimental reflection imparts.

Chapter two applies these distinctions to Nella Larsen’s *Quicksand*, reading its protagonist’s submission as a triumphant move to self-actualize—a brave choice to respond to sentimental feeling. Chapter three analyzes the entwined relation between the emotional and the economic by exploring Claude McKay’s allusion to the Caribbean coffee crisis of the 1830s in

Banana Bottom. By privileging Stoic principles in his protagonist's journey towards self-mastery, McKay shows how introspection assures her voyage into community.

Chapter four discusses Marilynne Robinson's novels in relation to her essays. By imagining what it might mean to be a Good Samaritan or embrace a Prodigal Son, her writing works to replace a broken parable of American exceptionalism. Through visionary tableau, Robinson offers a more expansive Christian ethic many in her audience find rousing, especially as an alternative to evangelical conservatism.

By reframing the sentimental, *Uneasy Fellowships* opens up new perspectives on old antagonisms. Proposing a more dialogic than oppositional view, it follows a literary current through intellectual history: sentimentalism arose in the British eighteenth century along with the novel, an artform that achieves fully dialogic presence.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE	ix
1.0 INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 THE SENTIMENTAL IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY	8
1.2 CHAPTER OUTLINE	13
2.0 ANATOMY OF A JOINT, OR HOW TO DOVETAIL THE SENTIMENTAL AND THE AFFECTIVE	16
2.1 THE MODERN SENTIMENTAL SUBJECT	28
2.2 THE LANGUAGE OF FEELING FROM MORAL SENSE THEORY TO THEORIES OF AFFECT	34
2.2.1 SENTIMENT	34
2.2.2 AFFECT	40
3.0 HUMANIZING AFFECTIVE AGENCY: <i>QUICKSAND</i>'S INCITATION TO REIMAGINE SENTIMENTAL POWER	56
3.1 RESISTING BIOGRAPHICAL CRITICISM	64
3.2 LOCATING <i>QUICKSAND</i>'S HISTORICAL AND RHETORICAL CONTEXT	70
3.3 “ON THE SHIFTING QUICKSANDS OF SENSIBILITY”: THE EDUCATED MIND OF HELGA CRANE	83
3.4 “ONE SYMPATHETIC TEACHER”: HELGA CRANE AS DISHEARTENED AID WORKER . 87	
3.5 “YOU’RE A LADY”: HELGA’S RESPONSE TO THE POLITICS OF RESPECTABILITY	89
3.6 CHARITY BEGINS AT HOME: WRITING BACK TO HARRIET BEECHER STOWE	96

3.7 RAISING HELGA’S SENTIMENTAL APPEAL: THE ADVOCACY OF MRS. HAYES-RORE	101
3.8 “SHE WAS THANKFUL FOR THE BARBARIC BRACELETS”: PATRON AS PRIMITIVIST	106
3.9 HELGA CRANE, HEROINE OF HER OWN PLOT.....	112
3.10 IMAGINING PROTEST FROM THE OTHER SIDE OF THE FENCE	118
4.0 CLAUDE MCKAY’S CREATIVE REJOINER TO ADAM SMITH: READING	
THE SENTIMENTAL HISTORIES IN <i>BANANA BOTTOM</i>	126
4.1 SYSTEMIC SENTIMENTALISM: THE COFFEE SCANDAL.....	136
4.2 THE ADAM SMITH PROBLEM.....	140
4.3 MCKAY’S CREATIVE REJOINER	144
4.4 SENTIMENT AND KINSHIP: THE CLAN SOLIDARITY OF THE ADAIRS	160
4.5 RE-PRESENTING RAPE	167
4.6 THE PATRONAGE OF PRISCILLA CRAIG.....	181
4.7 THE NOVEL’S FINAL VALUATION OF LEARNING AND ART	198
5.0 “TO SEE FEELINGLY”: TABLEAU IN MARILYNNE ROBINSON’S GILEAD	
NOVELS	210
5.1 ENCOUNTERING THE STRANGER IN <i>LILA</i>	240
5.2 GLORY’S GAZE: SENTIMENTAL TABLEAU IN <i>HOME</i>	256
5.3 THE LONG TIMELINE OF SYMPATHETIC RESPONSE, OR THE NEED FOR MANY	
RETELLINGS OF AN EVENT	284
6.0 CONCLUSION: SOLITUDE, THE SELF AND COMMUNITY	306
7.0 EPILOGUE	317
APPENDIX A CRITICAL ISSUES REGARDING <i>QUICKSAND</i>	322

BIBLIOGRAPHY..... 327

PREFACE

“Any communion of consciousness, in whatever form it takes place, enhances social vitality.”

—Émile Durkheim, *The Division of Labor in Society* (1893)¹

I begin this dissertation with a sentence from French sociologist Émile Durkheim on the forms which social solidarity assumes in modern societies. Opening in this way may seem discordant with the times. On Memorial Day of 2020, the murder of a black man by a white police officer pushed American governance to an inflection point—again. I am writing on the twelfth day of protests, both peaceful and violent, over the recent deaths of three African Americans: Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and George Floyd. “[H]aving spread to well over 650 cities and towns, across all 50 states,” these protests represent “the broadest in U.S. history” (Knowles, et al.). At a time when people are rising up against police brutality to challenge systemic racism, what might it mean to think with a sociologist who measured crime to gauge public morality? In viewing criminal acts form a force field of fellow feeling across the United States, I envision my subject afresh. This moment has cut inroads into my perspective on fellowship—a perspective long in the making.

In my lifetime, I recall Rodney King and the Los Angeles Riots of 1992. More recently, I remember Michael Brown and the Ferguson Unrest of 2014. Soon I will be remembering George Floyd and the Protests of 2020. George Floyd was a forty-six-year-old son, brother, and father who moved north to Minneapolis seeking a better life. Among friends back in Houston, he was known

¹ Translation from Lauren Collins.

as Big Floyd, the gentle giant. Identified as “a person of peace” by his church, Floyd mentored young men in the Third Ward neighborhood where he grew up. On social media, he implored his brothers to put down their arms: “I don’t care what religion you’re from, man, or where you’re at, man. I love you, and God love you, man. Put them guns down, man. That ain’t what it is, you know. [...] You got parents out here selling plates, man, trying to bury their kids, man. Think about it, man. Love y’all” (Floyd qtd. in Goodman). I know I’m not alone in being moved by these details—details that help me form some vague outline of George Floyd’s life. In Minneapolis, coworkers remember him as someone who always had their backs, someone who regularly showed up when a person was in need.

On May 25, 2020, Floyd faced his own hour of need, exiting Cup Foods, a corner store he regularly frequented. A clerk at the store called 911 reporting that a customer had used a counterfeit bill to purchase cigarettes, adding that the man appeared “drunk” and “not in control of himself.” After some resistance, Floyd was arrested for “passing counterfeit currency” by an officer displaying a gun. Outside the squad car a handcuffed Floyd, complaining of claustrophobia, stiffened and fell to the ground. Officer Derek Chauvin arrived late to the intersection of E. 38th Street and Chicago Avenue. A second attempt to get him in the squad car resulted in a distressed Floyd falling, face down on the ground. From this moment on, a nearby witness captured events on video. Chauvin restrained Floyd by driving his knee into his neck, maintaining substantial pressure there for eight minutes and forty-six seconds. Multiple times during this violent action, Floyd pleaded “please, please, please... I can’t breathe” (“George Floyd”). He cried out for his dead mother. At minute six, Floyd slipped into a non-responsive state. Bystanders pleaded for Chauvin to check Floyd’s pulse. Officer Alexander Kueng complied and could not find one. For minutes, Floyd lie lifeless. Still none of the officers moved to action. An hour later, Hennepin

County Medical Center pronounced Floyd dead. In response, protesters took to the streets. A day later, all four officers were fired. It would be another three days before Derek Chauvin was arrested and charged with third-degree murder and second-degree manslaughter. Five days after Chauvin's initial charge, Minnesota officials increased the charge to second-degree murder. The three other officers involved in the case were also charged. In the midst of a pandemic that had emptied streets, protesters across the country flooded them anew.

To understand the death of George Floyd and the legion like it, we might remember with James Baldwin that "truth" requires "devotion to the human being, his freedom and fulfillment." Dignifying the human being, in these circumstances, does not mean "merely" dignifying "a member of a Society or a Group" ("Everybody's" 15). In invoking George Floyd's story, I want to honor his human truth. Am I raising him to the status of a symbol even as I attempt to see him as a "specific and individualized human being," as American writer Tochi Onyebuchi suggests I do? "Mamie Till knew as early as 1955, that her son had been mutilated into a symbol," submits Onyebuchi. Also a mother, I imagine myself into Mamie Till's shoes. What did it mean to decide on an open casket funeral to bury her only child? "I wanted the world to see what they did to my baby," she cried. What heartrending pain, soul-torturing outrage, indeed, overpowering love went into steeling her motherly resolve for that choice? Even the pale shadow of pain I can imagine feels harrowing.

Two years after Rodney King became a household name, literary critic Hortense Spillers identified "a genocidal circumstance" within "the African-American life-world" (69). I, as a white female scholar, feel my own embedment in this fully American problem. As the cultural critic bell hooks writes, "the real truth, which is a taboo to speak, is that this is a culture that does not love black males, that they are not loved by white men, white women, black women, or girls and boys.

And that especially most black men do not love themselves” (8). This cultural form invites protest, as a literary critic and as an American.

All the authors in this study, Nella Larsen, Claude McKay, and Marilynne Robinson, spin protest into their prose in their own way. Their stories invite readers to think and act in alternate, often countercultural, ways. To be affected as a reader of their work means to recognize how experiences other than one’s own grants social knowledge that over time lead to a reshaping of self-knowledge. In reading such authors, one embarks on a journey, as intimated in the words of William Butler Yeats:

Myself must I remake
Till I am Timon and Lear
Or that William Blake
Who beat upon the wall
Till Truth obeyed his call. (299)

True education, as opposed to a process of crude credentialing, requires administrators, educators, and students alike to develop practices for acknowledging how segregated our social spheres are and to develop practices for reducing such segregation: strategies for hearing one another’s stories and comprehending how these stories intermingle.

Fulfilling such aspirations may mean reclaiming the word *compassion*, which means “to suffer with.” Perhaps the reason *compassion* has fallen into disfavor relates to how separated many Americans have become from the suffering of their fellow Americans, how far many have fallen out of relationship with one other, and how that fall has squashed our desire to accompany our brothers and sisters in their suffering. To draw on Baldwin’s words once more, “I do not mean to be sentimental about suffering—enough is certainly as good as a feast—but people who cannot

suffer can never grow up, can never discover who they are.” A person who suffers, Baldwin submits, “achieves his own authority, and that is unshakable. This is because in order to save his life, he is forced to look beneath appearances, to take nothing for granted, to hear the meaning behind the words” (“Letter”). This act of looking beneath and beyond appearances has long been the staple structure of the sentimental narration, as have suffering and sentimental narration, like Ishmael and Queequeg, long been bosom bedfellows in America literature.

Uneasy Fellowships treats novels as critical vehicles for compassionate intermingling, as critical windows into the felt experience of subjects past and present. It submits that truths of any real importance arise from intermingled experience, on the page, as in life. *Uneasy Fellowships* works to understand the attempts we make to enter into the lives of others by focusing on a select group of creative writers who thematize that act. Implicitly, it is deeply concerned with how publics read and experience the lives of others. Our act of reading the lives of our compatriots intimately structures the fabric of everyday life as it unfolds in every neighborhood, in every city and town across the nation-state. *Uneasy Fellowships* identifies uneasiness with the affective costs of democratic unity, as the attendant emotional state that often accompanies fellowship—because heart work proves hard work, because genuine protest, in necessarily challenging the status quo, breeds widespread discomfort. Only in the afterglow of victories won does a protester like Martin Luther King, Jr. gain popular approval.

“Human passions stop only before a moral power they respect. If all authority of this kind is wanting, the law of the strongest prevails, and latent or active, the state of war is necessarily chronic,” wrote Émile Durkheim nearly half a century after the U. S. Civil War and twenty-five years after the end of Reconstruction. As American protesters presently declare, the United States has yet to eradicate the culture of white supremacy that authorized African enslavement. This

moment elucidates that excruciating reality. Through Durkheim's eyes, I see American society as still at war, albeit covertly. "That [...] anarchy is an unhealthy phenomenon is quite evident," concludes Durkheim, "since it runs counter to the aim of society, which is to suppress, or at least to moderate, war among men, subordinating the law of the strongest to a higher law" (3). Durkheim's appeal for social stability anticipates an ideal form of what Antonio Gramsci would later term *hegemony*. Healthy hegemony, however, proves impossible under unjust conditions. Although indirectly, this project participates in the kind of historical analysis Durkheim and Gramsci initiate. It reads social solidarity through an alternate route—investigating social sentiment in literary form.

While not mainstream, acts that acknowledge white supremacist order, that has long undergirded social order in the United States, seem to be gaining momentum. In higher education, Academics for Black Lives has offered training on understanding anti-Black racism. On Twitter, communications researchers Shardé Davis and Joy Melody Woods founded the hashtag #BlackintheIvory, inviting professionals and graduate students to share painful stories of their experiences of racism and economic exploitation on campuses in academia and medical schools. The Twitter thread has proven to have been as galvanizing as it has been educational.

As a graduate student at the University of Pittsburgh, I was able to spend ten years doing what I love: reading, teaching, and writing about literature. Acknowledging what a privilege that marks in terms of class has been relatively straightforward. Recognizing the privilege I had as a white person in higher education was not something I did consciously, even though I studied texts tagged as racial or about racial equity. The racial consciousness of authors writing within the sentimental tradition from the eighteenth into the nineteenth and through the twentieth centuries

proves complicated. African American literature and American sentimental literature developed as literary traditions concurrently, at times, and undoubtedly cross-pollinated.

The worldview of the sentimental may be best summarized by the line from Durkheim with which I began: “Any communion of consciousness, in whatever form it takes place, enhances social vitality.” I interpret this phrase as underscoring the essential project of literary criticism. *Uneasy Fellowships* highlights the ways in which this literary critical project requires practitioners to remain open and uncoercive in an effort to acquire “consciousness of the presence of society” (Frye 24-25). Literature (and scholarly writing about it) has always developed in intimate discourse with the social. To entertain responses to cultural texts produced by viewpoints other than one’s own requires fortitude on the literary critic’s part—a putting aside of personal investments. Though necessary to democratic community, such work may prove uncomfortable, particularly in a culture in which fellow feeling assumes strong partisan lines. People do not naturally gravitate toward ideologies that differ markedly from their own. To do opens on an arena in which one’s sense of self is open to question. Contrary to popular notions of sentimentality as mostly mawkish artform that endorses one’s own viewpoint, true fellowship delivers neither automatic approval nor the company of like-minded thinking: it requires deep consideration in good faith of the views of people with whom one may fundamentally disagree. Truly robust fellowship ensues from the widespread practice of entertaining others’ views and imaginatively entering their lives to gain a clearer sense on one’s own embedment in collective life.

Writing this dissertation has brought me into community. At the end of this journey finding myself in such company, I feel an abundance of gratitude, as astounding as humbling, for the many individuals who have touched and shaped my life.

The inquiry that guides this dissertation began in the classroom. Jonathan, thank you for your seminar, *Novels: Texts and Theories*, for the sweeping history it imparted, theoretical and practical, and for how it activated the novel as an artform in my imagination. Thank you for following that course with another linked exploration, *Successful Societies*. The sociological import of literature and the conversation across the Humanities you steward at Pitt has enriched my perspective on so many fronts. Thank you especially for your friendship beginning in year one, for sharing such stimulating works-in-progress, for your illuminating marginal commentary on small essays and this big one, and for your consistent human concern for me as a whole person. Thank you for inviting me into the company of Susan Balée who dissertated as a mother herself and whose creative life inspires me. Thank you both for endowing the Carol Kay fellowship that helped me shape myself as a scholar of Claude McKay in my first year away from Pitt. From Kay to McKay feels like a poetic traversal, especially since both writers warmed their own minds by the fire of D. H. Lawrence's majestic work.

Nancy, thank you for so generously sharing your talents and time, for your fierce commitment to my growth as a graduate student, and for remaking the job title DGS into a part only a superhero could play. Failure makes life meaningful, and you saw me through that, bestowing, through your friendship and professional poise, such significance to this journey. When I needed it most, you pushed me to produce nutshell interpretations and you met my efforts to do so with patience, good faith and humor. As a teacher, you are exemplary, inviting your students into genuine conversation, investing in sustained and profound dialogue as a means of flourishing, a practice of light and laughter. Thank you most of all for your elegant way of uniting two forms of activism as a professional: (1) for prismatically illuminating critical theory and transforming it into a chiseled rainbow of a tool that engages the most practical aspects of life and (2) for giving

vibrant testimony in the classroom, literally from year one, on how razor-sharp and pressing theory can be on immediate life. Your ki (chi) will follow me into whatever workplace I enter.

Shalini, thank you for taking my breath away with your sentences and with you epic tour de force course, Caribbean Literature: Gender and Sexuality. I met friends, scholars and artists in that class, transcribed the whole score of our long conversation into one massive Word document, which I will forever treasure as testimony to the politics of literary form, and for the communal experience of articulating such disciplinary truth. For that stirring vision of a more equal world I chase, what drives the pen that writes these sentences, how indebted I am to you!

Giuseppina, you were my guide through French political theory and the source of so many bright encounters on the sidewalks of Squirrel Hill. If I found a home in our English department, I found an equally vibrant home in Cultural Studies. Ronald Judy, thank you for a stimulating couple classes on Gramsci and most of all, the Cultural Studies Common Seminar: Common Sense and the Imagination. I've returned switchback to the questions that course raised many a time over these ten years. To my dear committee, writing in conversation with you has been among the most exhilarating experiences in my life. Thank you for the time you have devoted to this project, the generosity you have exhibited in listening so attentively to me. I will continue to write with your voices in my ear.

My heartfelt thanks to the community of scholars I found at Pitt and U of M, particularly my graduate school classmates, mentors, and friends: Timothy Adams, Dan Barlow and Donna Nguyen, Katie Booth, Kate Brennan, Nathan Heggins Bryant and Hannah Burdette, Lauren Campbell, Amanda Phillips Chapman and Schuyler Chapman, Brad and Racheal Fest, Sarah Hakimzadeh, Carrie Hall, Lauren Rae Hall, Katie Homar, Jennifer Howard, Jess FitzPatrick, Jess Isaac and Justin Sevenker, Molly Nichols and Liam O'Loughlin, Elizabeth Oliphant and Nathan

Kosub, Lisa Schwartz, Aggie Shwayder, Swathi Sreerangarajan, and Hyo Kyung Woo, thank you for the support, friendship, and inspiration over these many years. Special thanks to Jess F., Elizabeth O., and Swathi S. for engaging me and pushing me to think further and better as I produced this work. The privilege of intimate converse with you, your brilliant brains, generous hearts, and playful perspectives is something I could never have imagined. It certainly will take a lifetime to unfurl the exchange we've begun. To all those conversations, held across so many tables around Oakland, Squirrel Hill, Friendship, East Liberty, Regent Square, Shadyside, and Garfield, at bars and cafes or in intimate kitchens, I am unaccountably lucky to have shared tumblers of tea and beer, glasses of wine, and cups of coffee with so many of you.

To my Wooster community, Tatiana Filimonova and Anton Tenser, Rikki Palmer and Bill Morgan, Marion Duval and Adam Mix, Beth Ann Muellner and Martin Lubell, Jim Bonk and Margaret Wee Siang Ng, Dana and Victor Ujor, and April and Harry Gamble, thank you for cheering me on as I dissertated at a distance from my Pitt community, your kind curiosity, unflinching support, and hospitality has enriched our lives.

To my teachers over the years, at Penn State, Sandy Petrulionis, Ian Marshall, and Susan Squier; at the University of Montana, Robert Baker, Richard Drake and Katie Kane and at Pitt, Lynn Clarke, Ronald Judy, Paul Kameen, Jen Lee, Beth Matway, Amy Murray Twyning, Donald Pease, Bill Scott, and Brenda Whitney. How much I owe to all of you. I will take your examples and voices with me everywhere. How I treasure the chance to get to know your work at different stages and as I continue to grasp more deeply what you have spent so much energy imparting to so many over the years. I treasure our correspondences.

To my first conversational partners and models in how to perceive the world, my godparents, uncles and aunts, grandparents, parents, and their friends, especially Tim Tabor, Kay

and Bernie Geishauser, Carol and Ken McGearry, and Sally and Al Yetsko. Thank you for always taking me seriously as a conversational partner and for participating in the joys of discovery. I channel your models in seeing the world anew through Emilio's eyes.

Special thanks to Maryori Sosa, Maeven Barry, Evelyn Marin, Natalia Parra, Mia Eschinger, and Katiasofia Gonzales. Thank you for taking the time out of your busy schedules at the College of Wooster to witness and shape Emilio's evolution and take care of him while I wrote upstairs.

To my parents, Mary Ann and Tom, who have since I was a child met my intrigue and caught my excitement. How lucky I am to enter into such quick communion with you, to be able to send a passage from Dreiser, *Hurstwood* before the safe, and find you are as taken with its power as I am. Mom and Dad, you have contributed mightily to the shape of my mind, widened the perspectives my eyes, ears, and heart have taken in, and taught me to discern the cadence of a sentence, to follow those cadences into conversation as they meet others, steadily, discordantly, and joyously. Thank you for sharing everything with me, your time, love, talent, friends, and experiences. I learned the meaning of literary exchange in our exchanges across the dinner table. I did not need to read Andrew Solomon's *Far from the Tree* to grasp the wisdom it contains: the experience of difference within families is universal. To my sisters Colleen, Christina, and Monica, to the expansive difference each of you has brought into my life and continues to bring into it, I love you dearly.

To Hernán, my best friend and co-producer in all things vital, your creative spirit and literary imagination nourish me on a daily basis. Without you, this dissertation would not be. It happened when you and Emilio took picnics in the park, played on the playgrounds, and went for long afternoon wanders, giving me the space I needed to find the thread of inquiry I follow through

these pages. This work would not feel nearly as meaningful without my witnessing you, your parallel creation of relationship, unfolding all the time around me, a beauty to witness and a source of delight buoying me onward and upward. You sustain me.

To our wondrous child, who wills the whole world into animation and wants to find such dialogue in it. I follow your asking “What they say? What she says? What he says?” everywhere. In every storybook we open, I discover rhythm and action anew with you. Through your ears and by your side I meet resonant sound and listen afresh to the meaning-making capacity of language. Emilio, I want a lifetime of dialogue with you, in which I swear to stay forever your silly goose.

To the writers I studied, I hope I have listened well to you, putting aside some of my own self so as not to get in the way of knowing your art, your person, and your life. Studying your lives has taught me that your days do not determine the beauty you have produced. It has been an honor to witness how you surpass all in crafting for the world’s pleasure and instruction what you have.

Finally, I dedicate the victory of earning this degree, of producing this dissertation to my beloved uncles, in whose home I always found an oasis of conversation and culture, a model of love’s beauty, and a reserve of endless support. Uncle Owen, you told me about what hung on the walls of your family’s homestead in Jamaica and you cared for me when I needed it, helping me retain my grip on academic life, much as you did, at one point. Uncle Tommy, how fearless you have loved in life and just as courageously shared your loves with us. You mailed me letters, tucked in clippings from *The New Yorker*, stray stories and articles you liked and wanted to share. You told me more than once where my talents lie. My dear Uncle O, our first conversation, I must have been thirteen, was about literature. You knew every novel I mentioned and so many more. Thank you for giving me your copy of *Kindred*. But conversation with you was always the real

gift. You taught me that any sort of meaningful change, if it is to happen at all, happens through relationship. Only reach out! So fiercely will I remember you.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

“I would say, for the moment, that community, at least community larger than the immediate family, consists very largely of imaginative love for people we do not know or whom we know very slightly. This thesis may be influenced by the fact that I have spent literal years of my life lovingly absorbed in the thoughts and perceptions of—who knows it better than I?—people who do not exist. And, just as writers are engrossed in the making of them, readers are profoundly moved and also influenced by the nonexistent, that great clan whose numbers increase prodigiously with every publishing season. I think fiction may be, whatever else, an exercise in the capacity for imaginative love, or sympathy, or identification.”

—Marilynne Robinson, “Imagination and Community,” in *When I Was a Child I Read Books* (21)

Periodization serves a useful purpose for understanding literary history, hiring professors, and organizing anthologies. As Ted Underwood points out, dispensing with such categories as the Romantic and the Victorian would be about as foolhardy as throwing out the twenty-four-hour division of the day (161). Dividing a subject into fields should facilitate, not preclude, examination of a movement’s impact across time. Although closely associated with the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century “culture of sentiment,” sentimentalism exceeds the traditional periods and genres in which most critics place it. A highly contested term within philosophical and literary scholarship, the sentimental originally carried a positive meaning, signifying the labor a person expended in cultivating emotional sensitivity and responsiveness to the world. The term quickly acquired a negative connotation of false or superficial emotion, so much so that one could claim that nearly since its inception in the mid-eighteenth century, the sentimental has brought the validity of certain emotional appeals under question.²

² According to the *Oxford English Dictionary* (hereafter *OED*), the first sense of *sentimental* carried a “favorable” connotation: “Of persons, their dispositions and actions: Characterized by sentiment. Originally

As early as 1855 in the American context, writers were expressing frustration over the popularity of the sentimental, as demonstrated by Nathaniel Hawthorne's often-cited rebuke of that "damned mob of scribbling women."³ With the twentieth century, charges against sentimentality acquired a particular vigor, first within the modernist movement and then again among mid-twentieth century African American writers. Amid these many objections, sentimental form yet persisted and continues to be a part of the social and literary scene. This study examines novels, typically classified as naturalist or realist, that engage the sentimental as a positive project while, at the same time, nodding to the history of grievance against many of its iterations.⁴ To use British cultural critic Raymond Williams's terms, we might say the sentimental persists as a residual structure within dominant culture, where predominantly realist forms "reach back" to older "meanings and values" (123).⁵ Residual cultural elements such as this carry "significance

in favorable sense: Characterized by or exhibiting refined and elevated feeling. In later use: Addicted to indulgence in superficial emotion; apt to be swayed by sentiment" ("Sentimental" def. 1.a).

³ Hawthorne had writers like Maria Susanna Cummins and Harriet Beecher Stowe when he penned this rebuke in a letter to his editor.

⁴ To take but one example, in the last few decades critics have begun to identify sentimental elements in *Moby-Dick*. In "Let's Get Lost" (1996) Jane Tompkins details her sentimental reading encounter with *Moby-Dick* and *Beloved*, two texts that escape classification as sentimental fiction but do engage the genre on their own terms. Also see Tara Penry's reading of the sentimental in *Moby-Dick* (collected in *Sentimental Men*). Kyla Schuller describes Melville as "explor[ing] deeply affective relationships," while Elizabeth Schultz contends that behind the masculine culture of whaling lies a "sentimental subtext [that] works to reinforce and expand its nineteenth-century reader's awareness of the gender-structured domestic sphere as the locus simultaneously of anguish and of the tenderness that anguish calls up." Finally, Debra Rosenthal compares *Moby-Dick* to *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, claiming that it also "endorses a model of manhood and masculinity that values family life and the restoring of a son to his father's side" (144).

⁵ For Raymond Williams, a residual cultural form comprises "certain experiences, meanings, and values which cannot be expressed or substantially verified in terms of the dominant culture" but are "nonetheless lived and practiced on the basis of. . . some previous social and cultural institution or formation" (122). Williams also coins the idea of emergent cultural practices, "radically different" from the residual, "the coming to consciousness [...] the (often uneven) emergence of elements of a new cultural formation" (124).

Though the tradition of reading sentimentalism as the province of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century studies has begun to fall away, the pressures of periodizing it still lead many critics to make statements such as the following: "Modernism, the twentieth-century literary movement following realism, put the nail in the coffin of sentimentalism." (Noble 180).

because they represent areas of human experience, aspiration, and achievement which the dominant culture neglects, undervalues, opposes, represses, or even cannot recognize” (124). As expressed in twentieth- and early twenty-first century cultural forms, the sentimental alternately takes up all these roles, working as a medium of representation, an aspirational marker, and a reminder of past achievements as well as foibles.

To study sentimentalism across this expanse of time requires careful linguistic bookkeeping, primarily because our language for emotion has shifted through the centuries. Some concepts have been forgotten while others have altered in meaning. Eighteenth-century forms of sentiment and sympathy operate under paradigms that escape twentieth- and twenty-first century understandings of emotion as personal with depth and interiority. Common usage today understands *empathy* as an improvement on an older form of sympathy, which now carries a negative association with pity and condescension. In the eighteenth-century landscape, however, pity and condescension were understood in a more positive light. Sympathy, understood as “fellow feeling,” occurred putatively among equals, while compassion, like pity, implied noblesse oblige. The range of emotion at play in eighteenth-century sentimental exchanges was largely limited to *sentiment*. Early sentimental exchanges did not involve an individual’s private feelings nor summon the kind of identity-defining passions that the modern era began to associate with them.

In contrast to *passion*, *sentiment* designates “[w]hat one feels with regard to something; mental attitude (of approval or disapproval, etc.); an opinion or view as to what is right or agreeable” (“Sentiment” def. 6a). Starting with the 1950s, *sentiment* experienced a drop in common usage. Its diminished standing in common use may signal an important shift in popular understandings of sympathy. Earlier periods understood sympathy as a protracted action rather

than a chance occurrence: to sympathize with another involved one's conscious approbation.⁶ Throughout this study, I use sympathy, rather than the current more commonly used term of *empathy*, to evoke this eighteenth-century meaning—a meaning that strongly depends on sentiment. I follow Bence Nanay who distinguishes between what the eighteenth-century moral sense philosopher Adam Smith described as sympathy and “[w]hat contemporary philosophers of mind mean by simulation or empathy.” As Nanay asserts, “Smith’s concept of sympathy, unlike simulation and empathy, does not entail any correspondence between the mental states of the sympathizer and the person she is sympathizing with” (88). “For Smith,” Nanay goes on to clarify, “sympathizing with someone entails imagining oneself in someone else’s *psychological* situation” (92, emphasis original). We remember the sentimental novel as popularizing a sloppier model of identification where the self remains the focus and adopting the emotional state of the person with whom one sympathizes came to be the norm.⁷ I am invested not only in excavating an older paradigm that challenges our foggy memory on this count but also in inviting wider appreciation for recognition of how modern and contemporary writers oppose this dominant model.

⁶ Samuel Fleischacker interprets Smith’s mode of sympathy as a “second-order feeling,” in which the pleasure of human solidarity is real, even if one finds that the cause of that solidarity, such as being together in a hospital, produces no such enjoyment. Fleischacker provides vivid illustration of his point that fellow feeling “is not a mixture of the two feelings, as jam is a mixture of fruit and sugar” (“Sympathy” 301). Here is his illuminating scenario: Imagine walking through a hospital and feeling very much in synch with the suffering of the patients. Now imagine being at a ball while feeling very out of synch with the delight that the other people seem to be having. Worse, imagine being at a ball where you disapprove of the pleasure people are having: Perhaps it is being held right after a catastrophe, and you think people should not be celebrating. Where would you rather be? Experiencing a ball as an outsider to the fun others are having can be sharply painful, and not a few of us will leave a ball like that for a place where people are suffering. Sometimes, we all agree with Ecclesiastes: ‘It is better to go to the house of mourning than to the house of feasting’ (7:2)” (Fleischacker, “Sympathy” 302-303).

⁷ In Nanay’s words, “Imagining being in X’s situation is a form of self-imagining, whereas imagining being X in X’s situation is not” (89). Only the second form pushes a person to “examine how ‘X’s situation’ is to be individuated” because it requires us to “talk about [...] X’s situation” (91).

Contemporary theories of emotion acknowledge how emotion can be at once personal and public. In common and scholarly usage, we are moving away from a highly individualized and interiorized model of a self who possesses emotions to a revamped model of a self that is suffused by public and collective relationships. In this spirit, literary critics Katharine Ann Jensen and Miriam L. Wallace offer that *emotion* “[a]t its root ... implies movement, a crossing between bodies, subjects, locations—or a failed attempt to make that crossing” (1249-50). Taken to be transactional in quality, emotion today signifies our relationality to others and the world. In its sensory processual precursors, which some term *affects*, emotions do not easily reside in one person alone, despite one’s sense of possessing them. For the purposes of making distinctions within sentimentalism, I treat affects, feelings, and emotions on a continuum where affects are the least articulable and most closely biological, and emotions are the most socially constructed and cognitively developed of the three. This designation helps me evoke the philosophical foundations of sentimentalism. Early sentimental thought drew on Stoicism, the Ancient Greek philosophy that approached emotion as a discipline. Stoics believed that cultivating emotions over time fostered the health of the individual and community.⁸ Contemporary sensibilities have largely moved away from this conception and the kind of discipline it implies. In our time, emotions are the immediate and nonnegotiable expression of a person’s authentic self (at the same time, emotions indicate a

⁸ It is important to qualify the degree to which eighteenth-century moral sense philosophers invoked Stoic tenets. Thomas Pfau criticizes Adam Smith for his “decidedly un-Stoic project of an affect-based and strictly ‘imagined’ community” (335). In the last section of the introduction on affect, I will take up this misinterpretation of sentimentalism later in my analysis of Pfau’s former student Vivasvan Soni’s work. For now, let me underscore how a more generous view of Smith’s project would allow for his good-faith attempt to credit the ways moral agency requires socialization—even if the future cultivation of one’s emotions lead one away from strict lockstep compliance with social norms. Pfau misses seeing how Smith’s tempered use of Stoicism helps him to escape its pitfalls into self-centered moral heroism by highlighting the indispensable social aspects of judgment as dialectic.

person's positionality within a given environment). Under such logic, we frequently conceive empathy as an immediate event, not a faculty developed over time.

As a way to signal the productive aspects I identify within the Stoic foundation of eighteenth-century sentimentalism and to mark this perspective as differing from our present moment, I have found it useful to separate affect from emotion. Affect, for my purposes, represents the sensory processual precursors to emotion. In a clinical setting, affect connotes how a person presents him- or herself, such that a person may appear guarded or defensive. Emotion, however, designates what a person may (or may not) be able to identify within him- or herself. As Freud pointed out, a person does not always know how he feels. Affects are impulses and sensations we have yet to fully process in the cognitive domain.⁹ In mass gatherings, affect organizes and fuels certain formations within group politics. Ronald Judy defines group identities of this kind as “constituted in the exchange of experience for affect.” In such a setting, an individual “forgets feelings, recognizing, instead, that affects” not feelings are more immediately “communicable, particularly the hard-core ones of anger, rage, [and] intense pleasure.” This description of affect picks up older formulations of emotion as contagion as well as new ones of affect as transmitted across and between subjects. As Judy suggests, “One can belong with millions of others in an asynchronic moment of consumption of the same affect, the same passion. This is not empathy” (228). Soccer stadiums often produce this kind of cohesion, as do political rallies. For reasons that

⁹ As Thomas Pfau explains, under Stoicism, “[p]assion [...] is not a distinct antagonist of reason but evidence of the latter’s as yet incomplete cultivation. To the extent that passion holds sway over someone’s mind, it points to one’s failure to apprehend and appraise the propositional nature of ‘impressions’ with the requisite care” (*Minding* 336). In explaining this kind of Stoic understanding, Martha Nussbaum writes, “emotions are not simply blind surges of affect” (*Therapy* 369). Emotions are “propositional in nature,” “entail judgments,” and “involve evaluative assessments of existing states of affairs” (Pfau, *Minding* 336; Greiner 2). As Epictetus writes, “it is not things themselves that disturb men, but their judgment about things” (Long and Sedley 418).

will become clear, I sharply distinguish this kind of affective convergence from the fellow feeling which sentimentalism endeavors to achieve, though contemporary culture often makes no such distinction.

This brings me to the trickiest and last terminological distinction between *passion* (or *affect*) and *sympathy*. The best kind of sentimental reader is moved by emotion without remaining in its thrall. The sentimental novel, however, has the reputation for breeding a different kind of reader. The stereotypical sentimental reader responds with *compassion*, literally meaning “to suffer with.” *Compassion* describes “the feeling or emotion, when a person is moved by the suffering or distress of another, and by the desire to relieve it” (def. 2a). *Compassion* shares a root meaning with *passion*, traditionally associated with intense personal attachments, “relating to physical suffering and pain” (def. I.1). Adam Smith employs *passion* to expand the meaning of *sympathy*, when he defines it as “denot[ing] our fellow-feeling with any passion whatever” (I.I, p. 15). In signifying “any strong, controlling, or overpowering emotion, as desire, hate, fear, etc.; an intense feeling or impulse,” *passion* comes close to what I call *affect* in this study (def. II.6.a). Smith knew that for the Stoics passion referred to feelings as yet uncultivated. Downplaying models of direct emotional transfusion, Smith’s *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) attends to the scenarios in which “we cannot bring [a stranger’s] case home to ourselves, scenarios in which we cannot “conceive any thing like the passions which [that stranger’s predicament] excites” (I.I, p. 15). In some cases, the requirements of sympathy surpass our personal reference points. Mindful of these cases, Smith reworks sympathy from the default mode of easy emotional identification to the more exacting task of imaginative identification.¹⁰ In marking this kind of division does sentimental

¹⁰ Though imagining rarely proves sufficient, it is a necessary step toward becoming informed and acting well in the world.

literary form earns its place as a serious mode of relational reflection—a mode that invites readers to partake in the rigorous mental work of imagining their way into another’s situation.

1.1 THE SENTIMENTAL IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

According to Philip Fisher, from 1740 to 1860 the sentimental novel served as “a crucial tactic of politically radical representation throughout western culture” (92). With Fisher, I classify the form as essentially “democratic in that it experiments with the extension of full and complete humanity to classes of figures from whom it has been socially withheld” (99). Since society has yet to extend full human treatment to all, the social aims of the sentimental seem to be as relevant through the twentieth century as any other. Consider John Steinbeck’s story of the Joads’ journey West through the dust storms in search of work. Certainly, *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939) channels the power of the sentimental to humanize the poor and expose the meanest aspects of capitalism. Or consider Alice Walker’s moving portrayal of Celie’s journey out of physical, emotional, and sexual abuse in *The Color Purple* (1982). Walker’s message of female empowerment through self-love draws energy from the sentimental. These critically acclaimed and popular novels have been criticized for their sentimentality. As the underbelly of sentimentalism’s legacy, sentimentality labels a particular kind of cultural response as well as the objects that elicit it. When we encounter a novel, a film, or a song that appears bent on rousing emotion, particularly of a false or superficial sort, we label it sentimental. We do so not only to identify the emotional tone but also to call out injustice. Behind every charge of sentimentality lies the presumption that emotion influences our perception of the world—more specifically, that the emotional states we nurture as a society are deeply connected to the quality of union we attain. Sentimentality designates the critical process

by which false or superficial emotions work to reinforce an equally false or superficial conception of reality. Critiques of sentimentality make a bid for and often later mark moments of cultural consensus—moments in which we label our indulgence in emotional fantasy and moments in which we reach for a more complex understanding of reality.

This sense of sentimentality as that which falls short dominated the twentieth century and remains a present element in this century. In 2013, for example, the cultural critic bell hooks asked about a cinematic “upsurge in sentimental portraits of blackness.” “Why,” she inquired, “is there this obsession at this historical moment with sentimentality?” The sentimental, in this context, summons a long history of oversimplified representations of racial reconciliation. In 2014, social media circulated a photograph of a tearful twelve-year-old black boy hugging a white policeman after a Ferguson protest, a photograph Ta-Nehisi Coates regarded as offering “a specious hope” (10). Finally, in August 2015, Black Lives Matter released a meme that spoke directly to the deep-seated history of sentimental racial relations: “Black lives > white feelings.” Though sentimentality under this social history appears to be a style wielded by whites to ease racial tension, a closer study of the sentimental proves it to be more than this.¹¹

¹¹ hooks has in mind films like *The Help* (2011), *Django Unchained* (2012), *The Butler* (2013), *Twelve Years a Slave* (2013). For the full conversation, see bell hooks and Melissa Harris-Perry, “Black Female Voices: Who Is Listening?” at The New School. 8 November 2013. Web. 12 April 2016. The answer to hooks’ question has a good deal to do with a registered slippage around who controls the narrative of race relations. As Harvard historian Paul Buck perceived in 1937, “the Negro was primarily a device by which a white philosophy of race relations was advanced” (210). Paul H. Buck, *The Road to Reunion, 1865-1900*. (Boston: Little, Brown, 1937).

“The phrase “black lives matter” was born in July of 2013, in a Facebook post by Alicia Garza, called “a love letter to black people.” The post was intended as an affirmation for a community distraught over George Zimmerman’s acquittal in the shooting death of seventeen-year-old Trayvon Martin, in Sanford, Florida.” (Jelani Cobb. “The Matter of Black Lives.” *The New Yorker* (2016 March 14): <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/03/14/where-is-black-lives-matter-headed>). For journalist Collier Meyerson, the message comes down to this: “it’s the responsibility of whites interested in ending racism to sacrifice their comfort, ask questions, and take cues and orders from black people without relying on us to show you and tell you how.”

A broader, more historical view might propose the sentimental as aspirational. When writers like Oscar Wilde or James Baldwin level the charge of sentimentality, they betray a longing as surely as they deliver a critique—a longing for truer expressions of sympathy and fuller forms of fellowship. To charge someone or something with sentimentality is to identify a deficiency as well as set up a standard: in place of cheap gratification, struggle for a deeper understanding; in place of simple portraiture, courage to envision complex reality; and, in place of “excessive and spurious emotion,” openness to feelings that deepen shared humanity. In twentieth and twenty-first century literature, the sentimental works as a stimulus for good art, or at least good thinking, about how to imagine our connection to others.

This dissertation contends that the category of the sentimental occupies both a residual and an emergent place in culture. I propose that the sentimental becomes emergent when writers respond to the social presence of sentimentality as a stimulus and challenge for crafting better methods for imagining our way into the lives of others. Within the twisting history of the sentimental, to borrow Lionel Trilling’s words, “Now and then it is possible to observe the moral life in process of revising itself” (1). Critiques of sentimentality in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, more than in past centuries, serve as a spur in distinguishing between specious forms of unity and more democratic promising forms of community—what I call the difference between affective convergence (in which group members develop similar feelings under similar experiences or situations) and fellow feeling (in which genuine sympathy is realized across differences in experience and situation, namely when those doing the sympathizing do not necessarily share living conditions similar to those with whom they seek to sympathize).¹² Fellow

¹² Because affects can be transmitted, mirroring proves an apt metaphor. While some mirroring promises political effects, my argument holds that it is an insufficient basis for democratic community. While affective convergence can be politically useful, its presence does not assure governmental unity.

feeling disposes one to democratic unity, a form of community which necessitates that individuals grasp their distinctness from one another. Democratic groups unify, not necessarily through shared experience or shared emotion, though likely present to some degree, but through shared understanding—what eighteenth century moral sense philosophers termed a concord of sentiment. Pursuing such distinctions entails engaging in a specific project that clarifies the differences between assembling out of fear or anger and building fellowship out of mutual understanding.

In proposing that the sentimental is invested in marking gradations in our experiences of group togetherness, this study challenges a dominant view held by recent scholarship on American sentimentalism. In a review essay on new studies in American sentimentality, Hildegard Hoeller summarizes eight important studies of American sentimentality produced in the early 2000s as follows:

[S]entimentality emerges from these studies as a central concept in American culture, the very vehicle through which Americans imagined themselves and defined their *identity* as a family, class, race, gender, or nation. Sentimentality is the necessary counterterm to individualism, and—as these studies make abundantly clear—it is at least as vital to America’s cultural history as individualism. (366)

Close examination of the novels in this study has led me to propose a different relationship between sentimentalism and individualism—framed as interdependent in place of oppositional. Rather than viewing *sentimentality* and *individualism* as counterterms, this study offers them as crucial

Democratic community brings many different individuals together and thus requires sympathy: the imaginative bridging of difference wrought at the cognitive level of understanding others’ plights. In a subsequent section of the introduction, I will discuss affect in further detail.

elements in a dialectic that produces fellowship—fellowship based on a concord of sentiment that marks democratic community.¹³

Writers, within the twentieth-century, began engaging the sentimental with increasing complexity, particularly as a project examining how we form community. Some novels in this study fall after the early modernist critique of sentimentality; others fall well after the mid-twentieth century critique voiced by prominent African American authors such as Richard Wright and James Baldwin. None of the novelists in this study is caught up in antagonism with the sentimental; on the other hand, each acknowledges its internal dialectic, while transforming inferior versions of sympathetic identification into worthier ones. These novels look back to sentimentalism's best aspiration while looking forward to instances where that aspiration has gone awry. In doing so, they invite readers to return to an earlier practice when reading a sentimental novel meant exercising greater scrutiny, namely that a reader be moved by emotion without getting caught in its thrall.¹⁴ This study examines a select group of twentieth and twenty-first century authors—Nella Larsen, Claude McKay, and Marilynne Robinson—who engage the sentimental as a form of longing and a discipline that demands rigor. That discipline partly implies reassessing the states of mind we cultivate so that we might develop more constructive unions with one another. In many ways, this project returns these authors to sentimentalism's origins in Scottish moral sense philosophy, perhaps not explicitly but in spirit. Their portraits of sympathetic identification recall older descriptions of the process delineated by Adam Smith in *The Theory of*

¹³ Thomas Jefferson, for example, used this phrase in his discussion of the drafting of the Declaration of rights autobiography: "There being much concord of sentiment on the elements of this instrument, it was liberally framed, and passed with a very general approbation" (103).

¹⁴ In the ending of *Banana Bottom*, Claude McKay presents the ideal sentimental reader as adopting "a receptive and critical mood" (314). For a theoretical discussion of such a reading practice, see Bonnie Latimer's "Reading for the Sentiment: Richardson's Novels."

Moral Sentiments (1759) and Denis Diderot in the *Entretiens sur le Fils naturel* (1757) and the *Discours de la poésie dramatique* (1758). While not sentimental novels themselves, these novels seem to take the sentimental as a topic by thematizing the human capacity for identifying with others; they evaluate sympathy in process, where it works and where it falls short. Attending to the levels of the individual and the community, these novelists seem to be delineating which forms of identification move us either out of or into meaningful connection with one another. Further, these novelists use sentimentality also to make distinctions among forms of solidarity: drawing a line between exercises in identification that foster a community of sentiment, the kind that possesses democratic teeth, and ones that ebb at affective convergence. Despite their differences, Larsen, McKay, and Robinson all write with substantial investments in the political and even spiritual significance of making such distinctions.

1.2 CHAPTER OUTLINE

Chapter one sketches a modern history of sentimentality in an attempt to outline the contours of a modern sentimental subject. It places this new sentimental subject within the twentieth-century literary scene and in relation to contemporary culture. Part of the work of mapping the literary and cultural location of the modern sentimental subject entails identifying certain shifts within the history of emotion. Of necessity, then, this chapter offers a heuristic map, a brief constellation of the etymological range within the language of emotion, from early eighteenth-century moral sense philosophy to contemporary theories of affect. The chapter concludes by pinpointing some of the ways in which sentimental studies and affect theory overlap and offers a way of bringing the two together under a common project.

Chapter two offers a reading of Nella Larsen's *Quicksand* as a protest novel. Larsen captures a tense Jim Crow environment through indirection, namely through her portraiture in psychological polarity. Larsen portrays her protagonist Helga Crane as a character prone to rapid shifts in emotional states. This polarity evokes a certain strain within sentimental history. To analyze *Quicksand*'s engagement with sentimentality, I analyze Helga's habits of mind, especially the mental moves that follow hard on the heels of her various emotional encounters. I identify how and why Helga appears to react to scenes as a stereotypical sentimental reader. At key points in the plot, Helga adopts an ironic perspective to manufacture psychological detachment—a gesture that both exorcises her from certain situations and charges her acts with impulsivity. Despite this *modus operandi*, Larsen's protagonist appears self-possessed, even capable. Her character wields affective agency with skill. This chapter reads nineteenth-century forms of sentimental power as continuing to provide a basis for modern expressions of affective agency.

As a particularly productive foil to *Quicksand*, chapter three presents *Banana Bottom* (1933), Claude McKay's last published novel during his lifetime. If Larsen offers a characterization of the stereotypical sentimental reader, McKay captures its ideal form. In contrast to Larsen's story of descent, McKay tells a story of ascent, closing upon a scene of happiness and prosperity. *Banana Bottom* unfolds the story of Tabitha Plant, a young woman who draws the charitable attention of a minister and his wife. McKay describes Bitá's experience as a pupil under their care and her struggle to gain independence. After showing how Bitá attains a degree of autonomy by practicing Stoic and sentimental forms of reflection, this chapter explores the significance of McKay's turn to Stoicism in a novel so invested in depicting crowd behavior. While *Banana Bottom* dramatizes the powerful vortexes in group gatherings and relationships of patronage, the novel's overall trajectory moves steadily toward securing its protagonist's self-

possession. Presented as a critical means for negotiating the colonial mentalities in her world, self-possession becomes a necessity for Bitá in coping with the structural violence of a social system marked by class and color hierarchies. *Banana Bottom* presents an alternative approach to reflective autonomy that avoids the pitfalls of a purely rationalist model. McKay accomplishes this by developing a complex model of sentimental judgment.

Chapter four considers a more contemporary example. I offer readings of Marilynne Robinson's last two published novels, *Home* and *Lila*, to show how sentimental sympathetic relations can still illuminate our present. Deeply rooted in the American tradition of evangelical protest, Robinson's writing, both her fiction and her essays, advances a sentimental project in social reform. Robinson performs important cultural work at the site of family values in her Gilead trilogy, a series that opens with *Gilead*, continues with *Home*, and ends with *Lila*. Each novel unfolds a nexus of family relations to reveal how human singularity develops within and alongside such relations. In many ways, in keeping with older traditions within sentimentalism, Robinson conceives of community as a larger embodiment of the kind of work that happens within family, as a union meant to protect diverse human expression. "Community," Robinson writes, "at least community larger than the immediate family, consists very largely of imaginative love for people we do not know or whom we know very slightly. [...] I think fiction may be, whatever else, an exercise in the capacity for imaginative love, or sympathy, or identification" (*When* 21). In depicting how rewarding this project can be, Robinson invites us to see the sentimental scene anew. Working within the sentimental literary tradition of tableau, the Gilead novels participate in the sentimental novel's tradition of expanding sympathetic identification and broadening its range for the twenty-first century.

2.0 ANATOMY OF A JOINT, OR HOW TO DOVETAIL THE SENTIMENTAL AND THE AFFECTIVE

[A] sentimentalist is simply one who desires to have the luxury of an emotion without paying for it.

–Oscar Wilde, *De Profundis*, (1905)

Sentimentality, the ostentatious parading of excessive and spurious emotion, is the mark of dishonesty, the inability to feel; the wet eyes of the sentimentalist betray his aversion to experience, his fear of life, his arid heart; and it is always, therefore the signal of secret and violent inhumanity, the mask of cruelty.

–James Baldwin, “Everybody’s Protest Novel,” (1949)

Attacks on sentimentality are not well understood. When unpacked, the subtleties apparent in such attacks reveal important aspects of how the sentimental works, not just as a literary category but also as a social practice. For my purposes, Wilde’s and Baldwin’s charges against sentimentality serve as benchmarks in understanding how the sense of the sentimental changed within the modern and contemporary periods. First, let us consider Wilde’s attack. This dismissive quip, appearing, as it did, in “one of the greatest and most complex love letters ever written,” turns out to mean much more when read in context (Tóibín).¹⁵ Charged with indecency for homosexual activity, Wilde addresses his lover Lord Alfred Douglas in Reading Gaol in early 1897: “As soon as you have to pay for an emotion you will know its quality, and be the better for such knowledge” (100). Incarcerated, Wilde, quite literally, is paying for having been moved by Douglas. In

¹⁵ Colm Tóibín writes of “De Profundis” (written in 1897), “Wilde’s old skill at paradox and phrase making was not there now merely to amuse his audience or mock his betters, but rather to kill his own pain and grief and attempt to communicate passionately and fiercely with his lover. He wrote not as art now, but as desperately serious matter.”

declaring that honest emotion has something to teach the one who experiences it, Wilde claims the authority of experience in the sense that feeling, the faculty of sensory perception, place one in relation to the world. Wilde presents particularly strong feelings not as reason's antagonist but as a critical component in the construction of knowledge. In moving us outside ourselves, emotions hold the potential to evoke alternative perspectives, allowing us the glimpse of something new, a vision with the potential to enlarge our mentality. Under my reading of the sentimental as a mode of relational reflection, where one is moved by emotion without being arrested by it, Wilde appears to be a sentimentalist after all. This counters the dominant modernist understanding of sentimentalism as fundamentally a mode of deception. Writing in 1915, William Butler Yeats captures this estimation of sentimentalism in "Ego Dominus Tuus" when he has Ille tell Hic, "The rhetorician would deceive his neighbours, / The sentimentalist himself; while art / Is but a vision of reality" (50-52). In reclaiming the sentimentalist as one who participates in a more complex process of moral judgment and nears a clearer vision of reality, I am not discounting Yeats's or Wilde's use of sentimentalist to identify an inferior version of this process. Instead, I am working to add to its complexity, first, by retrieving the richness older forms of sentimental judgment offered us; and, second, by showing how Wilde's critique could just as easily be interpreted as an act of fidelity to sentimentalism's original project. Of all the concepts within the history of ideas, the sentimental appears to be, borrowing Geoffrey Hartman's phrase, "strangely blind to its own history."

This leads me to the second of my three points in relation to Wilde. Since the modern era, charges of affective indulgence often mask more sophisticated forms of affective indulgence.¹⁶ Or,

¹⁶ Chapters one and three, respectively, analyze the ways Larsen and Robinson expose the sentimental affective indulgences of the main characters in *Quicksand* and *Home*.

as critic Debra Dean Murphy formulates it, “grandly dismissive critiques of sentimentality are often themselves sentimental”—sentimental in the pejorative sense. As Murphy explains,

Criticizing a work for short-circuiting depth and complexity with a snappy, self-gratifying dismissal can mimic the same affective indulgence it intends to call out. In this age of excess, [...] the sentimental dismissal of sentimentality is one form of a pervasive, aggressive tendency toward fault-finding: the readiness not only to assail the trite, the saccharine, the emotionally self-indulgent but also to relish the attack itself. (Murphy)

In her nonfiction writing, Marilynne Robinson has criticized contemporary culture on this account.¹⁷ Leslie Jamison, a former student of Robinson’s at the Iowa Writers’ Workshop, makes a similar argument in calling the “anti-sentimentality stance” yet another “mode of identity ratification, arrows flying instead of tears flowing” (127). In *Hard-Boiled Sentimentality* (2009), Leonard Cassuto has recently argued that even Ernest Hemingway’s “vaunted anti-sentimentality” turns out to be deeply entangled in the sentimental: “The hard-boiled pose draws its power from lack of affect, from self-conscious, self-defensive emotional detachment from a world of forces. Such a withdrawal amounts to a literal anti-sentimentalism: an opposition to feeling (or ‘sentiment’) that hard-boiled characters assert again and again” (42). In Claudia Roth Pierpont’s analysis, Hemingway’s fiction “served as a kind of dam against an opposing sentimental pressure” but that pressure found a way to break through (85).¹⁸ As a social practice, reactions to sentimentality often fit within a larger cultural impulse: the interplay of cynical and sentimental stances. Though often taken to represent distinct ideological poles, the two impulses share a

¹⁷ For example, in *Death of Adam* Robinson writes, “When a good man or woman stumbles, we say, ‘I knew it all along,’ and when a bad one has a gracious moment, we sneer at the hypocrisy” (78).

¹⁸ Later, on page 27 I discuss the implications of this hydraulic model of emotion.

common pattern of skirting deeper modes of reflective analysis, an issue I explore in the subsequent chapters.¹⁹

My third point in relation to Wilde concerns the impracticality of setting up “true feeling” as the new sentimental standard. According to the critic Michael Bell, many of us still overlook the degree to which modernism advanced “the transformation of sentiment into an implicit criterion of true feeling.” As Bell explains, this

development [...] even now largely escapes recognition whether in the common language of feeling or in the specialist practice of literary criticism. This failure of recognition also has its origin in modernism since, in some cases, the vehemence of the hostility to sentiment, often tinged with snobbery and implicitly gendered, tended to throw the baby of feeling out with the bathwater of sentimentality and projected sentimentalism onto others rather than acknowledging its internal dialectic. (160)

While I agree with Bell that hostility and snobbery have led many to miss sentimentalism’s internal dialectic, I disagree with him about that dialectic’s final object. Where Bell accepts true feeling as the new standard and views modernism as taking “a significant step towards its recognition,” I deem it an impossible one that sends us down a rabbit hole of politically dangerous authentication. (169). Let me offer an analogy by way of explanation.

In a *New York Times* op-ed piece entitled “Our Overrated Inner Self,” Orlando Patterson dismisses as fundamentally misguided studies that reveal the private thoughts of one’s neighbors as bigoted. Instead Patterson encourages us to move our fight against racism off the turf of authenticity and onto the turf of sincerity to a place where outward actions matter more than inward

¹⁹ Coleridge might have been observing a dynamic that parallels the one I am trying to identify in this moment when he wrote about “an almost epicurean selfishness, disguising the same under the soft titles of domestic attachment and contempt for visionary *philosophes*” (Coleridge 1956: 527).

thoughts. Drawing on Lionel Trilling's innovative study *Sincerity and Authenticity* (1971), Patterson claims,

I couldn't care less whether my neighbors and co-workers are authentically sexist, racist or ageist. What matters is that they behave with civility and tolerance, obey the rules of social interaction and are sincere about it. The criteria of sincerity are unambiguous: Will they keep their promises? Will they honor the meanings and understandings we tacitly negotiate? Are their gestures of cordiality offered in conscious good faith?

To a large degree Patterson outlines, though he does not say so, the difference between premodern and modern sensibility of the sentimental. In the modern era we have inherited sentimentalism in caricature due to this confusion between publicly expressed emotion (sincerity), often connected to *sentiment* understood as a public attitude or opinion, and the public exposure of private feelings (authenticity). Though not always connected to the kind of effusiveness we label as *sentimental*, the tenor of such display (in which private feelings find a public stage) carries certain parallels with sentimentality. The modern tendency to take feelings at their fullest and truest in their initial occurrence as raw affect has narrowed our vision of emotion's dynamism. Lost is the Stoic sense that feelings can be schooled, or that an impression of reality is something one first investigates and only later consents to, if indeed reflection leads one to judge an impression as true. Contemporary culture rarely accounts for what eighteenth-century perspective took for granted, namely that "[i]nner life that is entirely individual or private is politically irrelevant" (Kay 27).²⁰

²⁰ A charitable reading of this state of affairs should acknowledge that this is partly due to the good political work done under the feminist slogan "the personal is political." Undoubtedly the complexity here is bigger than I can gesture toward, so for present purposes, this partial division of sincerity on the side of public expression and authenticity on the side of private expression made public will have to do.

To be very clear, this study does not explore sentimentalism as an “implicit criterion of true feeling” because such a criterion diverts sentimental from its democratic heritage.²¹

We can attribute our general ignorance regarding the cultural shift from the paradigm of sincerity to that of authenticity (along with, perhaps, many bad nineteenth-century sentimental novels) for the caricature of sentimentalism that dominates today. Many scholars misconstrue sentimentalism as “the process by which strong feeling leads to moral judgment,” following the cultural trend to designate the sentimental as “a bathetic and hackneyed reliance on feeling” (J. Williams 178-179).²² Defined thus, the sentimental turns into something that most find easy to dismiss. One other example should illustrate the consequences involved in such a dismissal. In *Mourning Happiness* (2010), Vivasvan Soni characterizes what he views as an epochal shift in subjecthood: “The suspicion and even fear of passions characteristic of so much philosophical discourse, which acquires a renewed intensity in the seventeenth century, is almost completely reversed by sentimentalism, paving the way to the constitution of the subject as a principally affective entity, a conception still dominant today” (292). Soni’s summary disregards the nuanced understanding sentimentalism advanced through the concept of a community of feeling, built on the concord of sentiment. Sentimentalism does not unhesitatingly embrace the passions, nor does it promote affective abandon; instead, it consciously works through emotions to form a more complex grasp on reality.²³ Though Soni’s history appears to elide the distinction between sharing

²¹ As Bell correctly sees, “The implicit criterion of true feeling which developed within the tradition of sentiment cannot be fully disentangled from sentimentality in the pejorative sense,” as Michael Bell contends (118). This leads to a political dead end. It also sells the social project of sentimentalism short by interpreting sentimentality as nothing more than artlessness, poor syntax, trite characters, and clumsy plots.

²² Though Jonathan Williams goes on to give a more complex account of sentimentalism, I find his summary of Janet Todd’s account of the “sentimental” here suggestive, even representative, of the dominant interpretation of the sentimental, one I am fighting against.

²³ Soni’s choice to make a strawman of sentimentalism here allows for a complex historical argument about the political importance of reconceiving happiness that on all other accounts I strongly embrace.

a sentiment (as in a thought or an opinion) and sharing a sentimental emotional state, elsewhere he seems to allow for a more generous understanding of sentimental judgment. In a review essay, Soni notes how “‘judgment’ in sentimental theories is so often reflexive rather than reflective: that is to say, reflexively conditioned by the dynamics of affective response rather than properly deliberative” (“A New” 244). The track record of human failing aside, the sentimental project aspires to a fully reflective process of moral judgment. As a serious literary and social project, sentimentalism forwards sympathy not as an unmediated emotive process but as a complex emotional and intellectual exercise that draws an individual into relation with others who do not share a similar situation. In failing to account for this more rigorous process of sympathetic identification which early moral sense philosophers sought to delineate and which novelists like Samuel Richardson sought to inspire, we risk losing depth as well as an important resource in our attempts to forge human connection.²⁴

Baldwin’s charge of sentimentality, like Wilde’s, registers frustration with the caliber of emotion on display in his cultural moment. Baldwin attacks not only the caliber of the emotion but also the scenarios in which that emotion gets played out. In Baldwin’s famous critique, the sentimental short-circuits protest. Though only a century earlier, the sentimental had been perceived as largely compatible with protest aims. In the nineteenth-century, the sentimental novel and the protest novel were unobjectionably one. By the mid-twentieth century, they had become uncomfortable bedfellows. Despite criticizing Wright’s craft in *Native Son* (1940), the 24-year-old Baldwin who wrote “Everybody’s Protest Novel” actually shared Wright’s reservations about sentimentality. Nine years prior to Baldwin’s essay, in March of 1940, Wright wrote that after

²⁴ For an excellent account of older sentimental reading practices, see Bonnie Latimer’s “Reading for the Sentiment: Richardson’s Novels.”

publishing *Uncle Tom's Children* (1938), "I found that I had written a book which even bankers' daughters could read and weep over and feel good about ("How 'Bigger' Was Born" 531). According to Ralph Ellison, Wright "felt, for ideological reasons, that tears were a betrayal of the struggle for freedom" ("Remembering Richard Wright" 675). This sense of sentimentality rules the popular sense of African American literature, but it misses a great deal of the complexity even within Baldwin's position.

Baldwin writes with the moral energy of freedom's struggle in defining sentimentality as "the ostentatious parading of excessive and spurious emotion, [...] the mark of dishonesty, the inability to feel; the wet eyes of the sentimentalist betray his aversion to experience, his fear of life, his arid heart; and it is always, therefore, the signal of secret and violent inhumanity, the mask of cruelty" (12). This is James Baldwin's formidable enumeration of sentimentality's crimes. Lest we get too swept up in their ardor, it seems important to recall with Christopher Diller that "Baldwin dismisses not sentiment per se but 'excessive and spurious emotion' or, paradoxically, the *inability* to feel deeply and sincerely" (488). That Baldwin cared about feeling deeply and sincerely is reflected in how his novels do not turn away from the cathartic power of tears. In important ways, his aesthetic sensibilities parallel, rather than refute, the other text his famous essay singled out for critique. Though Baldwin likely saw himself as dialing back the optimism of Harriet Beecher Stowe's portrait in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), in spirit he hoped for a similar change of heart. Consider how Baldwin's description of being "saved" nears replicating Stowe's concept of sentimental transformation as an epiphany of moral recognition. In "Nothing Personal," his 1964 collaboration with fashion and portrait photographer Richard Avedon, Baldwin writes, "I have always felt that a human being could only be saved by another human being. I am aware that we do not save each other very often. But I am also aware that we save each other some of the

time” (389). Remarking on this very passage, theater critic Hilton Als contends that “it was exactly that kind of *sentiment*—a statement of fact filled with sentiment as opposed to sentimentality—that got on some of the reviewers’ nerves when ‘Nothing Personal’ was published” (emphasis added). This brings me to my first point in relation to Baldwin: rejection of sentimentality does not equate to rejection of sentiment. As the writer who rejected sentimentality, however, Baldwin is not often taken to be invested in sentiment.²⁵

My next point further elaborates this misapprehension of Baldwin’s significance within sentimental history. Along with the derogatory epithet Uncle Tom and pathos-driven Tom shows, “Everybody’s Protest Novel” can be read within a larger constellation of cultural objects across the twentieth century that racialized sentimentality in the popular imagination, causing the sentimental to appear as if it were the sole province of a so-called white imagination.²⁶ This could not be further from the historical record. As Christopher Diller remarks, “literary sentimentalism and *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* itself were primary grounds for interracial engagement during the modernist period” (489). Kenneth Warren explores this history in *Black and White Strangers* (1993), where he makes the distinction between the sentimental as a literary form and

²⁵ In an article discussing the interrelation of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* and *Huckleberry Finn*, Jonathan Arac explains that within American history being on the side of sentiment usually meant being on the side of a more progressive politics. In the years following the Civil War Southerners argued against sentiment. Nostalgic for an older order, writers like Virginian Thomas Nelson Page (b. 1853) successfully worked to frame national unity as “a ‘race problem’ rather than a problem of law or fairness or human rights” (Arac, “Uncle” 93). In *The Old South* (1892), Page writes, “Whatever a sentimental philanthropy may say; whatever a modern and misguided humanitarianism may declare, there underlies the whole matter the indubitable, potent, and mysterious principle of race quality” (313). Page’s framing of race relations reverberates to this day. Most Americans “agree that it is a ‘race problem,’ and that this means that it is a matter of complex feelings rather than of simple justice” (“Uncle” 94). Such a view, however, rather disturbingly complies with Page’s counsel: “Get politics out of it, and the problem will be more than half solved” (343).

²⁶ Historians locate the circulation of Uncle Tom as an epithet as early as 1919 when Rev. George Alexander McGuire, an advocate of Garveyism, used the slur in his speech at the first convention of the Universal Negro Improvement Association (Spingarn).

sentimentality as a political critique. As a literary form, the sentimental pledges allegiance to no one (and can raise sympathy for anyone, even rich white Southerners).²⁷ Nonetheless, as Warren also cogently argues, in the nineteenth and early part of the twentieth century, American sentimentality as a political critique was predominantly on the side of egalitarian ideals, abolitionism, and African American suffrage (*Black* 90-91).²⁸

The novelists in this study treat sentimentality as a universal susceptibility, just as they demonstrate how sentiment works as a universal strategy across literary narratives. Diller also raises another overlooked fact within sentimental history. Four years prior to Baldwin's critique of sentimentality, Ellison had formulated his own critique of sentimentality.²⁹ Later in "Remembering Richard Wright" (1971), however, he would explicitly reclaim sentiment as foundational to the artistic endeavor:

²⁷ As Arac points out, the historian Paul H. Buck identifies how, like Harriet Beecher Stowe, Thomas Nelson Page used sentimentalism to marshal "a forgiving pity" on the side of "the overthrown gentry" (See *The Road to Reunion, 1865-1900* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1937) 210). ("Uncle" 92). In *The Inadvertent Epic*, Leslie Fiedler traces the monstrous sentimentalization of the South in Thomas Dixon's *The Clansman* (1905) (whose cinematic adaptation as *Birth of a Nation* took place in 1915) and Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind* (1936) (whose cinematic adaptation took place in 1939).

²⁸ Warren cites the American historian W. A. Dunning who decried the granting of equal rights to African Americans, attributing it to "the public's following those whose hearts ruled their heads." Dunning called abolitionists such as William Lloyd Garrison, Charles Sumner, Wendell Phillips and Salmon P. Chase "emotionalists" while Madison Grant in the early years of the twentieth-century equated egalitarian ideals with "sentimentalism" (Warren, *Black* 90). In Grant's bigoted treatise *The Passing of the Great Race or the Racial Basis of European History* (1916), he bemoans "a widespread and fatuous belief in the power of environment, as well as of education and opportunity to alter heredity," which he attributes to "the dogma of the brotherhood of man, derived in turn from the loose thinkers of the French Revolution and their American mimics." Grant continues with his classification of such wrongheaded sentiments: "Thus the view that the negro slave was an unfortunate cousin of the white man, deeply tanned by the tropic sun, and denied the blessings of Christianity and civilization, played no small part with the sentimentalists of the Civil War period, and it has taken us fifty years to learn that speaking English, wearing good clothes, and going to school and to church, does not transform a negro into a white man" (14). Warren offers Grant's book as evidence of the widespread view in the post-Reconstruction era that egalitarian ideals meant sentimental ideals (*Black* 90-91).

²⁹ Ellison's first reflections on sentimentality "as a psychological coping mechanism that enables white Americans to live with their ethical schizophrenia." This insight appears across drafts of an article entitled "The Booker T," Ellison's review of a wartime chronicle *All Brave Sailors* (1946) penned by the twentieth-century Stowe-Beecher descendant John Beecher (Diller 487).

[I]n *my* terms, Wright failed to grasp the function of artistically induced catharsis, which suggest that he failed also to understand the Afro-American custom of shouting in church (a form of ritual catharsis), or its power to cleanse the mind and redeem and rededicate the individual to forms of ideal action. Perhaps he failed to understand, or else rejected, those moments of exultation wherein man's vision is quickened by the eloquence of an orchestra, an actor, orator or dancer, or by anyone using the arts of music or speech or symbolic gesture to create within us moments of high consciousness—moments wherein we grasp, in the instant, a knowledge of how transcendent, abysmal and yet affirmative it can be to be human. Yet it is for such moments of inspired communication that the artist lives. [...] I disagreed with his analysis, for tears can induce as well as deter action. (674-675)

The irony is that Baldwin delivers a truly bravura performance of catharsis in “Everybody’s Protest Novel.” The legacy of its eloquence, of its attractively oppositional stance perpetuates our misapprehension of the modern African American writers’ relation to sentimental form. On the one hand, it simply aligns Baldwin with other modernist writers who rejected sentimentality as an affective indulgence. On the other, it pushes us to conceive of emotion under an essentially Freudian, hydraulic mode, making sentimentality into a type of release valve—a literary mode white artists employ to ease racial tensions. This conception of sentimentality understands its dynamic as working on a group, which brings me to my third point: Baldwin counters such a paradigm by investing in the individual, in change occurring on the personal level. The crucial takeaway of his critique remains his correction of scale. Sentiment works at the level of the individual, not the group.

In the words of Dylan Evans, “The hydraulic model envisions emotions as forces that seek discharge by any means necessary” (85). Construed as something that helps us “let off steam,” sentimentality enters the realm of affect. This approach represents a fundamentally erroneous, not to mention demeaning, approach to human community, reducing it to a form of crowd control. Sentiment draws us in a different direction, closer to the ancient Greek tradition of catharsis. According to Martha Nussbaum’s primarily cognitivist understanding, the Greek tradition of catharsis requires an audience to formulate thoughtful judgments. Though that process entails feelings (the classic emotions of pity and fear in Greek tragedy), it more importantly combines the emotional with an intellectual exercise that works to “clarify[y] ...who we are” in the process of arriving at “an appropriate practical perception of our situation” (*Fragility* 391).³⁰ As an experience structured by literary narrative (which was the case even in the theater of Ancient Greece), catharsis “allows us to experience emotions at what Thomas Scheff has called ‘a best aesthetic distance’” (Evans 82). In Evans’s useful gloss, aesthetic distance helps to facilitate constructive change in the viewer:

If we are caught up directly in a powerful emotion, it may be too overwhelming for us to learn from the experience. Conversely, if we are too distant from an emotional event, it will not touch us at all. The function of drama may be to provide us with a context in which emotions may be experienced at a safe distance so that we may learn how to deal with them better in the future” (82).

The concept of aesthetic distance proves central in my effort in distinguishing constructive uses of the sentimental that attain this distance from cases that appear bankrupt in this area. The concept

³⁰ Building on Nussbaum’s definition, Joe Winston usefully glosses catharsis as “more accurately viewed as a process of cognitive illumination through the emotions than [...] purgation or political repression” (189).

of aesthetic distance (and the space it carves out for reflection) also proves useful in understanding the full import of Ellison's move to reclaim catharsis as an experience that offers something more than affective convergence.

2.1 THE MODERN SENTIMENTAL SUBJECT

Insofar as the twentieth-century may be said to have its own sentimental subject, she is written in such a way as to force us into adopting an aesthetic distance from her.³¹ This means we are led to seriously reflect on the literary depiction of her predicament. Put another way, the modern sentimental subject breaks with the stereotypical nineteenth-century sentimental reader. That reader responded to overblown invitations to emotionally identify with characters, turning novels like Susanna Rowson's *Charlotte Temple* (1791), Susan Warner's *The Wide, Wide World* (1850) and Maria Susanna Cummins's *The Lamplighter* (1854) into national bestsellers.³² We tend to view such readers as overly engrossed in a character's pain and excessively immersed in the emotional dynamic of the plot. Most literature aspires to draw its beholder into a certain level of absorption, just as most stories are designed to impart some kind of new awareness or insight. The difference lies largely in the degree. As cultural studies critics have convincingly shown, the continuum between art facilitating escapism from life (vicarious experience) and philosophical reflection upon it (aesthetic experience) depends partly on the reader. But perhaps the larger part

³¹ Though I do not mean to explicitly gender this subject, the choice of a feminine pronoun here does nod to that subject's heavily gendered history.

³² *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was published in serial form from 1851-1852. In 1852, when it was published in book form, it outsold the Bible.

still depends upon the author who controls her art's form—a form that can be crafted either to invite or to block emotional identification.

Nineteenth-century sentimentalism relied on the reader's emotional response to representations of family ties (tenderness) and the presence of distress (suffering). Underlying and amplifying the pathos each stirred was a foundational belief in a universal human predicament as an experience capable of uniting all. In *The Culture of Sentiment* (1992), Shirley Samuels offers this useful account of sentimentality's function in nineteenth-century America: "As a set of cultural practices designed to evoke a certain form of emotional response, usually empathy, in the reader or viewer, sentimentality produces or reproduces spectacles that cross race, class, and gender boundaries" (4-5). Boundary-crossing worked to advance the egalitarian project of the sentimental abolitionists who were intent on demonstrating a human condition universal to the enslaved and the free. Under this logic, race, class, and gender differences were presented as posing little to no obstacle in the sympathetic transaction. Abolitionist writers like Lydia Maria Child and Harriet Beecher Stowe employed sentimentalism's powerful manner of accentuating universal plight to disclose the suffering many endured under slavery.³³ In *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, for example, Eliza the runaway slave touches the heart of an Ohio senator when she stops at his house in her flight North. In Stowe's moving account, Senator Bird cannot turn her or her young child away, even though he had just that day voted to make aiding fugitive slaves illegal. He is so moved because he and his wife had lost a child in infancy, and the experience of standing before a distressed mother, fearful of losing her only son, proves transformative.

³³ While it is true that nineteenth-century sentimental novels in the American worked to stir emotion for underprivileged groups, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* being the most famous example, the truly good effects these works accomplished required them to individualize members of underprivileged groups.

With the success of the abolitionist movement, sentimental representation underwent a transformation: narratives began to move away from the corrective of universalism to consider social circumstance. This development seems like a plausible adjustment in the wake of naturalism—the late nineteenth-century genre of hyper-realism, which documented not only Darwinian themes of survival and decline but also the environment’s impression on human character. Theodore Dreiser’s naturalist masterpiece *Sister Carrie* (1900) represents an important stepping stone to the twentieth-century sentimental subject as well as an important precedent in an author’s critical engagement with sentimentality. Like Dreiser, Nella Larsen mocks and exposes the shallowness of bygone sentimental clichés of the domestic sphere as a haven in her novel *Quicksand* (1928). And like Dreiser, Larsen depicts, through her protagonist, how unrestrained sentimental identification can lead a mind astray.³⁴ In *Home* (2008), Robinson’s characterization of Glory Boughton follows a similar pattern. Channeling a different tradition, McKay accomplishes much the same with his protagonist Bitá Plant in *Banana Bottom* (1933). In identifying a line of critical engagement with the sentimental, this dissertation only begins what I see as a much deeper archeology of sentimental form. In *Questionable Charity*, William Morgan makes a similar proposal when he claims “U.S. literary realism’s critique of naïve sentimentalism [as] an enabling fiction,” pointing out that “although works of realism consistently construct

³⁴ Other parallels between *Sister Carrie* and the novels of this study await my attention in future developments. For now, let me offer that Dreiser’s protagonist Caroline Meeber, like Larsen’s protagonist Helga Crane, is distinguished by a Faustian desire for more, which she indulges with active fantasy; like Helga, this fantasy serves Carrie as a coping mechanism that allows her both to manage her feelings of inferiority and to navigate the landscape of urban anonymity. Like Dreiser, Larsen manages to impart qualities to her protagonist that balances on a hair both her singular humanity and her evocative status as “a representative anecdote,” in the Burkean sense.

sentimentalism as naïve, they also consistently locate in sentimentalism ‘a continuing social project’ that their authors, as realists, ‘(in some form) still want to sign onto’” (6).³⁵

Though this shift has eluded many literary periodizations of the sentimental, I propose that the sentimental continued as a serious literary category through the twentieth-century and into our present in novels that are not critically recognized as sentimental. Their authors do present sentimental subjects; however, they present them in situations that emphasize their difference rather than their universality. These authors work to accentuate the sentimental subjects’ difference, I contend, as a means of securing better forms of sympathy—forms that prove more exacting for us, as readers, to enter into. Where nineteenth-century sentimental novels depicted sympathy as a (relatively) natural movement and sentimental transformation as transpiring with ease (when it did occur), modern literary narratives approached sympathy more guardedly and often portrayed sentimental transformation as occurring only partially. The portraits of sympathy and sentimental transformation that emerged from Harlem Renaissance novelist Nella Larsen reflect this new attitude, as do the transnational productions of poet and novelist Claude McKay. The novelist Marilynne Robinson represents a contemporary instance of this new sentimental aesthetic.³⁶ This aesthetic takes on the baggage of sentimentality even as it holds up the sentimental as a worthwhile project. All the novels in this study record the difficulty of entering into sympathy

³⁵ Morgan is using the structure of Bruce Robbins’s argument that modernists and postmodernists perform much the same operation in their depictions of naïve realism. See Robbins, "Modernism and Literary Realism: A Response." Other scholars who read the sentimental as moving beyond its traditional eighteenth- and nineteenth-century periods include Michael Bell, Lauren Berlant, Suzanne Clarke, Christopher Diller, and Kenneth Warren.

³⁶ To take some of the most obvious points of entry into critical engagement with the sentimental, Nella Larsen’s protagonist calls herself “a sentimental fool” (59). Claude McKay protagonist is saved by “a sentimental white couple” due to a family history of “sentimental friendship” (292, 17). And Marilynne Robinson focalizes *Home* through Glory, a character so prone to excessive weeping that she wishes at one point that “nature [had] allowed the venting of feeling through the palm of a hand or even the sole of a foot” (15).

with another, even as they hold the act in high regard. These twentieth and twenty-first century authors respond to different demands in composing their portraits of characters in distress.

By portraying characters as operating in survival mode or subsisting in otherwise dire conditions, they open new grounds for approaching sympathy as a transaction that occurs on uneven terrain. For the modern sentimental subject, that act emerges as a privilege. Empathy, as these authors show, becomes an impossibility, when food, clothing and shelter needs go unmet, when safety is denied, or love and a sense of belonging are absent, or even when trauma visits the body. This way of conceptualizing sympathetic faculty represents a departure from racist strains within eighteenth- and nineteenth-century sentimentalism. As Charles Walls observes in his study of racial sentimentalism, the “intellectual genealogy behind literary sentimentalism” includes “a cultural and racial limit [...] on both the extension of and the ability to experience sympathy” (14-15). Or as nineteenth-century Americanist Kyla Schuller puts it in her study *The Biopolitics of Feeling*, “the sentimental affective economy long at the heart of U.S. power [...] identifies the feelings of the civilized individual—as the kernel of liberal democracy” (2). By way of correcting that history, the authors in this study craft stories that do not facilitate easy sympathy; they thereby push their readers to recognize how a subject exists under inhuman living conditions. In the most productive sense, the plight of the sentimental subject proves difficult for the reader to decipher. Seeing her, knowing her character, demands work on our part.³⁷ Some of us, these novels insist, operate at survival mode—a stress response characterized by an anxiety so powerful that it permeates all aspects of a life. For example, an individual’s ability both to be a part of a group and stand against group thinking presumes a healthy model of psychological development; it presumes,

³⁷ In chapter two, I explore what this implies for our understanding of literary character, following Jonathan Arac’s formulation: “No longer the traditional Aristotelian one who acts, nor, as in many great nineteenth-century novels, one who speaks, a character becomes one who is known” (“Politics” 255).

in other words, that a person emerges out of childhood with an arsenal of love and a firm sense of belonging. A writer like Nella Larsen compels us to recognize this presumption and dramatizes the difference it makes.

Stray voices in twenty-first century journalism are only now bearing out such insights. In *Between the World and Me* (2015), Ta-Nehisi Coates exposes how “racism is a visceral experience. [...] it dislodges brains, blocks airways, rips muscle, extracts organs, cracks bones, breaks teeth” (10). “To be black in the Baltimore of my youth was to be naked before the elements of the world,” Coates writes (17). In many appearances as a guest on popular news programs Coates claims, “no machinery could close the gap between [the broadcaster’s] world and the world for which I had been summoned to speak” (5). Coates attests to the bankruptcy of the sentimental project for subjects of stratified historical oppression. In a review of Ta-Nehisi Coates’ memoir, John Paul Rollert illuminates why, in part, this might be so. Rollert pinpoints “a great irony about empathy” through a comparison of Coates’s vision with the image of empathy (what I have been calling sympathy) that emerged over the course of President Barack Obama’s time in office:

It may seem strange that a man who maintains a Spock-like dispassion could also be a conduit for empathic understanding, but rather than being qualities at odds with each other, they are actually conjunctive. A capacity for empathy relies not only on a willingness to step into the shoes of another person, but the ability to step away from yourself.

We might ask, who gets to be able to do this? From the twentieth-century into the present, novelists have been engaging the sentimental in such a way as to vividly illustrate that answer. Not everyone can step away from themselves. “Empathy is a privilege,” writes Rollert, “just like freedom from

despair.”³⁸ To do this insight justice, our social understanding of empathy needs to change. Essayist Leslie Jamison captures what sympathetic transactions might now entail for those who are free from despair: “Empathy isn’t just listening, it’s asking the questions whose answers need to be listened to. Empathy requires inquiry as much as imagination. Empathy requires knowing you know nothing” (5). In many senses, however, these formulations simply revisit an older eighteenth century paradigm—a gesture I argue twentieth century novels make as well. By blocking more instant forms of sympathy and reinstating boundaries within the sympathetic encounter, twentieth-century writers illustrate how much the active accounting for difference matters if a sympathetic transaction is to be truly meaningful.

2.2 THE LANGUAGE OF FEELING FROM MORAL SENSE THEORY TO THEORIES OF AFFECT

2.2.1 SENTIMENT

The rise of modern commerce provoked animated conversation about human motivation, in part, because the reality that commercial society regularly rewards self-interested behavior was not lost on many. Sentimental ethics arises in this context as a reaction to a Hobbesian-Lockean conception of human nature as fundamentally impulsive (ruled by passion) and hedonistic (consumed by the pursuit of selfish desire). In other words, sentimental moral theory arises to challenge the kind of self a newly minted commercial society appeared to foster. Great Britain

³⁸ Adam Smith appears to have apprehended unequal access to empathy even in 1759, when he wrote: “The compassion of the spectator must arise altogether from the consideration of what he himself would feel if he was reduced to the same unhappy situation, *and, what perhaps is impossible*, was at the same time able to regard it with his present reason and judgment” (I.I p. 14, 17, emphasis added).

faced a decentered moral landscape following the financial revolution of the early eighteenth century (1620–1720). The rise of modern credit along with the shift away from settled, knowable communities to anonymous commercial societies placed stressed on old ways of understanding moral agency and virtuous action.³⁹ Moral sense philosophers, anxious to dispel increasingly dystopian views of sociality and seeking to preserve the human capacity for moral goodness, claimed benevolence as an innate aspect of human nature (in the manner of the Stoics who believed in the natural sociability of humanity).⁴⁰ Anthony Ashley Cooper, the Third Earl of Shaftesbury, (1671-1713) Francis Hutcheson (1694-1746), David Hume (1711-1776), and Adam Smith (1723-1790) pointed to sympathy as proof that humans looked beyond their own affairs and selfish interests to care for others, even strangers, in distress.⁴¹

In an attempt to negotiate the increasing anonymity marking social ties, Adam Smith forwarded the important role of the imagination in guiding our moral conduct toward others. Smith opens his *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) with an explanation of sympathy as an imaginative act. Though often quoted, Smith's account of sympathy diverges widely from the common use today of sympathy as mostly a straightforward gesture in feeling what someone else feels. Consider the many restrictions Smith imposes as he describes our ability to understand another human:

³⁹ In *A Secular Age*, Charles Taylor identifies this period of profound social change as the “great disembedding” (146).

⁴⁰ Though following Neostoicism in other respects, Smith diverges from his teacher Hutcheson on this count, instead agreeing with his friend David Hume in *Treatise of Human Nature* (Book 3) that law and government made social life possible (following Hobbes) (Hont 19). Smith adds a view that commercial society promotes sociability.

⁴¹ In, *Questionable Charity*, William M. Morgan claims much the same a century later for “U.S. literary realism,” which he claims “arises in large measure from an attempt to represent the human experiences caused by the growing sense of a discrepancy between residual social practices and emerging social conditions. U.S. literary realism charts how, in the late Victorian bourgeois self, a space of ethical mystery and interpersonal puzzlement opens up between the notion of a universal moral sense and an ever-receding hope for a new communitarian ethics” (12).

As we have no immediate experience of what other men feel, we can form no idea of the manner in which they are affected, but by conceiving what we ourselves should feel in the like situation. Though our brother is upon the rack, as long as we ourselves are at ease, our senses will never inform us of what he suffers. They never did, and never can, carry us beyond our own person, and it is by imagination only that we can form any conception of what are his sensations. Neither can that faculty help us to this any other way, than by representing to us what would be our own, if we were in his case. It is the impressions of our own senses only, not those of his, which our imaginations copy.

(Smith, *Theory* I.I.I, p. 13)

For Smith, sympathy transpires more in the mind than in the heart. Sympathy, as a mental exercise, does not entail a correspondence in emotional states between the perceiver and the perceived.

The American Studies scholar Jean-Christophe Agnew offers what I find to be the clearest delineation of Smith's concept of sympathy. Agnew identifies how Smith replaces Francis Hutcheson's concept of moral *sense* with his own theory of moral *sentiments*, thereby "situating those sentiments within the framework of a social rather than an individual psychology" (178, original emphasis). Smith moves the transaction out of the realm of the senses (feeling) into the realm of sentiments (socially held beliefs). This difference profoundly separates Smith from contemporary sensibility. Agnew unfolds the significance of this:

For Smith, sympathy invariably implied the presence of a witness or spectator because fellow-feeling was, more than anything else, a mark of the immense distance that separated individual minds rather than a sign of their commonality, as most moralists believed. Smith had no use whatsoever for the traditional definition of sympathy as an almost magical confluence of sentiment or emotional contagion. [...] Sympathy was not

for him a sentiment but an agreement between sentiments, not an emotional identification with another's passion but an *imaginative* identification with the situation occasioning the passion. [...] Mutual sympathy thus sprang, paradoxically, out of the realization of mutual inaccessibility. (178-179)

Although rarely noted, the distinction between emotional and imaginative identification emerges as defining in modern critical engagements of the sentimental. Smith's definition of fellow feeling has become countercultural, yet we, for the most part, do not recognize this to be the case. In the common language of political unity and prevailing references to it in literary scholarship, fellow feeling is taken to be a bland, uniform phenomenon in which all feel the same feeling as everyone else. A historical understanding of fellow feeling proves it to be a much more potent concept, to which literary record attests.

Appearing almost two decades after Richardson's *Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded* (1740) a little over a decade after *Clarissa* (1748), *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) built its theory of sympathy in dialogue with complex literary practices. In Bonnie Latimer's trenchant reading of Samuel Richardson's novels, sentimentalism emerges as a form invested in moral reasoning of a kind that encourages, even requires, a reader's freedom of thought—a world away from the didacticism conventionally associated with the sentimental novel. By the mid eighteenth-century, then, at least one author's sense of fellow feeling involved more complex aspiration to a concord of sentiments. In addition to Richardson, Smith also references the French novelists Pierre de Marivaux and Marie Riccoboni. His elaboration of sympathy not only drew inspiration from these eighteenth-century novelists and dramatists but also influenced subsequent writers. Making much the same point as Agnew, Michael Bell identifies how Smith "shifts [sympathy's] center of gravity," making "it less a movement of individual feeling [than] an imagined arena in which the

subjectivities of all human others, and of the self, are reconstructed in a manner which has to be both emotional and judgmental at once” (44). Rae Greiner further elaborates what a Smithian understanding of sympathy meant within realism: “Adam Smith’s major insight into the figural nature of sympathetic understanding—that one need not feel what others feel in order to sympathize with them—finds parallels in a realism that proceeds by way of tropes emphasizing approximate likenesses and close proximities rather than identity and simultaneity” (159). Many references to Smith overlook accounting for such distinctions. As a result, the sentimental is often taken to be a project in generating empathy in the twentieth-century sense of sharing another’s emotional state.

As a genre, the novel accommodates many forms of imagination. The nineteenth-century sentimental novel in the United States, by many accounts, deviated drastically from the Richardson novels it took as models, and yet the American sentimental novel also claims lineage with Smith.⁴² Smith’s famous metaphor for the sympathetic encounter, “our brother...upon the rack,” has garnered many conflicting interpretations. One tradition for interpreting the passage holds that for Smith sympathy is a matter of spectacle, namely that of the suffering other.⁴³ This camp would

⁴² For an interesting account of this deviation, see Myra Jehlen’s “Archimedes and the Paradox of Feminist Criticism.”

⁴³ In chapter four, I propose sentimental *tableau* as an alternative mode of viewing within the sentimental tradition.

Vivasvan Soni lucidly articulates a position of viewing sentimental ethics as a matter of spectacle. In *Mourning Happiness*, Soni explains Smith as substituting spectacle rather than story in the sympathetic transaction (a strange fact, given how influential Smith’s concept of sympathy and the impartial spectator have been in the development of the novel). Soni contends that sentimentalism offers a form of “ethical relationality” no longer “predicated on the narrative intertwining of lives in more customary, face-to-face communities” (293). Against “the centrifugal forces of self-interest, competition, and atomization” threatening to dissolve all sociability, sentimentalism reasserts a new model of community, a more abstracted community of feelings, sentiments and even manners held in common (and, as was argued, for the common good) (Soni, *Mourning* 293). In this way, he claims, emotion becomes the basis of an ethics meant to counter (perhaps only curb) the asociality of the hedonistic self. In Soni’s charge, the visual logic of sentimental ethics produces an ethical agent who unconsciously assumes, “What I can’t see doesn’t hurt me” (315). The spectacle reduces our sense of obligation and the responsibility we feel for the others. What

draw a direct line between Smithian sympathy and nineteenth-century American sentimentalism, casting both as a sensationalist project in emotional identification. James Baldwin's critique fits squarely within this camp. I find this view dangerously reductive. I also find it unjustly dismissive of the sentimental project, particularly its abolitionist history. Harriet Beecher Stowe was about more than agitating her audience with a series of sensational vignettes. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* shows itself over and over to be invested in a model of emotion that views feelings as states to be cultivated.⁴⁴ Nonetheless, the memory of Stowe as a sentimental sensationalist yet stands. In *Mourning Happiness: Narrative and the Politics of Modernity* (2010), Vivasvan Soni proclaims what continues to be the most predominant understanding of sentimentalism, when he writes, "The suspicion and even fear of passions characteristic of so much philosophical discourse, which acquires a renewed intensity in the seventeenth century, is almost completely reversed by sentimentalism, paving the way to the constitution of the subject as principally affective entity, a conception still dominant today" (*Mourning* 292). This understanding is built on a contracted cultural memory of sentimental form. In closing, I will offer a different way to conceive of the relationship between the sentimental and the affective. Pace Soni and many other theorists, I am not interested in signing onto a view of "the subject as [a] principally affective entity," certainly not as long as intelligent and sensitive writers continue to reach feeling *and* thinking readers.

I cannot see does not make a claim on me. Poverty, crime, and even slavery become structural problems of society, not ethical demands on one's person. I find this interpretation of Smith and sentimentalism in general injudicious.

⁴⁴ As June Howard explains, for philosophers like Francis Hutcheson and Adam Smith "[w]hat was at stake...was the shared and structured nature of feelings—their ability to link individuals in a chain of sympathy, and the view that they could and should be *cultivated*" (214, emphasis added). For Stowe, it is the slave trader who must cultivate an unfeeling heart. As Stowe warns her Northern readers, "His heart was exactly where yours, sir, and mine could be brought, with proper effort and cultivation. The wild look of anguish and utter despair that he woman cast on him might have disturbed one less practiced; but he was used to it" (138).

2.2.2 AFFECT

To be clear, many affect theorists understand affect as a form of intelligence. “In practice, affect and cognition are never fully separable—if for no other reason than thought is itself a body, embodied,” write Gregory Seigworth and Melissa Gregg, the editors *The Affect Theory Reader* (2009), a field-defining compilation of articles (2-3). Affect theorists envision a more multifaceted and promising dynamic—a vision that usefully complicates Soni’s characterization of the modern subject and, to be fair, up to this point in the introduction, my own. I have been invoking affect in the negative sense, as passion that needs to be digested by a thinking subject. I did this both to characterize certain forms of group unity and to draw a distinction between affect and emotion.⁴⁵ I have done this in an attempt to indicate the complexity housed within sentimental history. From this widened perspective, though few affect theorists say so, work on affect shares a good deal of overlap with early sentimentalism, particularly in their efforts to give more dynamic form to the dialectical interchange of feeling and thinking.

Affect theorists affirm this dialectic in unique ways. As cartographers, they follow their object of study as it circulates through and across bodies, instead of locating feeling within a single subject, as sentimental philosophers tended to do. Affect theorists trace the ways “[a]ffect arises in the midst of *in-between-ness*: in the capacities to act and be acted upon” (Seigworth and Gregg 1). They explore interfaces of emotion and sensation as a crucial location for cognition. Some branches of affect investigate other interfaces, such as the human and nonhuman, variously

⁴⁵ Contemporary works like Teresa Brennan’s *The Transmission of Affect* (2004) reinterpret older notions of emotion as a contagion structuring the movement of crowds to identify the ways in which this movement, affect’s transmission, represents a form of intelligence—an intelligence traditionally dismissed when we use a pejorative word like *mob*.

construed as the division between human/animal, human/machine, or even human/artificial intelligence. These relations remap how we understand the distribution of agency across what are increasingly viewed as permeable boundaries. In doing so, affect theory works to move beyond age-old prejudices against emotion set up in the Cartesian mind-body division as well as certain gender and cultural limitations within earlier philosophical thought.

As the editors of *The Affect Theory Reader* explain, beginning in 1995 there emerged at least “two dominant vectors of affect study in the humanities” (Seigworth and Gregg 5). Eve Sedgwick’s work comprises the first. In “Shame in the Cybernetic Fold,” she and Adam Frank brought Silvan Tomkins’s “psychobiology of differential affects” to critical attention. In that same year, Brian Massumi published “The Autonomy of Affect,” presenting “Gilles Deleuze’s Spinozist ethology of bodily capacities” (5). To be somewhat reductive in the service of mapping differences, Sedgwick’s model treats affect as continuous with our conventional sense of emotion, while Massumi’s model works to distinguish affect from emotion.⁴⁶ These interpretations open two different paths for understanding the role affect plays in structuring social relations. Scholars who follow Sedgwick tend to use affect to excavate the way feeling worlds impact subjects. In the service of enumerating that impact, they are more likely to separate affects into categories, such as anger, shame, contempt, as well as excitement, happiness, and euphoria. Scholars who follow Massumi’s approach often discuss affect as a general category. In approaching affect as distinct

⁴⁶ Writers such as Ann Cvetkovich, Sianne Ngai, and Barbara Tomlinson who approach affect out of a perspective informed by feminist or queer theory often use emotion and affect more or less synonymously. Sara Ahmed does so polemically: “I think that the distinction between affect/emotion can under-describe the work of emotions, which *involve* forms of intensity, bodily orientation, and direction that are not simply about ‘subjective content’ or qualification of intensity. Emotions are not ‘afterthoughts’ but shape how bodies are moved by the worlds they inhabit” (*The Promise* 230 n.1) (Here Ahmed is quoting Brian Massumi, specifically positioning her use of affect against his in *Parable for the Virtual*). Affect theorists who view affect and emotion as roughly synonymous terms do not position their work on feelings as a radical break from earlier forms of emotion studies.

from and even radically and revolutionarily opposed to emotion in its ability to resist systematicity, these writers claim affect as the new frontier for action and agency.⁴⁷ I will outline the ways each perspective informs my references to affect in the chapters that follow.

In excavating the way feeling worlds impact subjects, affect theory can be seen as a continuation of earlier consciousness-raising work within feminist and queer theory. In *Shame and Its Sisters* (1995), Sedgwick offers a concrete entry into this kind of work:

Tomkins's theory of affect originated with his close observations of an infant in 1955; he was able to locate early expressions of shame at a period (around seven months) before the infant could have any concept of prohibition. Many developmental psychologists, responding to this finding, now consider shame the affect that most defines the space wherein a sense of self will develop. (6)

Under Sedgwick's interpretation of Tomkins, "the emergence of a core self" speaks more to social context, to the physicality of facial expression, than to a purely personal context or an internalized ego. This shift helps to uncover how even as our sense of self comes from without, it intimately structures what is within. Sedgwick singles out the shame-humiliation response to analyze the ways subjects become isolated and lose positive social interaction with others. As an affective response, shame signals certain negative emotional states and marks the loss of positive feedback from others. Subjects who experience the negative impact of shame share common experiences that are, paradoxically, at once profoundly personal and penetratingly public. Sedgwick locates

⁴⁷ Though followers of Sedgwick undoubtedly consider their work as promoting action and agency as well, they are less likely to present it as a new frontier in quite the same way Massumi does (This comes through in Ahmed's way of positioning herself against Massumi, see note 41.). Seigworth and Gregg offer this enigmatic distinction between the two major branches: "affect as the prime "interest" motivator that comes to put the drive in bodily drives (Tomkins); affect as an entire, vital, and modulating field of myriad becomings between human and nonhuman (Deleuze)" (6).

shame as “the place where the *question* of identity arises most originally and most relationally” (*Touching* 37). Such group identities develop within and against a substantial base of communal experience.

The kind of affect Sedgwick is naming dramatically differs from the kind of affect I first defined in the beginning of my introduction: the kind of affect Ronald Judy identifies as immediately “communicable”: “anger, rage, [and] intense pleasure” (228). In *Banana Bottom* (1933), Claude McKay portrays both of these registers of affect. He represents how villagers and town folk respond in mass to natural and economic disasters. He also represents the way his protagonist responds to the shame, the shame of having been raped and a later event in which she comes close to being sexually assaulted again. McKay also depicts the social repercussion of Bitá’s rape in gossip and a popular ditty, sung by many in her community. Throughout these portrayals, McKay demonstrates how an artistic commitment to stirring fellow feeling requires an equal investment in calling out broken forms of unity.

The novelists I analyze in this study possess a hyper-attunement to shallow forms of affective community. As artists, they channel this sensitivity into portraying ways affective communities act to position marginal subjects. In the first page of *Home to Harlem* (1928), McKay wastes no time in laying out just how double-dealing affective affiliation can be. The novel opens at sea with its protagonist Jake Brown working as a stoker on a “filthy dinghy” boat. Wise to the shifting logic of racist discourse, Jake deftly navigates social exchanges with the crew. Consider how McKay has Jake, a black man, respond to one of the white sailor’s invitations. The reader encounters the man’s words already knowing that, as a group, the “white sailors who washed the ship would not wash the stokers’ water-closet, because they despised the Arabs”:

One of the sailors flattered Jake. "You're the same like us chaps. You ain't like them dirty

jabbering coolies.”

But Jake smiled and shook his head in a non-committal way. He knew that if he was just like the white sailors, he might have signed on as a deckhand and not as a stoker. (1-3)

This opening scene reveals how deeply McKay is aware of the ways sympathy—we could just as easily say *affect*—operates to structure and sustain racializing discourses and identities.⁴⁸ For literary critic Silvia Xavier, Jake’s response exposes how “race is not merely physiognomy or personal habits [...] but a complex element of social structure and daily experience that [...] shifts according to practices of hegemony and history” (726). As Xavier puts it, “McKay’s construction of identity shows the problematic nature of a ‘sympathetic’ racial matrix” (725). In my understanding, much of contemporary affect theory works toward exposing a similar kind of matrix—a matrix that constructs identity as innate rather than as emerging out of a composite of social relations.⁴⁹

Where McKay depicts Jake as refusing a false form of affective community, affect theory identifies the inescapability of our interpellation into some of these formations, of the very intimacy of its effects within the self’s composition. We are suffused by our social relations, it claims. Affect theorists thicken this picture of the self by identifying how public feelings, such as despair and anger, structure the alienation of social groups. Affect theorists see the potential of a

⁴⁸ Hilary Parsons Dick and Kristina Wirtz define racializing discourse as “the actual language use (spoken and written) that sorts some people, things, places, and practices into social categories marked as inherently dangerous and Other” (E2.) Dick, Hilary Parsons and Kristina Wirtz. “Racializing Discourses.” *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 21.S1 (August 2011): E2-E10.

⁴⁹ Interestingly, these are the grounds on which Thomas Pfau criticizes Adam Smith for his “decidedly un-Stoic project of an affect-based and strictly ‘imagined’ community” (335). A more generous view would allow for Smith’s good-faith attempt to credit the ways moral agency requires socialization—even if the future cultivation of one’s emotions lead one away from strict lockstep compliance with social norms. Pfau misses seeing how Smith’s tempered use of Stoicism helps him to escape its pitfalls into self-centered moral heroism by highlighting the indispensable social aspects of judgment as dialectic.

disorganizing influence in breaking up shallow forms of affective community (like the one Jake refuses).⁵⁰ This brings me to my first major point about affect theory: affect theorists more often work to unsettle past and present forms of fellow feeling than condone them. This tendency reflects an investment in critiquing formations of affective community as ideologically suspect, “as tending toward foreclosure and homogenized attunement,” as Lauren Berlant puts it (Berlant and Greenwald 86). This perspective understands how affect serves to reinforce prevalent ideologies of racial identity, family life and national community under capitalism. As a social phenomenon, these forms of affective community mark the sites where the personal becomes both public and political.⁵¹ Working within this orientation, Erin Rand ask, “how do particular affective orientations reinforce the marginalization of certain groups [...] while reinforcing the structures that enhance the validity of others?” (163) Affect theory usefully complicates our understanding of how emotion works to shape public life. To borrow Lauren Berlant’s words, McKay refuses to “render scenes and stories of structural injustice in the terms of a putatively preideological nexus of overwhelming feeling” (“Poor” 636). This is an excellent point, but as I argue above, we misunderstand the project of sentimentalism if we take it to be primarily a project in “build[ing] pain alliances” (“Poor” 636).⁵² To revisit my first claim, affect theory and sentimentalism contain

⁵⁰ In a move that critically engages the work of affect theory, Katrin Pahl proposes we reclaim the word *emotional*, “which has been used as an insult to exclude voices from the public sphere.” “When women, queers, and racialized or culturally othered peoples have been called emotional,” Pahl points out, “this has always meant too emotional, indicating an excess or incessantness unbecoming of the well-adjusted citizen” (1457).

⁵¹ Some of the important studies in this area include Sara Ahmed’s *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2004) and *The Promise of Happiness* (2010), Lauren Berlant’s *The Female Complaint* (2008) and her edited collection, *Compassion* (2004) as well as Gregory Seigworth and Melissa Gregg’s *The Affect Theory Reader* (2009). These writers “warn us to be wary of fellow feeling [and the] social emotions” it rallies (compassion, pity, sympathy, and empathy): “Although these social emotions may seem authentically personal, we are warned, they can be expressions of power, appropriations of others’ experience, and falsely oversimplified understandings of social and cultural relationships” (Jurecic 11).

⁵² In “Poor Eliza,” Berlant usefully elaborates Baldwin’s critique of liberal sentiment, even beginning with the same epigraph from Baldwin that I do. In this 1998 article, later collected in *The Female Complaint*

much overlap. My second claim moves to characterize this overlap as built on a bad faith interpretation of sentimentalism. Many important insights of affect theorists depend upon a strategic view of sentimentalism. This is a rhetorical move to come to terms with.

The move to expose sentimentality as a thorny enterprise in perpetuating unequal power relations remains quite entrenched within the field. Sedgwick's early instantiation of this move, however, opens a window. Before her initial study of affect *Shame and Its Sisters* (1995), in *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990), Sedgwick adds an important caveat to her critique:

The ballistics of the 'sentimental' requires the freeze-framing of one targeted embodiment of sentimentality, its presentation *as spectacle* to a further sentimentality whose own privileged disembodiment and invisibility are preserved and reenabled by that highly differential act of staging. Thus, [...] it must be said that sentimentality *as spectacle* is structured very differently from sentimentality *as viewpoint* or habitation.
(222, emphasis original)

The structure of relationality that sentimentality enacts can go one of two ways, Sedgwick suggests. The second option, sentimentality *as viewpoint*, carves out a place for more productive forms of communion. This second option, Sedgwick seems to indicate, would draw on Donna Haraway's notion of "situated knowledges" as a way to mark how all knowledge emerges from a positional perspective. Feminist standpoint theory, as represented in the writings of Nancy Hartsock and Sandra Harding, serves as an important resource in recuperating the sentimental under a frame that affect theory would find more palatable. Though feminist standpoint theorists

(2008), Berlant characterizes the sentimental as the political "desire to build pain alliances" and calls this work "the unfinished business of sentimentality in American culture" ("Poor Eliza," 636).

do not directly emphasize emotion, they do engage the way in which thought and reflection are always embodied and embedded.

In many senses then, affect theory represents the most up-to-date version of sentimentalism's underlying desire—"the desire to imagine ourselves into a feeling formation unfettered by the painful realities of a socius," as Pansy Duncan puts it (17). To use Sedgwick's terms, a central strain within affect theory aims at "reparative reading," a practice that turns away from suspicion and negative affect.⁵³ This orientation leads many theorists to see affective convergence in a more optimistic light than I have thus far characterized it. Berlant, for one, sees potential in such convergences. While she shares much of Sedgwick's outlook in shaping her sense of what constitutes a progressive politics, Berlant notably sidesteps the dominant trend to sever all connections to sentimentality:

I always see the potential in sentimental attention in the way it does not require substantive *likeness* to repair a broken world but instead counts on our fidelity to affective convergence, to returning to the situation at hand and cultivating an ethical practice with respect to that situation, a practice of attentive care against the world that engenders the destruction of its vital subjects. So I am not afraid of sentimentality—I don't think there's a successful politics devoid of its seduction to produce attachments before there is trust grounded in history. (Berlant and Greenwald 86-87, emphasis original)

Berlant's characterization of sentimental attention retains the distinctions I have been championing. In proposing that sympathetic encounters do not require substantive likeness,

⁵³ In "If Love Were All," Paul Kelleher proposes an approach to sentimentality that is "nonallergic." In his reading, Sedgwick's "ethic of reparative reading [does] signal a sentimental turn for queer criticism," even if she declines from framing her work in such a way (150).

Berlant also calls for a sentimentality of viewpoint rather than spectacle. She expresses her pragmatic approach in saying, “I never take my modeling from the damaged versions of a good aspiration” (Berlant and Greenwald 87). I would like to test this stance by dipping into a topic broached by the novelists I study: the limitations and the possibilities of affective convergence.

One of the contexts utilized by the authors of the novels in this study is religious experience. Their commonality in this regard should not be surprising, given sentimentalism’s ties to the Great Awakenings, revival movements whose emotional preaching stirred populations on the left and right of the Atlantic to feel all sorts of sensations. In her Gilead trilogy, for example, Marilynne Robinson draws on the history of abolitionist ties to the Second Great Awakening, where religious zeal moved many to fight to end slavery.⁵⁴ In *Quicksand* and *Banana Bottom*, Nella Larsen and Claude McKay approach religious conversion as a deceptively complex site for coming to terms with the deficiencies and potential of convergence. Larsen’s Helga unwittingly stumbles into a storefront church in Harlem. McKay’s Bitá attends a revival near her childhood home as a spectator but then unexpectedly becomes entranced. Though neither are strong believers, each gets swept into the frenzied emotion and fervor of the group.

Affect theorists typically assume a rather skeptical stance toward such alignments. In *The Promise of Happiness* (2010), Sara Ahmed describes the way that sociable happiness works to organize us into groups: “To be affected in a good way by objects that are already evaluated as good is a way of belonging to an affective community. We align ourselves with others by investing in the same objects as the cause of happiness” (38). Ahmed explores how the happy object of the family (notably, a key sentimental trope) becomes challenged by the “feminist killjoy,” a figure

⁵⁴ Ann Douglas’s field-defining study *The Feminization of American Culture* (1977) became so important partly because it did not limit its investigation of sentimentality to the nineteenth-century sentimental novel but located its influence on American theology as well (Walls 5).

who disrupts the coherence of the family as a happy object by bringing trouble and bad feelings to the site of its happiness. Ahmed sees such disruptions as politically productive. Calling the feminist killjoy a type of affect alien, Ahmed names her “suffering [as] a receptivity that can heighten the capacity to act” (210). Larsen and McKay use such existential aches, experienced by their characters, to intimate similar lines of inquiry. In their own way, they each seem to question the happy object of the place of worship.

Sentimentalism offers yet another way to approach such scenes of spiritual transformation. With Ralph Ellison we might find the promise of such in the form of “artistically induced catharsis.” Conscious of the difference which Ellison identifies between his and Richard Wright’s aesthetic, we might ask if we too have “failed to understand the Afro-American custom of shouting in church (a form of ritual catharsis), or its power to cleanse the mind and redeem and rededicate the individual to forms of ideal action.” The novelists I highlight here, Larsen and McKay, depict not only the bodily sensations involved in conversion but also the release and exhaustion the character undergoes. Larsen and McKay also explore the shift in a character’s mental life that the act of conversion sets in motion. In *Lila* (2014), Marilynne Robinson strikingly evokes the anxiety which conversion can provoke. The portrait Robinson achieves stands out for its precision in rendering low-key but infinitely portentous moments of everyday life. Affect theory proves particularly adept in this regard—wise in looking beyond intense passions. Affect theory offers the insight that dull moods and slow-burning anxieties are themselves powerful world-shapers.

Affect, as potentially world-shaping, or affect, as a pathway to agency, represents the final interpretation upon which I draw. Although my starting point may appear peculiar, I hope to clarify why I begin with a literary critic (rather than a recognized affect theorist) to characterize my final interpretation about the limits of the scholarly fields of sentimentalism and affect. Literary critic

Rebecca Wanzo does this well when she writes, “Rather than characterizing U.S. sentimentality as ‘good’ or ‘bad’ politics, a more precise characterization [...] is to call it a politically effective but insufficient means of political change” (9). In this delimited sense, Wanzo brings sentimental politics and affect theory together in a productive formulation:

In the United States, the logic that determines who counts as proper victims has historically been shaped by sentimental politics—the practice of telling stories about suffering bodies as a means for inciting political change. Sentimental political storytelling describes the narrativization of sympathy for purposes of political mobilization. It is key if people want to mobilize sympathy and have what I call affective agency—the ability of a subject to have her political and social circumstances move a populace and produce institutional effects. (3)

Wanzo is invested in exposing how skewed the record has been on this count: “Racial and gender politics demonstrate that in the logic of mobilizing affect—the motivation of emotion that is a necessary prerequisite to social and political action—citizens often negotiate an economy that privileges white female bodies” (3). Wanzo goes on to wrestle with the mixed bag this legacy brings. In the next chapter, my analysis of affective agency pushes Wanzo’s insight in another direction. Her formulation, while suggestive, does not flag the impersonality of affective agency.⁵⁵ Again, we might think of Stowe’s runaway slave stopping by Senator Bird’s house. What Stowe calls “[t]he magic of the real presence of distress—the imploring human eye, the frail, trembling human hand, the despairing appeal of helpless agony” that proves to be so utterly persuasive for a man like Senator Bird, are all affective appeals to another’s sympathy (127). They are not

⁵⁵ Political theorist Susan McManus treats affective agency as something a group deploys in her analysis of the Zapatistas in Chiapas (150).

distinguishing markers of Eliza's subjecthood or individuality but rather of her positionality. Her capacity to move rests in structural forces. To borrow Rae Greiner's words once more, Stowe constructs Eliza's social power "by way of tropes emphasizing approximate likenesses and close proximities rather than identity and simultaneity" (159). In an important sense that our prejudice against sentimentality might lead us to overlook, a strong element of impersonality structures Eliza's sentimental power over Senator Bird. As a reader, we get lost in the intimacy the scene produces and forget how it evacuates Eliza's personhood, not in any derogatory or pointed sense, but as a feature of the grab at representational power Stowe, quite rightly I believe, is making.

In the 1980s, Jane Tompkins makes a similar point in coining the term *sentimental power*. Her study *Sensational Designs* (1985) champions the cultural work early American women writers accomplished in the sentimental novel.⁵⁶ Stowe serves as her most convincing illustration in this project. Tompkins describes the kind of sentimental power Stowe brought into being as follows:

Stowe means to effect a radical transformation of her society. The brilliance of the strategy is that it puts the central affirmations of a culture into the service of a vision that would destroy the present economic and social institutions; by resting her ease,

⁵⁶ Tompkins's *Sensational Designs* (1985) accomplished a critical revival of popular antebellum texts by emphasizing the alternative they provided to contemporary thinking about the period. Tompkins questions the politics of literary canon formation by taking the feminist poetics of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* seriously, specifically its sentimental tropes around family and home. Tompkins pointed to these tropes as offering an effective political vision that accomplished important cultural work. Though scholars of sentimentalism often pit Ann Douglas against Jane Tompkins, Douglas also gives an illuminating account of the power of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, assigning it important place in American literary history (see "The Art of Controversy," her 1981 introduction to the Penguin edition of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*). Nevertheless, Douglas's *The Feminization of American Culture* (1977) represents an important interlocutor in Tompkins's work. Douglas identifies how nineteenth-century clergy, predominantly in New England, abandoned the Calvinism of their ancestors resulting in, Douglas asserts, an American Protestant establishment that turns increasingly to sentimentality for authority and effect. During this time, women consumed sentimental novels whose literary effects echoed a laxer form of homily they began encountering in religious services. Douglas considers the cultural implications of the ascendancy of a theology of feeling within both contexts. Douglas's effort to identify what America lost in abandoning Calvinism aligns her with Marilynne Robinson, an author I turn to in my final chapter.

absolutely, on the saving power of Christian love and on the sanctity of American life, placing it not in the government, nor in the courts of law, nor in the factories, not in the marketplace but in the kitchen. (“Sentimental” 575)

Stowe aims to destroy a dominant social order by marshaling the energies within an equally dominant parallel one.⁵⁷ Though Rebecca Wanzo does not frame her definition of affect in these terms, her work nearly identifies sentimental power as the most prominent force in securing affective agency.

This brings me to my third and final point concerning affect. Insofar as affect theorists overlook some of the best aspirations of the sentimental project, they lose critical tools. Below and in the subsequent chapter, I offer my understanding of affective agency to illustrate the kind of loss this entails. Like sentimental power, affective agency does not signify individual agency nor does it necessarily help an individual in distress (such as Stowe’s Eliza) express personal agency. Affective agency relies on structural forces within society; it does not rely on the subject’s ability to process personal emotions. This is an important critical distinction that emerges when we bring sentimentalism and affect theory into conversation. Turning to a scholar like Brian Massumi proves illuminating here. Massumi pushes his readers to think impersonality into their conceptualization of affect’s movement. Only under this mindset does the true nature of affective agency and its consequences come into view. Borrowing from Gilles Deleuze’s work on Spinoza, Massumi articulates affect as capacity—“the capacity to affect and be affected,” which highlights the link Spinoza made “between movement and sensation” (Massumi, *Parables* 15). The full implications of this approach only emerge when one comprehends how affect represents a shift

⁵⁷ Affective agency, on the other hand, holds the potential of deviating from these dominant pathways, though I do not pursue this point in this study. See instead McManus.

away from personhood (and subjectivity) toward something Deleuze terms “pre-personal singularities.” In Simone Brott’s explanation, pre-personal singularities are “those irreducible qualities or powers that act independently of any particular person.” “To walk, to see, to love—these are general or anonymous capacities that function in a very real sense prior to the personological subject,” clarifies Brott (1). Affect, in this sense, harnesses the power of abstraction. In *Parables for the Virtual* (2002) Massumi writes, “Paraphrasing Deleuze again, the problem with the dominant models in cultural and literary theory is not that they are too abstract to grasp the concreteness of the real. The problem is that they are not *abstract enough* to grasp the real incorporeality of the concrete” (5). Massumi’s assertion here evokes Sedgwick’s sense of how social context works to compose the most intimate aspects of self-psychology. With this nexus in mind, I am claiming that we do not see the extent to which the modern sentimental subject’s actions, her sentimental appeals, are themselves abstraction.

The modern sentimental subject experiences herself as one who is seen. She learns who she is through the experience of being seen in her state of oppression by the sympathizer. In this mode of encounter, her oppression is made visible.⁵⁸ Affective agency works by moving (in the emotional sense of movement) a public, by stirring our sympathy with an oppressed subject, not for who she *is* but for what she *feels* in the current position she occupies—a position she often occupies only temporarily, before some other hardship or chance event or choice repositions her. Feeling in this context does not individuate a subject. In the next chapter, I locate this reading of affective agency as residing within literary character, adapting the concept to designate a skill a person can possess in responding to the micropolitical, quotidian moments of social interaction

⁵⁸ This feature of sentimental subjectivity overlaps with some of the more general features of modern subjectivity, for example, the modern subject’s familiarity with spectacle and performance—key terms in Sedgwick’s analysis of shame’s transmission through culture.

and to name a style of engaging others that will lead to support or aid. Appeals to strangers operate under shared cultural codes. Such appeals require what Holly Yanacek defines as *affective empathy*, “the capacity to respond appropriately to another’s emotions.” Notably, Yanacek does not classify this ability as non-cognitive; the ability “requires significant work of imagination in order to ‘know’ and identify with another’s experiences” (“Empathy”). Experience in this context is not personal. Attending to this kind of affective-emotional experience “offers a way of thinking about subjectivity that is not tied solely to the psyche,” as Kristyn Gorton puts it (345). I understand affective agency within the theoretical perspective provided by queer and feminist scholarship. This means staying “attentive to the ways that the capacity to act is embedded within relations of power,” as Erin Rand explains (162). Under this formulation, affective agency emerges as a skill that has little to do with a person’s self-knowledge but everything to do with the kind of social knowledge that assures a person’s survival.

To frame this in psychological terms, affective agency is a skill a person employs when she is operating at survival mode. An individual with a high amount of affective agency need not necessarily have a strong grasp on emotional self-knowledge. Processing this fact, whether under an affective model or sentimental one, means recognizing the difference between a person operating at survival mode and one who is not. A person who sympathizes, to borrow the words of John Rollert once more, retains “the ability to step away from [her]self.” This ability signifies a healthy psyche; it also signals a capacity to flourish. In a very real material sense, what psychologists call self-actualization requires the presence of food, clothing, and shelter as well as a sense of security. When such base needs are met, argues psychologist Abraham Maslow, a person is free to pursue his or her full potentiality in relationship with others as well as in regard to oneself,

through honing special talents and skills.⁵⁹ This developmental arc contracts dramatically under survival mode. Increasingly, literary form imagines suffering at this interface where a hunger drive or a shame response affects the drive to create or to connect. Increasingly, literary engagements with the sentimental subject portray raw human need in the midst of astonishing human tenacity. In testifying to the human drive to dream and thrive, authors take up the mantle of an older sentimental form, reckoning with the repercussions of where distress leaves a body, mind, or heart. In this, they stir our sympathy, and in doing so, leave us, their readers, a little the wiser.

⁵⁹ In “A Theory of Human Motivation” (1943), Maslow frames human potentiality in terms of a hierarchy of needs and drives. Maslow devised a pyramid to reflect the way that we often require the fulfillment of base need before we can express higher ones. A sense of love and belonging provides a person with a healthy sense of esteem. Self-esteem, respect for others, and confidence, then, facilitates higher order capacities to conduct oneself morally, to express creativity, to risk spontaneity, to problem-solve, to question and release both formed and inherited prejudices, and even to perceive the reality of one’s environment (rather than escaping into fantasies about it).

3.0 HUMANIZING AFFECTIVE AGENCY: *QUICKSAND*'S INCITATION TO REIMAGINE SENTIMENTAL POWER

A small angry conference of white men took place in the front of the car and the Negroes sitting in the Jim Crow section overheard: "That's that Bigger Thomas nigger and you'd better leave 'im alone." The Negroes experienced an intense flash of pride and the streetcar moved on its journey without incident.

—Richard Wright, "How Bigger Was Born" (1940)

We have not, as it seems to me, in this most mechanical and interlocking of civilizations, attempted to lop this creature down to the status of a time-saving invention. He is not, after all, merely a member of a Society or a Group or a deplorable conundrum to be explained by Science. He is—and how old-fashioned the words sound!—something more than that, something resolutely indefinable, unpredictable.

—James Baldwin, "Everybody's Protest Novel" (1949)

For students encountering *Quicksand* (1928) in the twenty-first century, the Jim Crow realities of the narrative are largely imperceptible. Although Nella Larsen wrote about a society in which even the waiting areas were segregated, *Quicksand* does not throw the reality of Jim Crow in its reader's face. Stirring outrage at such injustice is not Larsen's objective, even though social critique remains her novel's unwavering focus. Well before Richard Wright's naturalistic protest novel *Native Son* (1940) and James Baldwin's famous objection to it in "Everybody's Protest Novel" (1949), twenty-one years earlier, in fact, Nella Larsen penned a formidable example of that form. By fashioning scenes that dissect the workings of sympathy and sentimental appeal orchestrated to garner it, Larsen levels a powerful critique of both the politics of racial uplift and the legacies of white liberal activism—without directly rejecting either. Her critique captures the good these movements accomplished and retains their tools, while indicating areas begging

reform. Pressing the political efficacy of the sentimental novel toward wider-reaching effect, or, put it another way, improving its affective capital, proves central to *Quicksand*'s form of protest.

Even beyond the protest novel, the novel itself has a history of negotiating between stories of the individual and stories of community (or society at large). When a protagonist becomes symbolic in a plot, the implicit danger arises that the character (as well as the reader of the novel) may lose a grasp of the character's individuality. This was Baldwin's complaint about Wright's work. Invoking the power of art to evoke singularity, Baldwin called upon his fellow writers to be keepers of the sacredness of individuality; yet, it can be argued that through attention to the context that would extinguish the flame of that singularity, Wright also contributed mightily to its keeping. Larsen does not lose her protagonist's individuality in *Quicksand*, nor does she fail to portray the multiple contexts in which such an extinction might occur. In *Quicksand*, Larsen manages to fuse the power of two strains within the protest novel. Through Helga, Larsen offers a portrait of singular humanity and just as powerful a portrait of the contexts that ultimately snuff out her singular flame. *Quicksand* tells a story of a woman who defies categorization, whose humanity "alone [...] is real and [...] cannot be transcended" (Baldwin 23). In artistic terms, Helga Crane's story signifies a triumph.⁶⁰

Part of *Quicksand*'s success may be attributed to Larsen's nuanced engagement with the sentimental tradition. In that tradition, Harriet Beecher Stowe looms large. As Kenneth Warren argues, writers since Stowe have "consciously and unconsciously" reproduced her methods to such a degree that even when modernist black writers "strive to distance themselves from all that *Uncle Tom's Cabin* represents," psychologically "they will always return in order to determine just how

⁶⁰ Despite the ending that leaves Helga, if not dead, completely defeated, Du Bois claimed in his review of the novel that "the theme is not defeatist" ("Two Novels" 202).

far they've gotten away" (226). Larsen escapes this return of the repressed by writing not in reaction to Stowe but in dialogue with her. The image of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as a saccharine work portraying enslaved African Americans in a stereotypical light is as notorious as it is untrue. Stowe's major characters are no stereotype, nor can the suffering of her characters be easily dismissed. Her scenes portray genuine adversity and real loss. In this portrayal, Stowe does not gush. In Ann Douglas's words, "her toughness and tartness perpetually resurfaced from whatever saccharine depths that had temporarily engulfed them" (20).⁶¹ Stowe provides American literature with a zealous model for pressing catharsis into service of humanity. For Stowe, a true change of heart implies a new way of acting. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* modeled this type of transformation in Senator Bird's encounter with Eliza Harris, a runaway slave. After voting to make aiding fugitive slaves illegal, Senator Bird stands before Eliza and her son, realizing that "[h]e had never thought that a fugitive might be a hapless mother, a defenseless child" (127). Their bodily presence helps him to see them as part of his own family. Senator Bird identifies with Eliza's fear that she might lose her son Harry because he knows what it means to lose a son. Like Senator Bird and his wife, Stowe and her husband had lost a young child of their own. The emotional force of such a loss moves the scene until Senator Bird is compelled to break the law he had instated only hours ago.

⁶¹ See Douglas's "The Art of Controversy" for a historically contextualized, fair-minded assessment of Stowe's representations, in which Douglas argues that Tom's response to Simon Legree, in the religious terms of the novel, achieves the ultimate form of conquest. In all ways, the novel forwards Tom as exemplar. For Stowe's reader, Tom serves as a model in how to sympathize with others. Douglas further contends that "Stowe's religion protects her from racism. She falls into the stereotypes of black characters and behavior almost inseparable from white Victorian culture only with her very minor black characters—such as Shelby's grinning pair, Sam and Andy—and seldom even there. Is Prue, an alcoholic ignorant of Christ who is finally beaten to death in her master's cellar, a stereotype? Or the black mother who drowns herself early in the book? Uncle Tom's docility is docility only in the sense that Stowe considers it 'feminine,' but it is 'feminine' only in that it represents adherence to spiritual values—and this adherence, for Stowe, is strength" (25).

Larsen also takes sentimental transformation seriously. *Quicksand*, however, depicts these encounters along a continuum, illuminating how sympathetic appeal works more often in subtle increments than singular events. Though similarly wide-ranging in locales portrayed, *Quicksand* does not invite the reader to sympathize with the array of subjects *Uncle Tom's Cabin* does. Where Stowe shows Tom as a facilitator of his fellow enslaved's stories and a model of compassionate response, Larsen presents how difficult her protagonist finds it to share her own story. Though the content of Helga's story also proves heartbreaking, it is rarely received in this way. While Larsen's narrative likely does not provoke our weeping, it does absorb us in another way. Under the narrator's prodding, the reader becomes bound up in contemplating what sympathetic appeals may lead to transformation and what difference sympathy may make in a life. Early in the novel the narrator remarks, "Even foolish, despised women must have food and clothing; even unloved little Negro girls must be somehow provided for" (21-22). This line, like many of Stowe's, smolders with a "fierce...compassion for the downtrodden," only its compassion manifests in an unusual way (Douglas 20). Writing at three-quarters of a century remove from Stowe, Larsen recognizes the need to restore a certain amount of rigor to the sentimental process. And Larsen's unusual approach answers this need, even as it shares in Stowe's choice to make the breaking up of families an integral part of its appeal.

Larsen retains the typical strategy of sentimental novels, "the direct addresses of the reader by the narrator" but dispenses with its traditional function (Warhol 15). As Robyn Warhol explains, direct address traditionally "serves to break down differences between categories of experience: the experiences of the reader in his or her own remembered life and those of the characters in the life being represented on the page of the book" (15-16). By using the narrator to place the reader as a removed spectator rather than an immersed partaker in Helga's experience,

Larsen cuts her audience out of the sentimental equation—the final effect of which encourages critical more than emotional reading. The narrator directs us to read Helga against the grain of her own thoughts. Claudia Tate observes how Larsen uses the narrator to close down readerly identification with Helga as “the novel’s desiring subject” (235). The narrator accomplishes this distancing, Tate claims, by adopting “an apprehensive and somewhat querulous tone,” reflected in such lines of questioning as “But just what did she want? ... Helga Crane didn’t know, couldn’t tell” and “Frankly the question came to this: what was the matter with her? Was there, without her knowing it, some peculiar lack in her? Absurd... Why couldn’t she be happy, content, somewhere? Other people managed, somehow, to be. To put it plainly, didn’t she know how? Was she incapable of it?” (Tate 241; Larsen 10, 75). Though Larsen dispenses with the traditional function of direct address, the endpoint, to stir reader sympathy, remains the same. This creative choice ultimately works to restore form and function to the sentimental project—to correct its process. As Smith argued, we are to judge the appropriateness of a person’s sentiments to a situation, not enter into his or her emotional state.

Under the narrator’s prodding, the reader sees Helga as lost and perceives what seems to be an incapacity in her to retain fellow feeling with any one group.⁶² Larsen’s well-traveled heroine identifies with various groups as she moves from the South to Chicago to Harlem, across the Atlantic, and back again. In each new setting, Helga rides a roller coaster of emotional identification, while the reader remains at an emotional distance from her. Larsen uses her protagonist’s responsiveness to illustrate the ways emotional identification can go awry. As Helga herself judges each scene, the reader judges Helga. When Helga does identify with the people in

⁶² To a significant degree we fail to identify how implicit biases in her environments condition this incapacity.

the various settings she passes through, we probe the depth and judge the authenticity of her identification. This is a curious position to place the reader in, given *Quicksand*'s engagement with such sentimental strategies as character typology, fellow feeling, emotional absorption, and catharsis; yet the overpowering and soul-transforming emotions in the narrative are Helga's, not the reader's, to experience. For example, in the plot's ultimate turning point of Helga's tearful religious conversion, the reader is likely to be suspicious more than gripped by the emotion she feels (although Helga initially feels skeptical herself). Larsen chooses not to invite the reader into sympathetic identification *with* the protagonist but to thematize sympathetic identification *within* her.

Throughout the novel, Helga's style of identification evokes the process of reading a sentimental novel in its less rigorous form popularized in the nineteenth century American form. At one point, she finds herself moved to recommit to racial uplift, experiencing a wave of sympathy akin to "a mystifying yearning," "that urge for service" (19). At another, she finds herself moved by an orchestra's rendition of "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot," pulled by sympathy to embrace again her black heritage and return to Harlem. Expectantly identifying with each new social milieu and anxious to experience fellow feeling, any sense of belonging, Helga seizes the promise each new turn in her life presents. By continually repeating this cycle, Larsen impresses upon the reader how Helga meets frustration again and again. The final effect paints sentimental identification as a mode of wish fulfillment. Freud classified wish fulfillment as the means of satisfying desire by participating in an involuntary thought process. Larsen, through her narrator, prods the reader to recognize the involuntary aspect of Helga's identificatory cycle.

If Helga is a sentimental reader, she is a sentimental reader of what often is classified as lowbrow literature, popular texts contrasted to their more literary counterparts, often classified as

“highbrow.” The distinction attempts to secure a difference in reading experiences: between the kind that expands one’s ability to empathize with the world and another that offers a more vicarious form of pleasure. Readers of lowbrow literature identify with a character to escape. Helga turns this act into an art; “escapism” becomes her character’s modus operandi. Each time Helga identifies with a social group she later finds its members to be neither grounded nor genuine. Thus, the initial exuberance of fellowship, the heady experience, fizzles out, only to reveal yet another false hope. Helga’s conflicted feelings concerning each social scene reflect some internal discord, while, at the same time, each setting reflects something of the injustices within it. Larsen uses this psychic duality—Helga’s experience as both an insider as well as an outsider of each social group—to construct a complex portrait of social power that can be misguided as often as efficacious. Likewise, Larsen uses this complex portrait to give life to a character who blends definite intellectual positions with the inner turmoil that marks emotional confusion.

After multiple phases of what emerges as a cycle of emotional identification and flight, the reader grows weary of Helga’s attempts to enter into fellowship with others. As a biracial child of her mother’s former relationship, Helga grew up in a hostile all-white environment under “the savage unkindness of her stepbrothers and sisters, and the jealous, malicious hatred of her mother’s husband” (Larsen 22). Larsen highlights how sympathy, or, more precisely, its absence, powerfully organizes Helga’s world. *Quicksand*’s narrative leads its reader to question Helga’s form of sympathizing—immersing the self with abandon, or put another way, emotional identification without reflection (the reader sees Helga’s form of sympathizing, in other words, as blocking her capacity to achieve discernment, the fruit of reflection). Larsen’s skill in positioning the reader, not alongside but above Helga’s travails, pushes the reader to reflect on the social and psychological mechanics of sympathy, not as it concerns a white audience but as it serves and

hinders one black woman.⁶³ For Helga, emotional identification serves as a psychological coping mechanism in a search for affirmation and acceptance. Helga uses it as a band-aid solution for the impoverished sense of self a life of rejection has bequeathed her. Similar to the white audience that looms large in mid-twentieth century criticism of sentimental fiction, Helga also seeks a form of fulfillment from human encounter—a sense of belonging and an affirmation of her own humanity. In this desire her character echoes Harriet Beecher Stowe’s model of sympathetic encounter, in which appeals to the heart have a transformative effect. Such appeals, as Kenneth Warren observes, help an audience “recogniz[e] that they themselves are but men and women whose feelings and passions need be engaged as reminders of their own humanity” (“The Afterlife”).

Larsen shows Helga experiencing isolation and invisibility even where she finds sympathy. At times this sympathy proves genuine, while, at others times, hollow, asking her to change for the price of acceptance. Even with a sharp intellect and captivating beauty, Helga cannot find fulfillment. Larsen manages to celebrate Helga’s humanity without relinquishing her authorial voice of protest. She constructs a novel of sympathy around a person with no sense of belonging and little self-worth. Does such a story require its author to write a tragic end? For W. E. B. Du Bois, even as multiple pregnancies defeat Helga physically and childrearing and poverty defeat her mentally, she “still” manages to appear, on some level, as “master” of her fate. Layne Craig explains this minor note of triumph (if one can construe it as such) as “Larsen’s critical engagement with social activists’ attempts to overmaster the ‘souls’ of poor women.” In the last

⁶³ So often the focus in analyses of twentieth-century sentimentality falls on its relation to a white audience, to their false consciousness. As Ralph Ellison perceived, before Baldwin’s indictment, that white Americans used sentimentality as a means of living with “their ethical schizophrenia” (Diller 488). While this critique rings true in instances, it also redirects our attention away from the good sentimentality has done and continues to do.

paragraphs of the novel, Craig claims, Larsen “reject[s] the racial and class-based depersonalization” of its heroine’s plight while “reinforcing her subjectivity even as she continues to lose economic and physical strength” (94). Larsen attests to how the human search for meaning abides even through great adversity.

I propose that reading *Quicksand* as a protest novel requires seeing in Helga’s story “the abiding human element through all the change in which it is implicated” (Babbitt, *Rousseau* 391). These are the words of a literary critic and conservative thinker Irving Babbitt. Though a largely forgotten figure, Babbitt represents an important interlocutor in my reading of Larsen. In referencing Babbitt’s philosophy of education and human nature, I situate my reading of Larsen’s characterization of Helga within a solid intellectual history in relation to her near contemporary.⁶⁴ Babbitt’s traditional vision offers an illuminating foil and a fitting complement to Larsen’s artistic portrait. Identifying within Helga’s story “the abiding human element” proves challenging because Helga changes herself so often to be many things to the many people in her worlds. Throughout all these changes, Helga never submits. Helga never abandons her hunger or loses her drive. In this sense, Helga’s tragedy harnesses a measure of hope, even as it indicts many around her.

3.1 RESISTING BIOGRAPHICAL CRITICISM

From initial reviews onward, Nella Larsen’s *Quicksand* has consistently been read as an autobiographical novel: an interpretive move that creates a curious amalgam in which novelist and

⁶⁴ Larsen was twenty-six years Babbitt’s junior and twenty-three years the junior of Du Bois.

protagonist bleed into one another.⁶⁵ Separating artistry from life proves vexing when it comes to Larsen, especially when one takes into account how she allowed the public to believe that like her protagonist Helga Crane she had lived abroad, first as a teenager visiting relatives and later as a student at the University of Copenhagen. No evidence exists to confirm these claims. Separating Larsen from her fiction, nonetheless, proves crucial for dispelling certain tendencies in the critical conversation around Larsen's work. As Barbara Johnson observes, "critics often praise Larsen for her psychological sophistication but then go on to interpret the novel in social, economic, and political terms" (254-5). With the canonicity Larsen acquired since Deborah McDowell's 1986 reissuing of her two novels, it becomes important to take into account Larsen's currency in our contemporary moment.

A good deal of the critical challenge around distinguishing between character and creator emerges as a result of Larsen's engagement with the nineteenth-century trope of the tragic mulatta, signaled by her epigraph from Langston Hughes's poem "Cross." I follow Eve Allegra Raimon in seeing the figure less as an instance of "mimetic realism" than a literary device carrying a potent "signifying power" (Raimon 6). Beginning with the abolitionist short stories of Lydia Maria Child, "The Quadroons" (1842) and "Slavery's Pleasant Homes" (1843), tragic mulatta narratives highlighted the vulnerability of light-skinned slaves. "The sexual vulnerability of a female light-skinned slave," as Raimon explains, "is essential to propel the plot forward and to generate the reader's sympathy and outrage. In the United States, the burgeoning of the genre of sentimental fiction in the early decades of the nineteenth century coincided with the appearance of the refined, orphaned, mixed-race slave character whose 'tragic' destiny is overdetermined by the iniquities of

⁶⁵ For example, Barbara Christian characterizes "Larsen's novels, as well as her life, [as] the quintessence of the tragic mulatta image" (*Black* 48).

plantation slavery” (5).⁶⁶ Tragedy visited their lives when they discovered their racial heritage and lost their freedom. Prior to discovery, the young, near-white characters exhibited striking poise, eloquence, and beauty. I follow Raimon in approaching the trope as “a recurrent device that places a more or less coherent body of literature into an ongoing dialogic relation,” as a narrative form “deployed ...to scrutinize the coextensive categories of race and nation” (6-7). As an intervention in cultural constructions of racial difference, the stock character was meant to testify to the feasibility of social integration, “to evoke white sympathy, and resist black stereotypes” (Glass 172). The trope of “passing” for white granted artistic license to authors to imagine a life of freedom and independence for enslaved people. Where earlier versions had the figure meet tragedy under slavery or white male violence, later versions turned to more personal afflictions: self-loathing, depression, and substance abuse. After abolitionism, the tragic mulatta “became a casualty of the color line,” a fate that continued to provoke sympathy and indignation (Manganelli).⁶⁷ By presenting the stock figure in a novel with a more realist than sentimental literary style, Larsen pursues a different set of emotions.

⁶⁶ In the same period in France, George Sand “likens the feminine condition to the condition of the slave in her 1842 preface to *Indiana*: ‘[T]he misfortunes of woman bring about those of man, like those of the slave bring about those of the master, and I have tried to show it in *Indiana*’ (Cohen 131). Margaret Cohen categorizes Sand’s first novel *Indiana* (1831) and Madame de Montpezat’s *Natalie* (1833) as “sentimental social novels” (123). In the terms of Cohen’s analysis, Sand and her contemporaries cast the struggle between individual freedom and collective obligation as a “conflict between the heart and the code as a variation on the sentimental conflict between opposing forms of rights” (133).

⁶⁷ William Wells Brown’s *Clotel* (1853), a sentimental novel about Thomas Jefferson’s slave daughters, follows the form, as does Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852). Stowe’s Eliza Harris, for example, represents a variation on this figure whose allure, physical beauty, and cultural refinement garnered reader sympathy. Stowe describes Eliza as fitting “that peculiar air of refinement, that softness of voice and manner, which seems in many cases to be a particular gift to the quadroon and mulatto woman. These natural graces in the quadroon are often united with beauty of the most dazzling kind, and in almost every case with a personal appearance prepossessing and agreeable” (17). Stowe’s use of the stock figure perpetuates an order of sympathy that operates according to white conventional standards of physical beauty. Judith Berzon explains this ramification in terms of plot: “The fact that many of these stereotyped characters are raised as... aristocratic white women and only discover their Negro blood as adults— allows white readers more identification with them than with full-blooded Negroes” (100).

In *Quicksand*, Larsen injects an edgy self-reflexivity into the figure, which allows her to level biting critical commentary on its historical function while still retaining the sentimental power in the form.⁶⁸ Dorothy Stringer defines Larsen’s “idiosyncratic, intensely ironic style” well when she identifies how a reader will find her prose “full of traps laid for critical sympathy” (68). Larsen’s portrayal of the tragic mulatta stirs up exasperation more than pity. While her prose set the reader up to feel coldness toward Helga, on the level of content, the narrative nonetheless concerns itself entirely with sympathy’s working. The effect of this novel presentation (*novel* in the sense of being both strange and matchless) is to draw the reader into witnessing, as a remote, detached observer, the cultural workings of sympathy: to notice the fellow feeling other characters’ feel in comparison with Helga’s isolation and despair. In doing this, Larsen reconfigures the sentimental narration of the tragic mulatta plot, not by telling a story that transports a reader beyond thought to pity or indignation but by crafting a narrative in which emotion figures largely as an object to contemplate rather than become ensnared by.⁶⁹ Loss of reason or ecstatic release may be

The conventionality around the form results from the tragic mulatta trope’s appropriation of white upper- and middle-class nineteenth-century notions of woman’s sacred place at the center of family and home, as virginal, obedient, and pure. In keeping with the code, the tragic mulatta often met death “in childbirth or w[as] driven to suicide to avoid sexual violation” (Manganelli 6).

⁶⁸ Leading critic on the Harlem Renaissance Nathan Huggins delimits Larsen’s artistry, however kindly, based on her work’s proximity to the tragic mulatta trope: “Nella Larsen came as close as any to treating human motivation with complexity and sophistication. But she could not wrestle free of the mulatto condition that the main characters in her two novels had been given. Once she made them mulatto and female the conventions of American thought—conditioned by the tragic mulatto and the light-dark heroine formulas—seemed to take the matter out of the author’s hands” (236). Rather than reading the conventions as limiting Larsen’s artistic expression, I read them as fodder for it. Emily Hinnov forwards a similar view in claiming Larsen “complicate[s]the sentimentalized tradition of the tragic ‘mulatta’ figure in American literature to interrogate issues of gender identity, racial oppression, sexuality and desire, work, marriage and ambition, reproduction and motherhood, family, class and social mobility” (93).

⁶⁹ Charles Larson’s commentary on *Quicksand*’s conclusion helps to clarify Larsen’s rejection of sentimental transport for her audience: “The grim ending implies that educated black women—sophisticated and cultured black women, middle-class black women—are trapped in life with no satisfactory alternatives. Sexuality must be repressed, yet intellect is a dangerous commodity, because thinking leads to unhappiness and misery. Since intelligence and passion cannot operate simultaneously

thematized to remarkable effect in the novel, but the narrative holds the reader to a different experiential standard, parallel to Helga's, to be sure, but not entwined with it. Though it is difficult to label Larsen's artistic practice sentimental, it nevertheless employs the sentimental strategy of finding in emotion the raw material upon which to deliver a moving moral vision. Works aiming to unite a readership in emotional solidarity were not new to the period. *The New Negro* (1925), Alain Locke's movement-defining anthology, partakes in a variation on this kind of sentimentalism, bringing black diaspora writings together under a unifying racial sentiment. The tragic mulatta trope, of course, animates the reverse of such a sentiment, thematizing the absence of fellow feeling. That absence should not distract readers from recognizing the trope's heavy investment in thinking about fellowship. As initial reviews indicate, Larsen roused in her readers a desire for a greater illustration of fellow feeling's presence.⁷⁰

The complexity of race feeling as a form of fellow feeling within the Harlem Renaissance comes into sharp focus in Larsen's work. "There were days when the mere sight of serene tan and brown faces about her stung her like a personal insult," Larsen writes of Helga, "Life became for her only a hateful place where one lived in intimacy with people one would not have chosen had one been given choice" (*Quicksand* 49).⁷¹ As one critic declares, "Helga's situation demands

with any degree of relative happiness, the only possible escape is into emotion—abandonment of the mind" (72-73).

⁷⁰ Though most of its exploration of fellow feeling revolves around race feeling, as one initial reviewer of the novel observed, Larsen's "tragedy of mistaken values [...] is a tragedy independent of social rank and racial distinction. *Quicksand* proves quite definitely that a colored author can blend successfully the ever-moving history of the American negro with the broad, universal problems that cling to humanity as a whole" (H. W.R. 2). Many initial reviews, nonetheless, found the absence of fellow feeling in the protagonist displeasing. Ruth L. Yates of the *Pittsburgh Courier* speculates that Helga may have found happiness "if [she] had been placed with other groups of Negroes," expressing a desire for an ending that offered Helga just that (8). *The Amsterdam News* critic also found Helga's perpetual dissatisfaction disheartening: "The reader, who has sympathized with [Helga up to her initial rejection of Harlem], wonders if there is any place this side of heaven, or in heaven, where she will be contented" (16).

⁷¹ Larsen also harbored ambivalent feelings about race and community, much like her protagonists. In a letter to Dorothy Peterson, an aspiring actress and member of the Negro Actors Guild, Larsen shared how

understanding and sympathy” (Larson 71). This demand grows all the more intriguing when one considers how Larsen’s prose impedes such sympathy and understanding. In *Quicksand*, narrative structure and form test reader sympathy.⁷² Appreciating the distinctiveness of Larsen’s literary expression requires that we disentangle the artist from her vivid characterizations, and read her literary expression as distinct from her life choices.

Larsen was born in Chicago in 1891 to a white Danish mother and an Afro-Caribbean father from the Danish West Indies. Her mother later married a white man and had a child with him. Raised in an all-white environment until the age of 16 when she attended Fisk University’s Normal School in Nashville, Tennessee, Larsen shared the biracial identity she gave her protagonists in *Quicksand* (1928) and *Passing* (1929). Much of Larsen’s life, however, departs from her protagonists’ lives. Larsen’s marriage brought her into society, not away from it, as Helga’s does. Larsen married Elmer Imes, the second African American to earn a doctoral degree in physics.⁷³ The couple did not have any children. After fourteen years of marriage, she and Imes divorced. As a professional, Larsen was also more qualified than Helga. Educated at Fisk University and the Lincoln Hospital School of Nursing, Larsen worked as an assistant

aligned with Helga she occasionally felt: “Right now when I look out into the Harlem streets I feel just like Helga Crane in my novel. Furious at being connected with all these niggers.” (65-66). Charles R. Larson records in his biography of Larsen that Peterson’s niece recalls “both women had a tendency to look down at darker skinned blacks (such as Zora Neale Hurston) and to take pride in their own lightness” (65-66).

⁷² As Sianne Ngai observes, Helga Crane’s tendency to become “irritated by nearly anything around her [...] both distances Helga *from*, and make her irritating *to* other characters in the novel” and readers of it (174). “‘Irritation’ becomes the index of a more general affective opacity at work throughout *Quicksand*, operating at the level of discourse as well as story, and at the level of reception as well as internal structure and form” (Ngai 175). Claudia Tate illustrates the mechanism by which Larsen works this estrangement in moments when “the narrator suspends the shared perspective and discontinues sympathetic rendering of Helga’s consciousness.” The prose “undermines Helga’s position as the novel’s desiring subject by imposing a separate and distinct narrator who now obscures Helga’s distress” (Tate 235).

⁷³ In the year of *Quicksand*’s publication, for example, she and Elmer hosted a cocktail party before the Countee Cullen-Yolande Du Bois wedding but “never made it to the ceremony because people kept arriving for cocktails until the time of the wedding had passed” (Larson 66).

superintendent of nurses at Fisk and later as a ward supervisor and teacher at Lincoln. In Tuskegee, Alabama, Larsen worked two years as a superintendent of nurses at Booker T. Washington's college. Where Helga desperately holds onto the idea of securing work as a librarian only to run from her interview, freshly alert to her underqualification for such a position, Larsen sustained a position as a librarian throughout the period of her life as an active writer (1926-1930). In that short time, she became a leading voice in the Harlem Renaissance, a successful author, winning multiple literary awards, including the Harmon Foundation prize for *Quicksand*. In 1930, she became the first black woman awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship for creative writing. The award funded a trip abroad to research a novel on "the difference in intellectual and physical freedom for the Negro—and the effect on him—between Europe, especially the Latin countries, France and Spain" (Larson 90). Larsen did not complete the novel, which would have been her third. Instead she left the Harlem social scene and returned to nursing. Despite the success she met through sponsorship, particularly from Carl Van Vechten, a white, gay critic, and novelist, Larsen found it difficult and then finally unmanageable to support herself as a professional writer. Tempting as it is to read *Quicksand* as its author's struggle to survive, this chapter contends that the novel offers something more in working the tragic mulatta form into a provocative new configuration.

3.2 LOCATING *QUICKSAND*'S HISTORICAL AND RHETORICAL CONTEXT

From depictions of the Tuskegee-styled school of Naxos to a meeting on Negro Health statistics in Harlem where the protagonist encounters her former boss and learns he has become a social worker, *Quicksand*'s investment in a humanitarian motif may hardly be said to be subtle. In its episodic, cyclic structure, Nella Larsen's novel plays out like a fugue with variations on a

leading melody of social aid. As a melody that surfaces in each of the novel's five parts, humanitarianism might even be seen as the main force propelling the narrative forward as Helga Crane moves from being an educated, upper middle class woman of some small means and impressive mobility to a married mother of four with no means and decidedly oppressive immobility.⁷⁴ Within the journey that comprises this plot arc, Helga encounters a string of benefactors, each of them representing differing styles of assistance.

Early in the novel, the plot makes quick work of shifting Helga from aid giver to aid recipient. And it is predominantly in her role as recipient that the narrative follows Helga in the ebb and flow of a life lived as the sometimes object of pity, as the on again, off again beneficiary of others' sympathies. Under such sentiments, Helga subsists. Against them, her life slowly unravels. While most critics of the novel view Larsen as refusing the conventions of

⁷⁴ The fusion of white modernist and New Negro movement aesthetics, a topic Ann Douglas explores in her book *Terrible Honesty*, is evidently an influence in two recent articles on *Quicksand*, one by Jeanne Scheper, the other, by Jessica Labbé; both critics draw parallels between Helga Crane and the modern *flâneuse*, and, in so doing, forward a modernist trope of resistance: mobility. For Scheper this trope "represent[s] the possibility for agency that resists the tragic mulatta narrative through imagining the potentiality for a nonxenophobic locality in the space of moving between" (693). Labbé curtails mobility's promise to a degree when she argues, "Helga's story must reveal the necessary truth of the black woman's, the woman's, and the human experience" (108). That truth, Labbé arrives at through Douglas who supposes that "self-destruction could precipitate its own transformation as grace" (Douglas 476). In contrast to all, I question the hope invested in the trope of mobility, the need to resist, wholesale, the tragic mulatta narrative in the first place, and even the move to read Helga, unhesitatingly, as an exemplar. And while I often find Douglas's work useful, I find Robert Bone's admonitory review of *Terrible Honesty* sobering, especially his warning against an impulse to turn history into myth.

Margo Jefferson gets at the complex positionality I am trying to gesture toward when she describes Helga as "working class by birth and upper middle class by assimilation." Jefferson, quite rightly, I think, sees Larsen's protagonist as "stranded between classes," suggestively adding: "the only race she really belongs to is the race of unwanted children." Race as a position within society that has consequences in terms of family structure is a point I will take up later in the chapter. I read Jefferson's formulation of the "race of unwanted children," not as forwarding a conception of race as "a state of being" but race as "bound up in certain political perspective and aspirations" (Luis-Brown 22). In this former sense, *Quicksand* depicts a conception of racial history that would support a history like the one W. E. B. Du Bois spoke of as the "red stain of bastardy, which two centuries of systemic legal defilement of Negro women had stamped upon his race" (6) and like the one Ta-Nehisi Coates lays out in his award-winning article, "The Case for Reparation." See also Beryl Satter's earlier argument, which Coates builds on, in *Family Properties: Race, Real Estate, and the Exploitation of Black Urban America*.

sentimentalism, what follows will explore what rises to the surface when a reader approaches the novel as critically engaging, rather than categorically rejecting, the sentimental mode of narration. When considered from such a vantage point, *Quicksand* looks like an exercise in plotting a subject's affective agency, that is, it appears as if the novel is graphing its protagonist's ability within the novel's world to appeal to public sympathy and thereby gain recognition and assistance.⁷⁵ Helga's skill in this regard fluctuates, if affective agency can even be conceived of as a skill one comes into (and out of) possession of. So often, as I will show, affective agency depends on the circumstances of larger rhetorical and historical contexts. Distinct from individual agency, affective agency relies on an individual's ability to perceive and harness the productive possibilities for sympathy within a set of circumstances in order to narrativize sympathy around oneself. By reading the novel through the frame of affective agency and for the contexts such framing emphasizes, I will offer an image of Larsen as a cultural critic exposing the untruths that slip into certain narrativizations of sympathy: as a critic, in other words, who would underscore the need for continued, more critically informed appeals to better forms of sympathy in the social sphere.

As a stock figure in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century sentimental literature, the figure of the sympathy-garnering tragic mulatta genre imports a host of unpleasant associations with slavery and awkward, passé attitudes regarding miscegenation. It is easy to see why critics might wish to see an author cast off this form. Adopting more of a dialectical approach to it allows me to read Larsen not only as a speaking from the past but also as speaking back to her own set of interlocutors. Earlier examples of the form have a more nuanced relationship to sympathy and

⁷⁵ As noted in my introduction, I borrow *affective agency* from Rebecca Wanzo who uses the term to think about sentimentality's implications (namely, its purchasing power) in contemporary media.

philanthropy than most accounts admit and than many who would subvert *Quicksand*'s relation to the genre allow.⁷⁶ I offer a reframing of the polarized positions in the existing literature that interpret *Quicksand* as either uncritically embracing or subverting the tragic mulatta genre. Like her contemporaries Jessie Fauset and Zora Neale Hurston, Larsen's work engaged the trope as a cultural horizon of her time. Since the resurgence of Larsen's novels in the 1980s, critics have claimed Larsen (as well as Fauset and Hurston) as defying the trope and its racial essentialism.⁷⁷ In taking a more moderate stance, I read *Quicksand* within a larger cultural tradition of sentimentalism of which it is a part—as, for example, an interlocutor of activist Frances Ellen Watkins Harper's *Iola Leroy* (1892) and the cultural heritage that conversation embodies. My more moderate approach draws on Rebecca Wanzo's appraisal of the larger cultural tradition of sentimentalism that I cited in the introduction: “[r]ather than characterizing U.S. sentimentality as ‘good’ or ‘bad’ politics, a more precise characterization [...] is to call it a politically effective but insufficient means of political change” (9). As with the tragic mulatta tradition, the sentimental tradition (in which the trope often appears) bears an ambiguous literary record whose meanings remain live and in flux. In imagining Larsen as critically engaging sentimentalism and its particular set of literary-rhetorical devices, I aim to leave a similar possibility open for reading *Quicksand*, that is, a possibility to effect an inadequate but nonetheless useful difference in how we understand relief work and stories meant to raise support for such work. Ascribing this revisionary intention to the novel leads me to see its protagonist as positioned in various settings partially as a means for her author to reject various models of humanitarian aid circulating in the given historical moment. By suggesting a different horizon for the political narrativization of sympathy, Larsen

⁷⁶ See Gregory Eiselein's reading of Harriet Wilson's *Our Nig* (5-9).

⁷⁷ See Appendix.

crafts a radical, penetrating novel against certain manifestations of sympathy and the concomitant forms of philanthropy they inspire.

Quicksand's narrative may be seen as disclosing a complex portrait of its object of humanitarian relief, set against the waning humanitarian fervor of the times. W. E. B. Du Bois, in his writing about the Tuskegee Institute and its leadership in 1901, characterizes his period in the following way: "Mr. Washington came with a clear simple programme, at the psychological moment, at a time when the nation was a little ashamed of having bestowed so much sentiment on Negroes and was concentrating its energies on Dollars" (*Souls* 24). By 1903, Du Bois was exhorting "the Talented Tenth," the most educated members of the African American community to assume responsibility for lifting everyone in their race. Nearly three decades later, Larsen writes in a considerably better moment. Still, as Ann Douglas explains, "The New Negro was a figure with few claims on mainline America's attention, interest, or sympathy. If he insulted or displeased, he could be cut off, erased, without thought or regret" (104).⁷⁸ Larsen depicts her period's humanitarian fervor as conflicted. While the state of wider society's concern for black welfare was as bleak as she clearly apprehended, Larsen herself benefited from the strong presence of patrons during the Harlem Renaissance. Individual patronage and institutional philanthropy were more extensive for black artists and writers in the 1920s and 1930s than any earlier period.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Douglas continues, "Inevitably, then, 'terrible honesty' in black Manhattan, whether in a novel, a blues song, or a Broadway venue, was an affair of subversion rather than assertion, of creative deceit and displacement rather than denunciation and attack" (104). In other words, white modernists could afford assertion while their black counterparts could not. And subversion, creative deceit, and displacement, an artist's tools of indirection, were the ones Larsen picked up and skillfully wielded.

⁷⁹ Financial support in the form of gifts and awards was crucial for writers and artists during the New Negro Movement. Some notable patrons included Alain Locke, James Weldon Johnson, A'Lelia Walker, Albert C. Barnes, Charlotte Osgood Mason, Nancy Cunard, Joel Spingarn, and William E. Harmon. The Spingarn Medal sustained many writers and artists between 1924 and 1931; the Harmon Foundation did the same, starting in 1926 (Jones 11; Soto 59). The Rockefellers' General Education Board and the Julius Rosenwald Fund supported key figures like James Weldon Johnson, Arna Bontemps, Langston Hughes, Claude

Money, however, was awarded more frequently to male writers than their female counterparts (Hull 7). In a letter to her “loyal friend” and patron Carl Van Vechten, penned the same month *Quicksand* was published, Larsen complained about a committee trying to raise \$2,500 for Du Bois’s birthday gift: “Some nerve I say. I’m about to celebrate a birthday too and I feel like writing and telling them that. I could use \$2500 myself. In fact I think it will do me more good at thirty-five than him at sixty” (T. Davis 250, 401).⁸⁰ In tempered form, the letter’s bitter wit and shrewd appraisal find their way into *Quicksand*.

As Helga moves through various political climates, from the rhetoric of racial uplift in rural Georgia to the class consciousness of the Talented Tenth in urban Harlem, she passes judgment, usually quite volatile judgment, on the various discursive structures that support them. The first half of the novel presents a series of unpromising career moves from Helga’s position as a teacher in Georgia to her job as a secretary for a social activist in Chicago to her work as a clerk at an insurance agency in Harlem.⁸¹ The final half of the novel moves Helga from Copenhagen back to the rural South again, in her most jarring transition of all, from primitivist-styled socialite and muse to matrimony and motherhood. Taken as a whole, these role changes in the text slowly expose a pattern of critique as Larsen’s chronically dissatisfied protagonist engages system upon system of failed social relations until the novel delivers its final indictment of those social

McKay, Zora Neale Hurston, and Aaron Douglas (Anderson 966). Larsen herself would win a fellowship from the Guggenheim Foundation in 1930.

⁸⁰ Thadious Davis also records Larsen’s irritation at Walter and Gladys White’s tendency to dote on their children, again wryly joking to Van Vechten in a letter about their “heir apparent” carrying on a name that takes up “only five pages ... in the New York telephone directory ... Now if it had been Van Vechten, or Imes——” (T. Davis 250).

⁸¹ The diminution in status Helga experiences from one job to the next might be read as a story about how a Kafkaesque bureaucratic anonymity swallows up young female talents in this period. As Liam O’Loughlin writes, “Bureaucratic aesthetics are almost always associated with minutiae,” and Helga, one can only imagine, finds herself steeped in aesthetics of just this sort, from Mrs. Hayes-Rore’s stale speeches to the paperwork at Mr. Darling’s insurance firm.

structures in placing Helga on the other side of the fence, so to speak, as a member of the very community she was meant to be aiding at Naxos.⁸² Overwhelmed by children, dogged by illness, and living in a stable that had once sheltered a rich man's horses, Helga's final set of living circumstances frankly raise the gap between Harlem's educated class and the rest of the country's rural poor to visibility.

A decade after *Quicksand*'s publication, the Negro Renaissance began to take stock of its legacy in the late thirties and to measure the movement's success in relation to outreach, specifically its relationship with the black communities beyond Harlem. In his autobiography *The Big Sea* (1940), Langston Hughes issued a rather damning indictment of the divide between Harlem artists and the wider population of African Americans in the country: "[O]rdinary Negroes hadn't heard of the Negro Renaissance. And if they had, it hadn't raised their wages any" (226). Writing with the retrospective gaze of a six-year tenure as the president of The League of Struggle for Negro Rights, the main civil rights organization of the American Communist Party, Hughes' frustration is palpable. His appraisal of the Renaissance, then, can be read as bound up in the failures experienced in the fight against Jim Crow, lynching, and economic inequality, a fight in which the white social reformers were largely perceived as ineffectual. In the same year, Richard Wright forwarded a similar view in his portrayal of white reformers in *Native Son* (1940).⁸³ Before either Hughes or Wright, Larsen grasped the urgency in expanding the narrative reach of stories meant to garner sympathy for those in dire need; more specifically, Larsen discerned the

⁸² Helga's chronic dissatisfaction, "her whimsical and unsatisfied soul," as Du Bois characterized it, also evokes a strain within romanticism, for example Goethe's unappeasable Faust who wishes for death over contentment or Wordsworth's line from "The Prelude": "And something evermore about to be" ("Two Novels" 202; Wordsworth 63). Helga possesses the wakefulness and restlessness that makes for good literary consciousness. Her dissatisfaction also gives her humanity.

⁸³ See Amy Carreiro's article, "Ghosts of the Harlem Renaissance: 'Negrotarians' in Richard Wright's *Native Son*."

narrowness in such stories, a narrowness that ends up excluding certain subjects (even whole groups of people) from sympathy's benefits.⁸⁴

This urgent need to reach a receptive, discerning audience ready to sympathize in new ways is one of *Quicksand*'s main investments. The novel unfolds this investment through various stories of sentimental identification—stories of origin, of humanitarian fervor, of racial pride, of religious conviction—even as it undoes the conventional thinking that would make such identifications coherent. Again and again, the novel's subplots expose how often particular types of stories go unheard, how little the supposedly important people hear from those in need of assistance until the final twist in *Quicksand*'s plot delivers its closing comment on the divide between certain high cultural forms and common folk concerns when Helga truly learns what kind of help the rural poor need. Read in these terms, Larsen's novel becomes a prescient, if unassuming, artifact in the history of the American protest novel. Sounding, if not resounding, well before the landmark dialogue between Richard Wright and James Baldwin, Larsen's voice acerbically speaks to an issue at the heart of their exchange, an exchange largely about how to place the individual within a social world, whether that placement leads to the human being's obscurity or centrality. In its

⁸⁴ Larsen shows how being ladylike, for example, places one in an exclusive category for gaining sympathy's attention. This issue brings Larsen's *Quicksand* into dialogue with earlier novels about black female activism, often with more straightforward sentimental characteristics, such as Frances Harper's *Iola Leroy*. As Barbara Christian notes, "Frances Harper [...] in her preface to *Iola Leroy*, made clear her purpose when she wrote that 'her story's mission would not be in vain if it awoken in the hearts of our countrymen a stronger sense of justice and a more Christian-like humanity.' [...] *Iola Leroy* is a version of the 'lady' Americans were expected to respect and honor, even though she is black. By creating a respectable ideal heroine, according to the norms of the time, Harper was addressing not herself, black women, or black people, but her (white) countrymen" ("Trajectories" 234). Tracing a trajectory of black-authored female characters from Harper's *Iola Leroy* to Pauline Hopkins's Sappho Clark to Jessie Fauset's Angela Murray to Larsen's Helga Crane, Christian argues that they become increasingly more heedless of respectable femininity's dictates until Larsen's heroine, "though restricted by conventional morality, senses the power of her sensuality and the lie the image of the lady represents" ("Trajectories" 236). My own emphasis here focuses less on aspects of sexual repression than on the ways a ladylike image structures sentimental appeal. Under such a standard, women who fail to fit the type lose the benefits a sympathetic audience might provide.

negotiation of the place of the human in the protest novel, Larsen's first book is an important way station for conversations invested in sentimental literary form as a persistent presence in twentieth century texts, on the one hand, and wider questions about the relation of educational programs to forms of humanitarian aid, on the other.

In the opening scene of the novel, the reader finds Helga frustrated with her teaching post at Naxos, a college near Atlanta, Georgia. *Quicksand* places its initial setting in dialogue with Du Bois's critique of Tuskegee.⁸⁵ First published in *The Dial* (1901) and later republished in its extended form in *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), Du Bois's piece urged Booker T. Washington and "the thinking classes of American Negroes" to liberalize their souls, speaking out, as he did, against a form of "reconciliation between the North and South [...] marked by the industrial slavery and civic death of those same black men" (*Souls* 32). Du Bois believed that teaching technical skills was not sufficient and that African Americans required a classical education to develop strong leaders. Once the most educated, brightest minds became leaders, Du Bois claimed, they would see to the general benefit of all.

Du Bois's critique of Washington in many ways amounts to the same call Irving Babbitt would issue only five years later to the thinking classes at Harvard, namely, that its curriculum guard against false forms of humanitarianism. Unlike Babbitt, Du Bois did not oppose vocationalism as long as it existed alongside equal access to liberal education, schools that would forward in his eloquent words: "intelligence, broad sympathy, knowledge of the world that was and is, and of the relation of men to it" (Du Bois, "Talented" 33). Both believed a renewed

⁸⁵ Although published in 1928, the initial part of the largely autobiographical *Quicksand* draws on Larsen's early memories, first as a student then as a teacher. Larsen left Fisk University in 1908; she arrived at Tuskegee Institute in mid-November of 1915, and would grow increasingly dissatisfied with the educational structures there.

commitment to the programmatic pursuit of the liberal arts promised solid leaders, thus assuring the nation's well-being.⁸⁶

Early twentieth-century institutions changed curricula in response to pressing social issues facing an industrial post-Civil War nation. Babbitt spoke out against higher education's turn away from its pre-Civil War tradition emphasizing the Classics and the traditional humanities curriculum. A longstanding member of Harvard's French department (1894-1933), his students included T. S. Eliot and George Santayana, though he influenced many more.⁸⁷ As a leading member of the New Humanists, Babbitt supported a renewed commitment to the programmatic pursuit of humanism and opposed "the ideal of operational utility, which tended to focus upon science and the world of affairs" (Harris 55). He viewed humanistic education as the study of what the human imagination has produced, paired with human reason and an awareness of human nature. Like Harriet Beecher Stowe, Babbitt was steeped in Ohio's Calvinist culture. In his move east, Babbitt abandoned Calvinism but kept his faith in a disciplined mind to guide society to peace and flourishing. Babbitt saw that religion had lost its foothold in guiding Americans to the good life and sought to fill the vacuum it had left with education. His dualistic view of human nature looked back in structure to the "Calvinist notion of the unregenerate man." He borrowed from Henri Bergson the idea of *élan vital*, a human's drive after knowledge, pleasure, and power, and

⁸⁶ For a recent article revealing the striking similarities of this unlikely pair, see David Withun's article.

⁸⁷ Claes G. Ryn cites many who were influenced by Babbitt: Paul Elmer More [...] T. S. Eliot, Walter Lippmann, Gordon Keith Chalmers, Louis Mercier, Austin Warren and, in a younger generation, Russell Kirk, Nathan Pusey and Peter Viereck. For many, Babbitt stood for a lack of modernization or, under Mencken's caricature of him, outmoded Puritanism. Among his opponents, Ryn lists Edmund Wilson, Joel Spingarn, R. P. Blackmur, Oscar Cargill, Sinclair Lewis and Ernest Hemingway (10). Many regarded Babbitt to be the target of Sinclair Lewis's 1922 satiric novel whose title bears his name. A fervent supporter of Lewis and one of Babbitt's most vocal critics, H. L. Mencken celebrated the novel as a perfect portrait of all that was holding America back as a society. Babbitt imagined American society's well-being in different terms.

opposed to it *frein vital*, the human capacity for “inner control,” which keeps an individual’s *élan vital* in check (Harris 53).⁸⁸ Babbitt advocated for higher education to instill this kind of self-discipline in students.

He saw philanthropists such as E. H. Harriman and John D. Rockefeller as operating outside such a model. With such men in mind, Babbitt writes,

Unfortunately a man may be trained for service and trained for power and yet be only a philanthropic anarchist. In Schiller’s “Robbers” (1781), which was written when Germany was filled with the influence of Rousseau, one of the robbers praises his chief not only as an apostle of liberty but as *a man of overflowing sympathies*. [...] It seems hardly necessary to draw the analogy between this philanthropic brigand and some captain (Kidd) of industry of our own day. [...] What is wanted is not training for service and training for power, but training for wisdom and training for character. A list of questions was recently sent around to graduates of the women’s colleges as to the relative importance of certain virtues. A majority of those who replied decided that *love of humanity* is a more important virtue than *self-control*. This is a view of human nature that may be pardonable in a young woman just out of college. What are we to think of our present leaders of public opinion who apparently hold a similar view? Let a man first show that he can act on himself, there will then be time enough for him to act on other men and on the world. If we are told that we should give no thought to ourselves, but live entirely for others, we should reply with Dr. Johnson that our first endeavor should be to

⁸⁸ In *The New Laokoon*, Babbitt continues writing in opposition to Rousseauian ethics. His discussion here provides a basis for reading *frein vital* as an important check on imperial expansion, which becomes an aspect of cultural decadence in his reading. See chapter five of William S. Smith’s *Democracy and Imperialism* for further discussion of this relation.

rid our minds of cant, of which every age has its own special variety; and that this being a philanthropic age, it behooves us to *rid our minds of the cant of philanthropy*. (*Literature* 106-108, emphasis added)

Babbitt sounds like he is objecting to a nation of sentimental readers. To return to the model of sentimental transformation Stowe offers in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, consider Senator Bird's response to the runaway slave Eliza. Like Senator Bird, the sentimental reader finds it difficult to control himself, to hold back tears, in the face of human suffering. Such a loss of control, however, does not indicate a lack of self-possession. Senator Bird's response, as Stowe presents it, arises from a core part of himself, confirming his truest values. Before encountering Eliza, Senator Bird's talk mouths the commonplaces from drafters of the Fugitive Slave Act. Passing the law, he told his wife, was in the best interest of the union. Eliza's sentimental appeal, the magic of her real presence, acts only to press the senator into acting in a manner consistent with his deepest beliefs.

Helga's attempts at emotional identification, as I argue below, often lead her away from her core self. Much of the novel presents a protagonist that appears uncertain about her core self, even as she displays considerable assurance and certainty in her judgment of others. Our measure of Helga's bearing and the self-possession she displays grows complicated when we take into account Larsen's understated setting: Helga must navigate a racial caste system. Her self-control, in this respect, must be acknowledged to be considerable. She manages to move in a hostile environment without entirely becoming engulfed by it.

Babbitt utterly fails to address the social consequences of racism in his writing on education. This blind spot does not make his ideas about self-control unusable, but it does require consideration. Sentimentalism as I defined it in my introduction calls precisely on the tradition of self-control Babbitt wishes to see more of; its moral vision requires that a man be able to "first ...

act on himself,” to be moved by emotions without remaining in their thrall. In this sense (one that is often overlooked), sentimental responsiveness can operate with more complexity than the popular caricature of the sentimental reader leads us to believe. Babbitt harbors no qualms in his general dismissal of sentimentality; nonetheless, I understand his objections to be directed at the caricatured temperament of a sentimental reader and the operation of judgment it sets in place. In doing so, Babbitt alights, however anachronistically, on the pulse of Larsen’s characterization of Helga in pitting overflowing sympathies against self-control. Here is how Larsen characterizes her protagonist: “A peculiar characteristic trait, cold, slowly accumulated *unreason* in which all values were distorted or else ceased to exist, had with surprising ferociousness shaken the bulwarks of that *self-restraint* which was also, curiously, a part of her nature” (5, emphasis added).⁸⁹ The problem of psychological polarity Larsen depicts through Helga can be read as both as an index of the sexism, classism and racism that have profoundly shaped her sense of self as well as a call to explore how Helga’s discerning intellect and fierce passion guide, often misguide, her judgment. Karen Chandler contends that Larsen, in creating a character with such “polarized vision [...] calls on readers to challenge Helga’s way of knowing the world, in addition to critiquing that world’s injustices” (44). To a considerable degree, Helga’s way of knowing the world derives from her habit of sentimentally reading a social scene, and then, when discontent sets in, ironically reading the same scene. First, Helga emotionally identifies with a group, then she snaps out of fellowship with it. As a reader encountering this recurring conflict in Helga’s inner world, it becomes difficult to decide how much of her indecision to attribute to context and how much of it simply defines

⁸⁹ Although Susan Jacoby’s *The Age of American Unreason* (2008) focuses on the second half of the twentieth century, her analysis of a cultural trend to confuse opinion and fact remains suggestive for understanding Helga within a larger cultural context of anti-rationalism as it characterizes American culture today.

her soul. Where Babbitt characterizes human nature in dualistic terms, Helga tends toward psychological polarity. Where Babbitt proposes a dialectic that resolves for good or ill, Helga takes up alternating poses, the sentimental and ironic, that only appear oppositional. In reality, the two reactive stances cause her to remain stuck in place: their friction actually proves complementary.

3.3 “ON THE SHIFTING QUICKSANDS OF SENSIBILITY”: THE EDUCATED MIND OF HELGA

CRANE

The novel’s opening characterization of Helga portrays a young woman just out of college who bears a striking resemblance in cast of mind to Babbitt himself. Consider how Helga identifies what Naxos has become under the white donor’s generosity, or what might as easily have been called his philanthropic cant:

This great community, she thought, was no longer a school. It had grown into a machine. It was now a show place in the black belt, exemplification of the white man’s magnanimity, refutation of the black man’s inefficiency. Life had died out of it. It was, Helga decided, now only a big knife with cruelly sharp edges ruthlessly cutting all to a pattern, the white man’s pattern. Teachers as well as students were subjected to the paring process, for it tolerated no innovations, no individualism. Ideas it rejected, and looked with open hostility on one and all who had the temerity to offer a suggestion or ever so mildly express a disapproval. (4-5)

Helga sees how Naxos is under the sway of a similarly pious sentiment. And after hearing “that holy white man of God” speak to the whole school, speak about how glad he was that the administrators and students of Naxos “knew what was expected of them,” “knew enough to stay

in their places,” she knows she has had enough of the pretense in the institution’s newfound sense of itself (3).⁹⁰

Guided by her angry appraisal of the state of learning at Naxos, Helga yearns for the “selection and judgment” necessary for a more robust education. In this she resembles Babbitt, a scholar at pains to rescue leisure from loafing in pursuit of “the humanist’s passion for wholeness” (Babbitt 94). Defending the humanist “principle of selection and restraint,” Babbitt criticizes Rousseau who “would ... rest virtue on the shifting *quicksands of sensibility*” (Babbitt 101, 98, emphasis added). Not to belabor the uncanny mirroring between this unlikely pair, it is, nevertheless, suggestive to consider how Babbitt foreordains the dominant qualities that will define Helga: her self-restraint rules for the majority of the novel, that is, until she falls into the shifting quicksands of sensibility. While Helga’s restraint is often read as a sign of her sexual repression, given the educational setting that opens the novel, I’m inclined to read it more expansively, as embroiled in the struggle between technical and humanist models of education, worked out at the level of the protagonist’s individual psychology—the difference represented in the struggle to be functional or to be free.⁹¹

⁹⁰ Later in the novel on a smaller scale, the fashionable social set in Copenhagen will undergo a parallel transformation in Helga’s mind when she moves from viewing the group as cosmopolitan and welcoming to small-minded and stiff.

⁹¹ More recent critical commentaries on Helga’s restraint approach it in terms of sexuality: see Kimberly Monda (26), Ann Hostetler (37) and Esteve (275). For a more modified position, see Johanna Wagner: “The shame is for him, and by extension, for herself because of him; simply put, she is embarrassed by this man who is unable to restrain himself in her presence, this man who noticeably cannot control his passions (see Larsen 1986, 84, 74, 59)” (142). But the most compelling response to Helga’s restraint remains Du Bois’s. As Du Bois saw it, Larsen’s image of restraint in Helga Crane stood in stark contrast to McKay’s “utter absence of restraint” in *Home to Harlem*. In a striking article on *Home to Harlem*’s place within black transnationalism, John Lowney observes the irony of Du Bois’s review appearing in the same issue as Clement Wood’s report on U.S. policy in Haiti, as the novel would go on to be a major anti-imperialist force among black intellectuals in the Caribbean. Lowney marvels at the fact that Du Bois writes so little “about the Haitian intellectual whose narrative illustrates the destructive impact of an imperial policy that the same issue of *The Crisis* protest. ... the story of a Haitian migrant appears to have little place in a novel about Harlem” (413).

Larsen's narrator gives early exposition to this struggle in her complex psychological portrait of Helga. That this portrait develops on the heels of her seething critique of the educational institution underscores the analogy the novel would draw between social institutions and psychological qualities, a relation Babbitt himself presumes when he champions "training for wisdom and training for character" over and above "training for service and training for power." Consider how Larsen's narration accents this institution-individual analogy by jarringly transitioning between the two:

Enthusiasm, spontaneity, if not actually suppressed, were at least openly regretted as unladylike or ungentlemanly qualities. The place was smug and fat with self-satisfaction. A peculiar characteristic trait, cold, slowly accumulated *unreason in which all values were distorted or else ceased to exist*, had with surprising ferociousness shaken *the bulwarks of that self-restraint which was also, curiously, a part of her nature*. (5, emphasis added)

The intended object of the sentence's description does not receive clear referent until the final two words of the sentence, which is, furthermore, subordinated to the position of the object of the prepositional phrase: *her nature*. The quality of suppressing enthusiasm and spontaneity is not so easily distinguished from Helga's *essential* trait of self-restraint.⁹² Unreason and sentiment, on the

⁹² The use of *nature* would seem to imply that Helga's self-restraint has an essential, fixed, and indwelling quality, a personality trait that is given rather than made. This old-fashioned mode of characterization, at least as surface appearances go, might pose a challenge to readings of *Quicksand* that take a more post-structuralist view. As Michael Black writes, "The world of moral transactions in which the individual is seeking to preserve a balance, achieve a surplus, or avoid a deficit, is the world of the social self, the unit in the economy of moral-economic men and women. It gives only a partial, though often dismayingly powerful glimpse of all that a person really is. That concept of human nature cannot be contemplated in repose. It can only be glimpsed in action. But there is the possibility of other insights which one might call contemplative or poetic or *essentialist* rather than analytical" (22). Glimpsed in action, Helga's self-restraint appears as a socioeconomic, even political, imperative when, broke and unemployed in Chicago, a job offer presents itself on somewhat insulting terms and she "couldn't afford anger" in refusing it (32); and yet, her

one hand, and self-restraint and detachment, on the other, represent two warring sides in Helga's nature, sides that set up an oscillating movement within the narrative action and shape the image of agency it offers. Consider the narrative's first foray into what will become its dominant pattern:

And now that it [unreason] had waned as quickly as it had risen, she smiled again, and this time the smile held a faint amusement, which wiped away the little hardness which had congealed her lovely face. Nevertheless she was soothed by the impetuous discharge of violence, and a sigh of relief came from her.

She said aloud, quietly, dispassionately: "Well, I'm through with that," and, shutting off the hard, bright blaze of the overhead lights, went back to her chair and settled down with an odd gesture of sudden soft collapse, like a person who had been for months fighting the devil and then unexpectedly had turned round and agreed to do his bidding. (5)

Helga's dispassion is also suggestively polarized in relation to good and evil, absolutes that graph a therapeutic process curiously lacking in moral direction.⁹³ Her emotional distance here excuses her from any further investment in her surroundings. Mimicking the motion of a Newton's Cradle, Helga begins from a high point, in her case of embroiled, impassioned reaction, and ends in a resting pose marked by ironic detachment.⁹⁴ As a model of an educated mind at work, this example is troubling.

self-restraint, like much of her character possesses, as Tate calls it, an "elusive factor" that grants her a poetic indeterminacy and protects her, to a certain extent, from readings that would reduce her individuality to purely racial and sexual factors (240).

⁹³ Stowe's Augustine St. Clare comes to mind as a character evidencing a similar pattern of ironic detachment. See Faye Halpern's excellent section in *Sentimental Readers*, "Why St. Clare Must Die" (128-133). The problem, Halpern explains, has to do with his complicating a more straightforward model of identification: "St. Clare *needs* to die because he brings up the question of endless interpretation in a book that wants to deny its existence. He makes everything—including the people around him—seem complex" (130).

⁹⁴ In this opening characterization of Helga's inner life, her emotional movements illustrate what Janet Todd defines as *sentiment*, the process by which strong feeling leads to moral judgment (7) (As I explain in the

3.4 “ONE SYMPATHETIC TEACHER”: HELGA CRANE AS DISHEARTENED AID WORKER

Helga reaches a decision about her next move as an ironic reader of her life, not a sentimental one. To deliver this crucial moment of judgment, Larsen constructs Helga’s critique of her environment through a focalized, retrospective gaze:

Helga Crane had taught in Naxos for almost two years, at first with the keen joy and zest of *those immature people* who have dreamed dreams of *doing good* to their fellow men. But gradually this zest *was blotted out*, giving place to a deep hatred for the trivial hypocrisies and careless cruelties which were, unintentionally perhaps, a part of the Naxos policy of uplift. Yet she had continued to try not only to teach, but to befriend those happy singing children, whose charm and distinctiveness the school was so surely ready to destroy. Instinctively Helga was aware that their smiling submissiveness covered many poignant heartaches and perhaps much secret contempt for their instructors. But

introduction, I sharply diverge from Todd in locating *sentiment* as the end result of a mental act.) In Helga, Larsen continually highlights how context-dependent such strong feelings can be, showing how Helga’s feelings respond to situations that do not allow her full expression or freedom. While literary and cultural examples support Todd’s characterization of the sentimental as signifying a mawkish and vapid dependence on emotion, my identification of sentimentalism as literary forms that bring a community of sympathetic persons together invests emotion with a more structured, removed quality, where one can feel moved by a text without becoming totally engrossed by it (6–7).

Helga’s tendency toward the ironic, on the precipice of another life-changing decision (to leave Copenhagen), appears more explicitly in relation to art, when Larsen uses it to describe her stance as a repeated viewer of a minstrel show: “Her old unhappy questioning mood came again upon her, insidiously stealing away more of the contentment from her transformed existence. But she returned again and again to the Circus, *always alone*, gazing intently and solemnly at gesticulating black figures, *an ironical and silently speculative spectator*” (77). Ten pages later, the reader finds Helga saying goodbye to Denmark. This move could be interpreted as a move toward a more nationalist identity on Helga’s part, for it happens to be one of the moments of racial allegiance, rather than rejection. If Helga’s posture as a consumer of this particular transnational cultural form (minstrelsy) suggests anything crucial about her tendency to be an ironic, mocking reader of her world, it might point to how irony moves a spectator to identity consolidations—and quite reactive, rigid ones at that, the kind of identifications that shut down inquiry and an openness to other possible viewpoints or stances.

she was powerless. In Naxos between teacher and student, between condescending authority and smoldering resentment, the gulf was too great, and too few had tried to cross it. It couldn't be spanned by *one sympathetic teacher*. It was useless to offer her atom of friendship, which under the existing conditions was neither wanted nor understood. (5, emphasis added)

Consider how Helga's ironic stance in the above passage acts to distance her from the humanitarian problem in her environment. A move to diagnose extracts her from the situation. The earlier textual immediacy generated from Helga's impassioned critique of Naxos's "great community" has dropped away. As the first of several decision-making processes in the novel, this passage sets up a significant pattern of action and picture of agency, an agency whose underlying impetus is a form of irony affixed to the protagonist's gaze.

Under this approach, the image of the sentimental objects of Helga's humanitarian aid receives a dynamic portraiture. Consider the portrait's movement from happy singing children to smilingly submissive children to secretly contemptuous children. Note, too, the direction of this contempt, for Helga is on the other end of it. As such, she is "powerless." Indeed, she is quite tellingly rendered powerless here because of her situation. With Gramscian insight, the narration typifies the student-teacher relationship at Naxos as a failed relation between the intellectual and the masses. Sympathy, or the sympathetic friendship forged between teacher and student, Helga quite clearly sees, is a flawed approach, given the system. Conceiving her role at Naxos as *acting on* rather than *acting with* the community, she does not see why her students might hold her in contempt, but rather visualizes their pain through the generalized image, the likely quite ironic image, of their "many poignant heartaches." But Helga does see enough of a failed situation to allow Larsen to critique a certain brand of sentimental humanitarianism. Larsen's view at this early

point in the narrative appears to align with what Du Bois and Babbitt argue in common. Larsen seems to be suggesting that a humanist overhauling of Naxos' uplift goals might do the institution some good.

3.5 “YOU’RE A LADY”: HELGA’S RESPONSE TO THE POLITICS OF RESPECTABILITY

Larsen’s critical portrait of the school takes another turn when Helga enters the principal’s office to tender her resignation. If the white preacher had presented a rather dire picture as the first of the text’s compendium of humanitarians, Dr. Anderson presents a rosier one, his oratory managing, if only momentarily, to fan the embers of Helga’s flagging commitment:

“Some day you’ll learn that lies, injustice, and hypocrisy are a part of everyday ordinary community. *Most people achieve a sort of protective immunity*, a kind of callousness, toward them. If they didn’t, they couldn’t endure. I think there’s less of these evils here than in most places, but because we’re trying to do such a big thing, to aim so high, the ugly things show more, they irk some of us more. Service is like clean white linen, even the tiniest speck shows.” *He went on, explaining, amplifying, pleading.*

Helga Crane was silent, feeling a mystifying yearning which sang and throbbed in her. She felt again that urge for service, *not now for her people, but for this man* who was talking so earnestly of his work, his plans, his hopes. An insistent need to be a part of them sprang in her. With compunction tweaking at her heart for even having entertained the notion of deserting him, she resolved not only to remain until June, but to return next year.

She was shamed, yet stirred. It was not sacrifice she felt now, but actual desire to stay,

and to come back next year.

He came, at last, to the end of the long speech, only part of which she had heard. “You see, you understand?” he urged.

“Yes, oh yes, I do.” (19, emphasis added)

The principal delivers a speech that is both unsentimental and pragmatic. Frankly acknowledging the presence of lies and injustice, Dr. Anderson advises Helga to accept a certain amount of flawed reality, promising her “a sort of protective immunity” will ensue after she does. His message carries nuance and urges Helga to compromise. Such earnest content, however, does not sway Helga; instead, it is Dr. Anderson’s captivating presence that moves her: his gentle, “deep voice of peculiarly pleasing resonance” and the “searching” gaze of his “piercing gray eyes” (18, 21).

Bodily, her response approximates that of a pulp romance reader: “a mystifying yearning ... sang and throbbed in her.” Helga converts to Dr. Anderson’s vision as a stereotypical sentimental reader might, persuaded not by the word or reason but by embodied and attractive oration. While I read Helga’s responsiveness as a popular caricature of the sentimental reader, many critics presume this presentation of the sentimental reader as typical. For example, Karen Sánchez-Eppler contends, “Reading sentimental fiction is [...] a bodily act, and the success of a story is gauged, in part, by its ability to translate words into pulse beats and sobs” (100). Fictionalized examples of this kind of transport exist as well, for example, in Henry James’s *The Bostonians* (1886), where Verena Tarrant’s captivating oratory works indiscriminately, breathing hypnotic persuasion into any topic. While there is ample evidence that some forms of sentimental fiction produce such hypnotic responses in their audience, it is equally true that others stimulates more thoughtful responses. In not attending to such examples, critics risk distorting the model of sentimental readership and thereby discounting the good the genre has done and continues to do

in its subtler manifestations. As a response to Dr. Anderson's practical vision, Helga's sentimental responsiveness proves interesting. While the narrative goes on to show how short-lived this responsiveness turns out to be, it also shows how folded into the fabric of everyday life it is, thus illustrating how often sentimental responsiveness and a critical, alert consciousness can comfortably coexist.

Toward the end of Dr. Anderson's rousing talk, the reader is told, "He had won her. [...] She knew that she would stay" (19-20). Then, the Dean decides to pay Helga a compliment. He tells her she possesses "an elusive something" and then adds: "Perhaps I can best explain it by the use of that *trite* phrase, 'You're a lady.'" "You have dignity and breeding" (20, emphasis added). Even if *trite* manages to do a moderate job of tipping off the reader to the objectionable in the principal's compliment, Helga's retort retains its shock value: "If you're speaking of family, Dr. Anderson, why, I haven't any. I was born in a Chicago slum."⁹⁵ Larsen makes sure a larger story of structural inequality dislodges the individual story of self-transformation: broken homes due to segregation and racist responses to interracial relationships, especially ones that produce a child out of wedlock, is here translated, metonymically, through *lady*, which is itself a sign of years of historical encoding of images operating under an entrenched formula where whiteness equals aid.

⁹⁵ In relation to affective agency, the direction of the reversal this scene performs is significant: an image of a lady quickly turns into an image of the bastard child of a slum mother. This reversal enacts a transformation that overturns a much earlier sentimental P.R. campaign waged by Harriet Beecher Stowe in response to the Fugitive Slave Act. To engage the image already in circulation, Stowe replaces it with another: the image of an escaped slave and mother, Eliza. The living presence of Eliza acts on Senator Bird's "idea of a fugitive" as "only an idea of the letters that spell the word, —or, at the most, the image of a little newspaper picture of a man with a stick and bundle, with 'Ran away from the subscriber' under it" (97). By the end of the episode, Senator Bird is a changed man. Larsen works against the satisfying redemptive arc Stowe offers to draw attention to the silenced (but all the more powerful for it) underbelly of a different image, one that grants privilege less often than it denies it: the image of *a lady*.

For example, at the turn of the century, the National Association of Colored Women (NACW), under the leadership of Mrs. Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin and Mary Church Terrell, adopted the motto “Lifting as we climb” to celebrate the self-education of their members and the kind of outreach they hoped to achieve.⁹⁶ Terrell framed this mission in her address before the National American Women’s Suffrage Association on February 18, 1898: “And so, lifting as we climb, onward and upward we go, struggling and striving, and hoping that the buds and blossoms of our desires will burst forth into glorious fruition ere long” (226). Terrell emphasized solidarity—the parallel interests of NACW with all educated women. Yoking traditional white formulations of femininity with racial uplift, she offered stories of her African American sisters achieving advanced college degrees and living religiously-observant, morally upright lives as wives and mothers, even as they worked against racial violence and inequality. Though we may look back and pronounce this starting point conformist or even detrimental to the stated goals of racial uplift, their position was as difficult as their stated goals were challenging. Distance offers too comfortable a seat to judge. The more important exercise lies in questioning how this legacy shaped and continues to shape the social imagination we have inherited, especially in relation to gender and class performance.

Writing about how sentimental narratives have shaped particular, recurring images in the larger U.S. social imaginary, Wanzo argues that “Stowe is not responsible for the privileging of whiteness in sentimental narratives,” but “she is a prominent, early example of its logic.” Such a logic “privileges women who are close to normative ideals about white mothers and family” (Wanzo 25-26). Larsen intervenes at the administrative level of the philanthropic institution,

⁹⁶ In 1904 the organization changed its name to the National Association of Colored Women’s Club (NACWC).

giving her readers access to the kind of mind that runs such an institution, a mind like Dr. Anderson's that would sign on to the politics of respectability, a politics, as she is well aware, that is modeled after the image of the "white" family. By accident of birth, Helga possesses the outward appearance that would secure her the sentimental appeal others do not have. Whether by appearance alone or life circumstances, not everyone has the same chances of conforming to this respectable character type as Helga.

After the explosive scene of reversal in which Dr. Anderson underscores this, the narrative fills in more of Helga's background: a "gay suave scoundrel, Helga's father, had left her" (21). Focalized through someone else's point of view, Helga's view of her father is "blotted out" by her mother's or, more likely, her mother's relations' assessment of him as "that gay suave scoundrel" (5, 21).⁹⁷ After underscoring this misrepresentation and the emotional blockage it implies, the narrative makes its investment clear. I will quote this line of the narrator's once more: "Even foolish, despised women must have food and clothing; even unloved little Negro girls must be somehow provided for" (21-22). Though wryly imparted, this sentence typifies *Quicksand's* moral vision; it also places it in relation to other literary works, beyond *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, works that take up philanthropic debates. For example, George Bernard Shaw's championing of Eliza Doolittle's father, in *Pygmalion* (1913), presents another instance of the "undeserving poor" who needs to be supported because the "deserving poor" have already tapped into such philanthropic streams. Under a strikingly different tone, Larsen indexes the impact good breeding's code has had on Helga's self-esteem. Her wry moralizing also directs us to reconsider Helga's reaction at

⁹⁷ As implicit as it is foundational, Larsen's characterization of Helga with the recurring image of experience *blotted out* is a suggestive one. Remember the earlier quoted passage: "But gradually this zest *was blotted out*, giving place to a deep hatred for the trivial hypocrisies and careless cruelties which were ... a part of the Naxos policy of uplift" (5). Social forces appear to rob Helga of direct access to feelings a person might normally have in response to certain experiences, as in the sorrow of losing a parent.

being called a lady—an image upon which humanitarian aid had capitalized for three-quarters of a century—and assess its impact anew. In fashioning a protagonist who perceives such immunity as beyond her grasp, Larsen problematizes respectability as a route for securing humanitarian aid.

Helga's reaction to being called a lady, if not a highly self-possessed response, *is* highly socially aware. Somewhere deep-down insider her, she registers the historical inequity she is fighting against.⁹⁸ Her visceral reaction, then, is, at the same time, a considered, well-thought out rejoinder to Dr. Anderson; it also determines her next life-altering decision. Another way to view this scene is as the first appearance of Helga's hubris and with it, the elements of tragedy begin to accent the action; but the more important vantage point lies with the former, with its complex accounting of positionality, as a part of Larsen's project to revise the racialized apparatus of a powerful literary genre and its effect on philanthropic institutions. Helga is a proper lady and so she is a suitable aid worker, goes the logic. Despite appearances, Helga knows her story does not fit into this logic; and so, her decision becomes a decision about who belongs to what reality, as her own sense of that reality resumes its dominant position: "As I said *at first*, I don't belong here. I shall be leaving at once" (20, emphasis added). In refusing what she perceives to be a fraudulent form of belonging, Helga also refuses to pass (though passing here is not passing for white but passing for a lady).

The distinction between essence and appearance thematized through Helga, while germane to a race novel, has long been a mainstay in the sentimental novel, beginning with Richardson's *Pamela* and *Clarissa*.⁹⁹ As a powerful engine driving the plot, discord between essence and

⁹⁸ The unequal treatment of illegitimate children has a history under the fourteenth amendment, illegitimacy being a constitutionally suspect classification.

⁹⁹ See David Rosen and Aaron Santesso's *The Watchman in Pieces: Surveillance, Literature, and Liberal Personhood*.

appearance twists and turns Helga's life path in the span of three short chapters. Helga began teaching at Naxos with the joy and zest of a naïve social worker; she next decides to leave Naxos, under the mood of irony and the resultant stance irony fosters—distance. Continuing down the tonal continuum, Dr. Anderson's compliment deepens the pitch from irony to its not too distant cousin, cynicism; and, Larsen depicts this cynicism, oddly muted though with a still present zeal for the cause. Larsen presents Helga's jarring response to Dr. Anderson, but the far more important message bound up in Larsen's portrayal of a proselytized Helga is that she is won over without the prerequisites of understanding or judgment to fully commit to such a cause.¹⁰⁰ Effective philanthropy does not require a worker to fully perceive the hardships a population faces. Nevertheless, the quality of aid a worker extends is largely determined by that worker's grasp on the problems she is volunteering to help abate.

¹⁰⁰ Helga's flimsy decision-making and fickle waffling between two modes of sentimental and scientific humanitarianisms reflects less on her and more on the synergy the two forms of humanitarianism share. Explicating Babbitt's categories, philosopher Robert Koons writes, "the superficial tensions between the 'two cultures' of scientific pragmatism and romantic individualism merely disguise their more fundamental affinities. Both are united in their rejection of the teleologically ordered cosmos of the classical tradition, with its finite and universal goal of happiness-through-self-restraint (*eudaemonia*)" (201). In underscoring this mode of rhetoric as bypassing understanding, Larsen might also be referencing sentimental tradition as it can be read in Stowe who claimed her "vocation" as "that of a painter"; her task, "to was to hold up in the most lifelike and graphic manner possible Slavery." "There is no arguing with pictures," Stowe writes, "and everybody is impressed by them, whether they mean to be or not." Helga most decidedly does not mean to be impressed by Dr. Anderson, surely. Faye Halpern fleshes out the implications in Stowe's aspirations as follows: "Pictures, as Stowe understands them, do not rely on the understanding. They bypass the faculties that allow someone to be distanced from the object of contemplation; they go right to the heart, with no detours through the head. Pictures can persuade a reader in a way that words cannot. It is as though a picture can bring to life a thing that it is representing because it has no intellectual pretensions" (40).

3.6 CHARITY BEGINS AT HOME: WRITING BACK TO HARRIET BEECHER STOWE

On the train ride to Chicago, Helga falls asleep ruing her last conversation with Dr. Anderson: “Why hadn’t she grasped his meaning? Why, if she had said so much, hadn’t she said more about herself and her mother? He would, she was sure, have understood, even *sympathized*. Why had she lost her temper and given way to angry *half-truths*?” (24, emphasis added) Helga’s regrets are bound up in the choices she might have made to secure her goal of sympathy from a potential mentor; the impediment, she apprehends, are the half-truths she fell back on. The way Larsen formulates Helga’s regrets implies that she might need to articulate a more complex truth to secure the sympathy she so desires. After Naxos, the truth of her story undergoes some rather suggestive alterations, as Helga’s need to secure others’ sympathy only grows more acute.

She journeys north to visit Uncle Peter, “the one relative who thought kindly, or even calmly, of her” (6-7). Peter Nilssen grew up in Chicago alongside his sister, Helga’s mother, as a first-generation Danish immigrant. Helga’s mother had always been his favorite sister, and so he favored her daughter as well. During Helga’s youth when the rest of her white family shunned her, Uncle Peter “had been extraordinarily generous with her,” looking after her and seeing to her education (7). Recalling this, Helga resolves to ask him for a loan. Upon her arrival to Chicago, the narrative showcases just how calibrated Helga’s mind has become to assessing her affective agency in a new environment:

Helga Crane, who had been born in this dirty, mad, hurrying city, had no home here. She had not even any friends here. It would have to be, she decided, the Young Women’s Christian Association. “Oh dear! The uplift. Poor, poor colored people. Well, no use stewing about it. I’ll get a taxi to take me out, bag and baggage, then I’ll have a hot bath and a really good meal, peep into the shops—mustn’t buy anything—then for Uncle

Peter. Guess I won't phone. More effective if I surprise him."

It was late, very late, almost evening, when finally Helga turned her steps northward, in the direction of Uncle Peter's home. She had put it off as long as she could, for she detested her errand. The fact that that one day had shown her its acute necessity did not decrease her distaste. As she approached the North Side, the distaste grew. Arrived at last at the familiar door of the old stone house, her confidence in Uncle Peter's welcome deserted her. (25)

Helga enters this new living space without friends, fearful of being lumped in with the poor, as she worriedly calculates the best way to go about asking for her uncle's help. Her anxiety is not without cause. Unbeknownst to Helga, her uncle had recently remarried, and his new wife swiftly shows Helga that she wants nothing to do with her: "Sensitive to atmosphere, Helga had felt at once the latent antagonism in the woman's manner" (26). Mrs. Nilssen's words confirm her reading when she informs Helga that since her parents were not married, her husband is not her uncle, nor she her aunt. The scene not only seems to justify Helga's prior ill-tempered response at being called a *lady* but also emphasizes how her position outside conventional respectability has sharpened her affective attunement to her environment—a habit that causes her sense of self to fluctuate losing its confidence and center in the face of yet another racist relative.

A year later, Helga receives a letter from her uncle. The letter accomplishes two things: it gently disowns her and provides her with a sizable inheritance. Helga's uncle presumes her good sense in not contacting him (but the reader knows this silence owes more to her feeling offended): "I have looked for a letter, or some word from you; evidently, with your usual penetration, you understood thoroughly that I must terminate my outward relation with you. You were always a keen one." Taking on any fault in information management as his own, Uncle Peter implies that if

his niece had known he'd taken on such a wife, she would have politely avoided seeking help from him: "But of course you couldn't know. I blame myself. I should have written you of my marriage." Uncle Peter's form of charity resembles the form of charity for which *Uncle Tom's Cabin* has become known, the kind that operates out of the charitable person's sense of himself as good and giving and quite a bit less out of actual knowledge regarding the party in need. The kind of imaginative identification Helga's uncle practices in relation to his niece echoes the tradition for which Stowe is the touchstone: the kind of care the middle class can extend to the unfortunate. Helga's uncle regards her as meek and compliant in much the same way Stowe is remembered, however inaccurately, as inviting readers to regard Tom.¹⁰¹ Even the narrative arc of her uncle's charity bears important resemblances to Stowe's resolution at the end of her novel. George, Eliza, and Harry move to Africa—an ending that grants the family freedom (from slavery) but not political equality (with their fellow U.S. citizens). In suggesting his niece visit her relations in Denmark, Helga's uncle plots a type of liberation that follows a similar path.

Lest this assessment become too pat, Larsen gives us Helga's discordant reaction to her uncle's letter. Through free indirect discourse, the reader finds that Helga thinks the letter is "friendly" (50). Her uncle appeals to their old familiarity: "But of course you couldn't know. I blame myself. ... Of course I am sorry. ... You know, of course, that I wish you the best of luck" (50). He also indirectly apologizes for his decision: "[I]t can't be helped. My wife must be

¹⁰¹ I do not mean to imply Stowe's portrayal of empathy is without merit. Much of the courage Stowe invites us to see in Tom's struggle and rebellion has lost its legibility in our culture and, consequently, has been forgotten. Considerable value can be found in the Christian tradition of dying to the self that Stowe gestures toward in her portrait of Tom as a martyr and rebel. But Tom's recommendation to Cassy and Emmeline to run away from Legree might also be seen as a trace of the even more ancient Greco-Roman tradition, the care of the self. Stowe's project does not necessarily exclude the care of the self even as it places the Christian law, founded on suffering, above it. As J. M. Bernstein writes, "although there could be no morality unless we could act otherwise, altering our behavior in light of what is seen, we have an ethical life at all not because we can reason but because we can suffer" (xi).

considered, and she feels very strongly about this.” Yet Helga’s distance from her uncle is not, as he claims, a sign of her “usual penetration.” It is a necessary defensive strategy: she withdraws in an attempt to protect herself from further offense—a fact the correspondence conceals, the letter having been written entirely from the view of the Nilssens. After the letter, the narrative continues to be focalized through the Nilssens, as if the dominance of middle-class charity, as a perceiving system, jams Helga’s own perceptivity. Notice how the narration slicks over any penetrating record of Helga’s emotional response: “Beside the brief, friendly, but none the less final, letter there was a check for five thousand dollars. Helga Crane’s first feeling was one of unreality. This changed almost immediately into one of relief, of liberation” (50). The relative value of Uncle Peter’s gift would be around \$70,000 today. In choosing such a large sum for Helga’s inheritance, Larsen seems to be encouraging her reader to wonder, how much is enough to assure a good life.

The narrative reveals how this inheritance offers Helga something beyond financial security. Money alters class consciousness. For Helga, liberation from hunger and poverty assumes a dissociative form. The capacity to extract herself from her former position in society grants her the luxury of emotional expression. Consider how this form of liberty opens a floodgate of anger and, curiously, prejudice:

Abruptly it flashed upon her that the harrowing irritation of the past weeks was a smoldering hatred. Then, she was overcome by another, so actual, so sharp, so horribly painful, that forever afterwards she preferred to forget it. It was as if she were shut up, boxed up, with hundreds of her race, closed up with that something in the racial character which had always been, to her, inexplicable, alien. Why, she demanded in fierce rebellion, should she be yoked to these despised black folk? (50)

Helga continues to rehearse past prejudices in her new class position. In many respects, her outlook here represents a return to the one she assumed just preceding her flight from Naxos. Again, Helga asserts her difference from the scene in which she finds herself: “She felt it. It wasn’t merely a matter of color. It was something broader, deeper, that made folk kin” (51).

For Helga, the racist function of grouping serves as a convenient release valve. Her emotions operate under a hydraulic model: mounting pressure finds release because better circumstances permit her the luxury of anger. This model of emotion grants Helga little individual agency, though it is the model her environment has impressed upon her, a reality the novel consistently details. For instance, the narrative leads the reader to imagine how Helga survived in her former class position by interpreting her anger as irritation. The reader can also surmise that irritation poses a smaller threat in the racially segregated environments through which a person *like* Helga moves. Interpreting anger for irritation becomes a structural measure a person *like* Helga takes to survive.¹⁰² Helga’s spirit rears against her structural positioning. Her soul craves individuality. This feeling does not destroy race as a category of difference; it feeds on it to manufacture the privilege of difference and grant Helga separation from a marked identity.

Larsen’s portrait of this dynamic discloses the arbitrary basis of racial construction. This arbitrary quality receives further emphasis when the narrative casts Helga’s separation from other black folk in terms of kinship, a disowning, not unlike the one Helga’s uncle himself performs. In psychological terms, the charity Helga receives buys displacement, not mobility. A truly liberating psychic mobility would require an altogether different mental landscape from the one Helga possesses. Helga would need to possess more emotional awareness. In this particular portrait of

¹⁰² That this kind of repression has been the norm is implied in sentences expressing Helga’s frustration: “It was no good. The feeling would not be routed,” which implies other feelings Helga had experienced previously had indeed been suppressed (50-51).

charity, Larsen reveals how class consciousness operates on a different plane than emotional awareness, even as she depicts their imbrication. A healthy self-esteem would move Helga to question the kinds of prejudices she continually falls back on to structure her escapes. On a sociological level, Helga's ruminations also expose how race feeling, to a certain extent, depends on shared class consciousness.¹⁰³ More broadly, *Quicksand* illustrates how fellow feeling in general moves more smoothly among people who share a structural situation—and how this can pose problems for social outreach and aid.

3.7 RAISING HELGA'S SENTIMENTAL APPEAL: THE ADVOCACY OF MRS. HAYES-RORE

But Helga does not receive her uncle's charity while she needs it in Chicago. Broke and hungry, she is left to fend for herself:

In the midst of her search of work she felt horribly lonely too. This sense of loneliness increased, it grew to appalling proportions, encompassing her, shutting her off from all of life around her. Devastated she was, and always on the verge of weeping. It made her feel small and insignificant that in all the climbing massed city no one cared one whit about her. (31)

The psychological impact of being in need sets Helga at a disadvantage when it comes to appealing to the people who might help her: "She was herself unconscious of that faint hint of offishness

¹⁰³ See, for example, Kenneth W. Warren's *What Was African American Literature?* for analyses of literary depictions of supposed racial difference as self-consciously entering a context that has been, from the beginning, contested—along with the racial unity and the essentialist sentiment underlying it. *Quicksand* offers many instances of this. Late in the plot, for instance, James Vayle, Helga's ex-fiancé, explains the attraction of living in the United States for African Americans: "I suppose it's just that we like to be together. In response, Helga quips, "I'm a Negro, too, you know" (94-5).

which hung about her and repelled advances, an arrogance that stirred in people a peculiar irritation. They noticed her, admired her clothes, but that was all, for the self-sufficient uninterested manner adopted instinctively as a protective measure for her acute sensitiveness, in her child days, still clung to her” (31). Larsen is underscoring here how a long practiced coping mechanism, itself a response to childhood neglect, further hinders Helga’s ability to secure assistance.

The hindrances to Helga’s sentimental appeal receive even further explication in the context of Helga’s job search. Facing “the hated moment” of turning to the Y.W.C.A. employment agency, Helga immediately finds its office disturbing, particularly its clients: the women who “wore an air of acute expectancy.” Her proximity to them is what bothers her. Counterpoised to those “others” are the women behind the desk, “wearing a superior air” (29, 30). The narrative separates the employed and, therefore, fortunate women from the desperate ones, presumably mirroring Helga’s own perception. The fleeting fervency Helga felt for uplift in Dr. Anderson’s office is utterly eradicated in the employment office, and, any chance of solidarity she might have felt with these desperate women has gone out with it. As Larsen sympathetically underscores, her protagonist’s fragile psychological state cannot risk such a gesture.

After a few panic-stricken afternoons of searching, the employment office sends Helga a note that promises work:

Its possibility made her feel a little hysterical. Finally, after removing the dirt of the dusty streets, she went down, down to that room where she had first felt the smallness of her commercial value. Subsequent failures had augmented her feeling of incompetence, but she resented the fact that these clerks were evidently aware of her unsuccess. It required all the pride and indifferent hauteur she could summon to support her in their presence. Her additional arrogance passed unnoticed by those for whom it was assumed. They were

interested only in the business for which they had summoned her, that of procuring a traveling-companion for a lecturing female on her way to a convention” (32).

Helga obtains an audience because she might fulfill a function. The note promises no recognition from the women, either of her as a person or of her overqualified skill set. The wry drama of the narration accents how Helga’s sociability with the Y.W.C.A. staff alters considerably after she secures the job:

Was there, she inquired, anything that she needed to know? Mrs. Hayes-Rore had appeared to put such faith in their recommendation of her that she felt almost obliged to give satisfaction. And she added: “I didn’t get much chance to ask questions. She seemed so—er—busy.”

Both the girls laughed. Helga laughed with them, surprised that she hadn’t perceived before how really likeable they were.

“We’ll be through here in ten minutes. If you’re not busy, come in and have your supper with us and we’ll tell you about her,” promised Miss Ross. (34)

With a keen sense of timing, Larsen calls attention to the narrative ordering of events that line up Helga’s experience of fellow feeling with the women she had found snobbish a short few days ago. The scene also allows Larsen to underscore the feeling of obligation pulling on Helga despite this newfound camaraderie. In accentuating how Helga has entered into a network in which recommendations are taken on faith, the novel signals its changing focus, this time to the kind of charity that comes with strings attached.

Helga agrees to work as a copy-editor for Mrs. Hayes-Rore, a lecturer on the race problem. Having learned her lesson with Dr. Anderson, Helga controls herself when she hears her new employer wonder, “[H]ow is it that a nice girl like [her] can rush off on a wildgoose chase at a

moment's notice"? Provoked, no doubt, Helga hears the woman add, "I should think your people'd object, or'd make inquiries, or something" (35). After passing off her lack of folks as a "mightily unpleasant...[i]nconvenient" fact, Helga then hears her new boss's cautious query: "You wouldn't like to tell me about it, would you? It seems to bother you. And I'm interested in girls." Notice that the question is not directed to Helga the individual so much as Helga as a representative of a group. Under these circumstances, Helga begins to tell her story "mockingly," as she needs the distance the tone affords, but the content of her story proves too overpowering for her: "[A]s she went on, again she had that sore sensation of revolt, and again the torment which she had gone through loomed before her as something brutal and undeserved. Passionately, tearfully, incoherently, the final words tumbled from her quivering petulant lips" (36). If this story represents a revision of the story Helga told Dr. Anderson, its pain, now legible, meets a similarly impassive reception:

The other woman still looked out of the window, apparently so interested in the outer aspect of the drab sections of the Jersey manufacturing city through which they were passing that, the better to see, *she had now so turned her head that only an ear and a small portion of cheek were visible.*

During the little pause that followed Helga's recital, the faces of the two women, which had been bare, seemed to harden. It was almost as if they had slipped on masks. *The girl* wished to hide her turbulent feeling and to appear indifferent to Mrs. Hayes-Rore's opinion of her story. The woman felt that the story, dealing as it did with race intermingling and possibly adultery, was beyond definite discussion. For among black people, as among white people, it is tacitly understood that things are not mentioned—and therefore they do not exist. (36-37, emphasis added)

Helga's story is met with silence, as the narration demotes her to "the girl" amenable to Mrs. Hayes-Rore's interest in her. As with her uncle's viewpoint overriding the narrative focus later in the text, Mrs. Hayes-Rore's point of view overrides it here. If sentimental political storytelling vies for recognition, it does so, more often than not, by making its target an object, not a subject, of her story. Rebelling against such a relinquishment of agency, Helga again falls short on this generic convention when she retells her story to Mrs. Hayes-Rore. What prevents her success is the somewhat paradoxical fact that she *is* the victim of her story and, as a victim, is too distressed to compose a story coherent enough to meet success. Fortunately for Helga, Mrs. Hayes-Rore does not need to hear a perfectly crafted story to offer Helga her aid.

In New York under the care of the capable Mrs. Hayes-Rore, Helga finally manages to present her life story in a manner that attracts sympathy. Helga manages to do this by following Mrs. Hayes-Rore's savvy, offhanded advice: "And, by the way, I wouldn't mention that my people are white, if I were you. Colored people won't understand it, and after all it's your business. When you've lived as long as I have, you'll know what others don't know can't hurt you. I'll just tell Anne that you're a friend of mine whose mother's dead. That'll place you well enough and it's true" (39). When Helga is introduced to Anne, she has been counseled to manage the right kind of untruths to narrativize sympathy:

[Helga] hear[s] herself being introduced to "my niece, Mrs. Grey" as "Miss Crane, a little friend of mine whose mother's died, and I think perhaps a while in New York will be good for her"; to feel her hand grasped in *quick sympathy*, and to hear Anne Grey's pleasant voice, with its faint note of wistfulness saying: "I'm so sorry, and I'm glad Aunt Jeanette brought you here. Did you have a good trip? I'm sure you must be worn out. I'll have Lillie take you right up." And to feel like a criminal (39, emphasis added)

Much of the change in Helga's fate from Chicago to New York has to do with Mrs. Hayes-Rore's help, help that transforms a young woman with little sentimental power into a woman who has it, as the plot of *Quicksand* moves Helga from a subject that elicits no pity on the steps of her Uncle's home to a sentimental object who secures that pity in Anne Grey's house. But before this new connection admits Helga into Harlem's stylish set, the chapter ends dramatically with Helga finding that her newfound sentimental appeal has made her "feel like a criminal" (39). To interpret this final line in the chapter, a reader must take into account how this introduction positions Helga within an impersonal structure of kindly meant sentiment, securing her a general rather than an individual sympathy. When one also considers how Anne represents the only example of a close female friend Helga has throughout the whole narrative, the impersonality of this encounter stands out all the more. Insofar as this scene marks the beginning of a friendship, it impedes rather than invites intimacy between the two women. In friendship, one offers and hopes to make known one's core self to another. Sympathy places Helga at a heartbreaking disadvantage in this respect.

3.8 "SHE WAS THANKFUL FOR THE BARBARIC BRACELETS": PATRON AS PRIMITIVIST

The decades of the 1920s and 1930s saw "an unprecedented surge in private patronage of black artists" (Trapp 94). In "Whose Renaissance Was It Really," Rodney Trapp divides these patrons into 2 camps, the patron as primitivist and the patron as humanist. Larsen's mentor Carl Van Vechten, by Trapp's and most others' accounts, fits in with the latter group. Tactfully, then, Larsen engages the scene of patronage at a remove. When Helga finally decides to visit her Uncle Poul and Aunt Katrina Dahl in Copenhagen, her aunt wastes little time in transforming her appearance by buying her a "lively ... bright" new wardrobe (62). After allowing Helga a few of

her own words of commentary on one costume from this ensemble, the narrator slyly fills in the picture:

Marie had indeed “cut down” the prized green velvet, until, as Helga put it, it was “practically nothing but a skirt.” She was thankful for the barbaric bracelets, for the dangling earrings, for the beads about her neck. She was even thankful for the rouge on her burning cheeks and for the very powder on her back. No other woman in the stately pale-blue room was so greatly exposed. (65)

Eroticized and exoticized, Helga feels a gratitude that hardly begins to fill the deficit created by the green velvet’s objectification of her. It is not too difficult to imagine an impish young novelist satirizing the “Godmother” of the Harlem Renaissance, Charlotte Osgood Mason, with her portrait of this Scandinavian aunt.¹⁰⁴ The commentary assumes a more caustic tone with Larsen’s literary choice to embroil Helga in the patron-artist relationship while denying her full standing in her part of the role. The lack of social transformation such a relation affords, as Larsen represents it, complies with Mary Esteve’s reading of the novel as portraying the Harlem Renaissance as a period in which “the only alternative to being racialized is self-evacuation” (155). Exercising little autonomy over her own self-expression, Helga is remade according to her patron’s desires. Helga

¹⁰⁴ See especially Carla Kaplan’s *Miss Anne of Harlem*, the nickname given to white women who flirted with the color line and became insiders in the Harlem Renaissance scene, bending notions of race and gender. As Kaplan describes Mrs. Mason, she bears a great deal of resemblance to Katrina Dahl: “Subdued where Carl Van Vechten was excessive, calm where he was overexcitable, private where he was attention-grabbing, Charlotte Mason struck many of her new protégés as an antidote. She seemed to be just the ‘Godmother’ she asked to be called” (197). Rodney Trapp writes that Mrs. Mason “required strict obedience and was quick to cut off those who did not obey her wishes. . . . These artists were required to read certain books, listen to a particular kind of music, attend specific plays and even escort Ms. Mason to certain social events” (96). Similarly, Helga is required to attend many social functions with Dahls. Naming the negative in her influence, Martin Summers writes, “In contrast to McKay and Toomer, who also saw in primitivism and black folk culture an alternative to devitalized manhood, Mason emphasized the infantile and feminine nature of ‘the primitive’” (235). Mrs. Osgood once told Claude McKay that she was “a ‘better Negro’ than most of the Negroes [she] knew” (Sandweiss).

is again demoted, this time to a muse for the primitivist painter Axel Olsen who, it soon becomes clear, the social climbing Dahls would like Helga to marry. The tensions involved in this matchmaking process parallel those found in the patron-artist financial relationship: initially enjoying her expensive costumes, room, and board, Helga quickly comes to experience all the inner turmoil that results from feeling obligated. As the recipient of so many gifts, Helga struggles to meet her patron's approval, namely on this question of marriage.

Consider how Mrs. Dahl twists her niece's family history to drive home her own view on "the desirability of Helga's making a good marriage":

Because your mother was a fool. Yes, she was! If she'd come home after she married, or after you were born, or even after your father—er—went off like that, it would have been different. If even she'd left you when she was here. But why in the world she should have married again, and a person like that, I can't see. She wanted to keep you, she insisted on it, even over his protest, I think. She loved you so much, she said.—And so she made you unhappy. Mothers, I suppose, are like that. Selfish. And Karen was always stupid. If you've got any brains at all they came from your father. (72)

Again, the half-truths of the story provoke Helga into action; threatened with a Darwinian heritage of foolish, selfish, and stupid personality traits, pushed into a corner due to her financial dependency on the Dahls, Helga erects a troubling smokescreen to fend off the prospect of having any serious future with a Dane. Her refusal to spar with her aunt on the terms her aunt has had the privilege of setting produces a counterargument that is as appalling as it is evocative:

Into this Helga would not enter. Because of its obvious partial truths she felt the need for disguising caution. With a detachment that amazed herself she asked if Aunt Katrina didn't think, really, that miscegenation was wrong, in fact as well as principle.

“Don’t,” was her aunt’s reply, “be a fool too, Helga. We don’t think of those things here. Not in connection with individuals, at least.” And almost immediately she inquired: “Did you give Herr Olsen my message about dinner tonight?” (108)

Helga’s agency of refusal ends up creating a troubling fiction, as she chooses to invoke a miscegenation discourse she herself does not agree with because she prizes her immediate personal autonomy more than any damage this discursive maneuver might do to her image. Hedged in so, she allows her aunt’s prejudice its more politically correct form and therefore retains a measure of civility around their protégée-patron relation. Irrespective of any intelligence Helga might bring to the compromised situation, the rhetorical context makes her neither a subject of knowledge nor a wielder of reason. Against the form of the *bildungsroman*, a form that many critics nonetheless identify in *Quicksand*, Helga does not find her place, she does not pair reason with inclination, as the many contexts the novel embeds her in consistently deny her the ability to be inclined toward anything at all.¹⁰⁵

Well, almost anything. At a moment of disenchantment with Copenhagen, Helga hears the “wailing undertones” of the American Negro spiritual “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot,” and experiences nostalgia that will draw her back to Harlem:

¹⁰⁵ Not all life stories fit within the *bildungsroman*. Still many have considered *Quicksand*’s relation to the form. See, for example, Sara Davis, “The Red Thing,” p. 92., and Emily M. Hinnov in *Encountering Choran Community*, p. 89. Larsen’s biographer, Thadious M. Davis calls *Quicksand* “not only a *Künstlerromane* but also a *Bildungsroman*” (277). Jessica G. Rabin compares Larsen to Cather and Stein in her tendency to “work within and against the *bildungsroman* tradition” (153). While George Hutchinson does not name *Quicksand* a *bildungsroman* he does name Stein’s “Melanctha” a female *bildungsroman* and comments on the text’s similarity to Larsen’s fiction “right down to its pathetic conclusion” (313). Jed Esty compares *Quicksand* and *Voyage in the Dark* as novels whose heroines “lack [the] means to protest the instrumentalization of [their] sexuality” leading to the same end: “a well-orchestrated failed-*bildungsroman* plot” (225). In contrast to all, Yves Clemmen categorizes *Quicksand* as fiercely opposite in form to the *bildungsroman*, arguing that “instead of a *bildungsroman* that feeds on experience, we have ... a narrative that feeds on difference” (460).

For the first time Helga Crane felt *sympathy* rather than *contempt and hatred* for that father, whom so often and so angrily she had blamed for his desertion of her mother. She understood, now, his rejection, his repudiation, of the formal calm her mother had represented. She understood his yearning, his intolerable need for the inexhaustible humor and the incessant hope of his own kind, his need for those things, not material, indigenous to all Negro environments. She understood and could sympathize with his facile surrender to the irresistible ties of race, now that they dragged at her own heart. And as she attended parties, the theater, the opera, and mingled with people on the streets, meeting only pale serious faces when she *longed for* brown laughing ones, she was able to forgive him. Also, it was as if in this understanding and forgiving she had come upon knowledge of almost *sacred importance*. (86-87, emphasis added)

This come-to-Jesus scene describing Helga's return to her father's memory offers an understanding that is at the same time a self-understanding, an incorporation through identification (based on sameness) that leads her to "*almost sacred*" knowledge" (87, emphasis added).¹⁰⁶ This qualifying word adds a curious addition to the scene of reconciliation Larsen's narrator sketches in a plainly essentializing language shot through with signifiers of desire: where her father's *yearning, intolerable need* for the racially marked qualities of *inexhaustible humor* and *incessant*

¹⁰⁶ Helga's self-definition, according to Claudia Tate, swings on a pendulum of identification with her African American identity from attraction and embrace to rejection and escape then back again (245). In an incisive and persuasive reading of Helga's refusal of Axel Olsen's "honorable request" to be his wife, Tate argues that Helga unconsciously turns to the overdetermined category of race "to conceal her sexual discomfort" (246). The categorical thinking Helga's adopted guides her to handle Olsen's proposal as "an indecent proposition" and Olsen himself as "a surrogate for all those people who have rejected her" (246). This kind of thinking moves Helga away from lived reality, and as such, Larsen's sometimes-distant narrator becomes integral to exposing a pattern of bad faith in her protagonist's actions. While it could be said that Helga's existential ache is little more than a consumerist desire for more, for that "newly defined, idealized object," a deeper reading suggests she is responding to a more complex set of catalysts encoded in sentimental texts and their cultural conventions (Tate 246).

hope mirror the same longings “that ...dragged at [Helga’s] own heart.”¹⁰⁷ The qualifier also underscores the reality of a sacredness that falls short. Helga’s act of forgiveness does not enact a redistribution of pain and pleasure. The scene, therefore, falls short of being one of social transformation. Instead, it reinforces her characteristic response to discomfort—flight. Helga will go back to Harlem and away from the scene of tension. Helga trades one polarizing emotional experience for another, making *Quicksand* a text that produces meaning out of “an interplay of fear and desire, affects that both Helga and the text share” (Tate 247). In terms of reading practices, the alternation between fear and desire parallels Helga’s practice of reading her own family history, where she alternates between a mocking, ironic posture (characterized by fear) and a nostalgic, sentimental one (characterized by desire). When identification happens, as it does above with Helga, as it did before with Mrs. Hayes-Rore who was “interested in girls,” it does so at a high cost: the cost of the collapse of the other (and otherness, more generally) into the self. Forgiving her father, from most vantage points, appears desirable, even heart-warming; it moves the emotional structure of the narrative into the affective framework of sentimental fiction.¹⁰⁸ Again

¹⁰⁷ Helga’s longing here is refigured and dealt with just as harshly in Clare Kendry’s yearning for “her own people.” As Jonathan Little remarks, “There is no supportive ‘birthright’ to which her passers may serenely return” (175). “Larsen...does not glorify Clare, or show that a ‘humane, spiritual birthright’ exists for any of her characters. Clare is an ambivalent character. Her heroic, vibrant, convention-defying qualities are balanced by her naïveté and romanticism. ... When [Clare] confesses her desire to return to Harlem, her vision of Blacks is clouded by romantic sentiment and stereotype ... her ‘hopeless’ sentimentalism and romanticism ill-prepare her to deal with the reality of the worst aspects of human behavior, including Irene’s escalating resentment, envy, jealousy, and paranoia” (177).

¹⁰⁸ Indeed, in her reading of the above passage, Tate rightly reads Helga’s sympathy as “reinforce[ing] her self-esteem” (247). Helga’s sentimental response to her father’s memory also moves her into the realm of the sacred, what Baldwin, also thinking of Stowe, calls her “medieval morality” (13). In many ways the logic of sentimental fiction resembles certain features of the romance, to deal in fixed quantities of good and evil. If the genre were to shift away from forgiveness, away from achieving sacred knowledge, what other possible outlook might Helga adopt in her relation to her unnamed parent? Rather than “recover this lost, parental object,” what other possibilities for viewing life might open? What antecedents structure her racial longing? Rather than seek a home, Larsen’s transnational novel might help us to explore the possibilities that might follow an admission of a homeless dwelling on earth.

evoking the stereotypical sentimental reader, Helga's sympathy with her father proves easy and satisfying. As Claudia Tate puts it, "sympathizing with him reinforces her self-esteem" (247). To imagine an historical understanding, much less a reconciliation, not based on this limited form of identification presents its own challenges. This kind of imaginative identification, nonetheless, *is* a need the text holds out to its readers, *and* it is a need we are made to experience as one that has yet to be met.

3.9 HELGA CRANE, HEROINE OF HER OWN PLOT

Sianne Ngai draws a convincing portrait of Helga as she operates through most of the episodes in the narrative: at a functional level. Helga reacts to microaggressions (or worse) in her surroundings with irritation, rather than rage. What appears at first to be an inappropriate response actually serves as an indispensable defensive mechanism that allows Helga to reserve her energy from an otherwise energy-sapping Jim Crow environment; that is, she guards the energy she might expend through outrage at the ugly living conditions that come with systemic racism and the inequality it produces. But *Quicksand* does narrate Helga's abandonment of this survival strategy when she feels sorry for her father and allows herself to feel sentimental about his memory. In adopting a sentimental, rather than ironic, reading of her past, Helga releases a new set of feelings, feelings that move her along a string of choices that eventually land her in the title's referenced quicksand. Quicksand might even refer to this constellation of feelings Helga allows to enter her life as the plot nears an end.

The sympathy Helga finally permits herself to feel for her father opens a floodgate—a floodgate that moves in the opposite direction of the one she had experienced earlier.¹⁰⁹ When Helga receives news of her inheritance from her uncle, anger and prejudice well up within her. In this moment, Helga owns the racial inheritance from her father, feeling instead the surging of love and sentimental longing. Having once rejected race feeling, Helga now embraces it, returning to Harlem full of hope and expectation. Then, at a party, she suddenly finds herself in the arms of her former boss, Dr. Anderson, who is now married to her friend Anne Grey. He presses her into a kiss, passionate enough to cause something to “well up in her”—“a long-hidden, half-understood desire” (97). Weeks pass in which she wrestles with this new desire. Eventually Dr. Anderson pays Helga a visit. Offering little more than a stiff apology, he leaves her smarting with humiliation. Acute isolation and loneliness grip Helga. After a night of drinking herself sick, she leaves her hotel, only to get caught in a downpour. Soaking wet, Helga unwittingly stumbles into a storefront church. At first the situation provokes only her hysterical laughter. Held there by the rain, the worshippers’ moans and wails gradually begin to entrance her, until she is held in horror by their energy, and eventually transported to a much-needed catharsis: “It was a relief to cry unrestrainedly, and she gave herself freely to soothing tears.” Helga finds herself the object of one mass prayer, as the congregation grows intent on saving her “Jezebel” soul (104). Exhausted and newly saved, she agrees to be escorted home by the minister. After a night together, the two marry “in the confusion of seductive repentance” (109). The novel ends with Helga living as a preacher’s wife in a small Alabama town, utterly overwhelmed by her duties, and newly pregnant with her fifth child. If this summary of Helga’s end seems to negate the keen consciousness that has set her

¹⁰⁹ This floodgate moves in the opposite direction than the earlier floodgate that opens after Helga receives her inheritance from her uncle. Where the earlier moment opened Helga to anger and prejudice, this time Helga experiences love and sentimental longing.

apart throughout the narrative, it only does so in outline form. Larsen shows how a woman can end up poor and unable to provide for her children or herself, even when endowed with considerable resourcefulness and intelligence.

Quicksand's major plot-turn comes when Helga consciously chooses to abandon her characteristic reserve. In many ways her functional approach to life approximates the discipline of her higher will over other desires, the kind of discipline Irving Babbitt advocates. Using his terms, we might say Helga's *frein vital* (inner control) works well against her *élan vital* (Bergson's vital impulse). Babbitt's view of human nature, one could fairly complain, exists in a vacuum, ignorant of the social impact of racism and poverty on human expression. To some degree, Helga's self-control develops out of necessity. Still, Larsen does not present her protagonist's nature as determined by her racist environment. Larsen presents Helga as fully aware of what she is doing, as deliberately deciding to pursue something new at the end of the novel. This conscious decision marks, not so much an end to her sexual repression, as it signals a deepened search for love and acceptance. In imagining that she would give herself to Dr. Anderson, in submitting to the energies of conversion, and in marrying a rural preacher, Helga makes consistent, incremental changes to her life approach. In total, the changes amount to a drastic choice; but they also show a consciousness making an intelligible decision to pursue the potential for a more alert life, lived in a different emotional key.¹¹⁰

Larsen's actual presentation of the events reveals a protagonist who never loses her sharp discernment. Helga makes all the decisions that lead to her end with her eyes wide open and her psyche alert to their probable danger. Helga's inner monologue shows her as master of her

¹¹⁰ This portrait of human decision-making channels the energies of *Sister Carrie*, particularly Dreiser's depiction of George Hurstwood's theft of \$10,000 from his employer's vault.

decision-making process and even shows her anticipating the end her actions will lead her to: “Her searching mind had become in a moment quite clear. [...] She stopped sharply, shocked at what she was on the verge of considering. Appalled at where it might lead her” (107). Helga’s mind has not strayed into fantasy here, but sternly looks reality in the eye. Larsen pairs further misgivings with analysis: “Just for a fleeting moment Helga Crane [...] questioned her ability to retain, to bear, this happiness at such cost as she must pay for it” (108). She then defines her character’s resolve: “She had made her decision. Her resolution. It was a chance at stability, at permanent happiness, that she meant to take. She had let so many other things, other chances, escape her” (108). In her final portrait of Helga, Larsen manages to present Helga acting in a way that is hard to classify as impulsive. Through each choice, Helga’s sharp self-awareness remains intact. Religion offers her a “miraculous calm,” despite her uncertainty that being “saved” was at the source of “this after feeling of well-being” (106, 108). One could say an increasingly porous vulnerability impels Helga to relinquish her old defenses. But under Larsen’s presentation, Helga’s actions appear less as a need to sake a painful vulnerability, than a gritty, willful resolve to meet her own human needs.

In presenting this line of action, Larsen endows certain generic conventions with suggestively intentional agency, thereby transforming Helga from a stereotypical sentimental reader to the heroine in her own sentimental plot. Assuming the type of the fallen woman, Helga performs feminine frailty. Helga accurately reads the desire in her escort: “She cast at the man a speculative glance, aware that for a tiny space she had looked into his mind, a mind striving to be calm” (Larsen 107). Tracing a line back to Samuel Richardson’s model, historian Margaret Wyman describes the fallen woman formula as “feminine frailty before masculine wiles.” Wyman identifies how nineteenth-century American writers “endlessly repeated the object lesson set by

Clarissa Harlowe when she went off with Lovelace to ruin and an inevitable death of shame” (167). Larsen offers a variation on this formula when she depicts Helga as merely performing the part of the fallen woman. The churchgoers assume, and Helga merely plays along. Not truly frail, Helga only pretends to stumble to awaken her escort’s desires. When their night together is over, she successfully takes advantage of Christian conventions of repentance and redemption to press her lover into marriage: “If she pretended to distress? To fear? To remorse? He couldn’t” (109). Larsen takes the taint out of the fallen woman formula by giving her heroine a different form of fallenness—away from sophisticated city life. Instead of moral implications about female purity, the narrative focuses on sketching the individual psychic fallout that comes from social conditions that leave young girls with a deficit of love: “Even foolish, despised women must have food and clothing; even unloved little Negro girls must be somehow provided for” (21-22).

Repeated often enough to invite scrutiny, Helga’s worry that she will be a fool, like her mother, haunts her throughout the novel.¹¹¹ Charles Larson’s astute reading of the novel helps to explain the derisive tone *being a fool* acquires by the novel’s end. As Larson contends,

The grim ending implies that educated black women—sophisticated and cultured black

¹¹¹ Early in the novel, Helga tells herself regarding Dr. Anderson, “She wasn’t, she couldn’t be, in love with the man. It was a thought too humiliating, and so quickly dismissed. ... She was, she told herself, a sentimental fool” (59). After her rejection of Axel Olsen, we read, “she knew in her soul that she wouldn’t [marry a white man] “Because I’m a fool,” she said bitterly” (90). Later, her aunt’s warning not to be “a fool...always stupid,” like her mother, alerts the reader to the family history behind Helga’s fights against foolishness. Her aunt’s counsel reflects the cultural stereotype that reason is a masculine trait. Her aunt further bears out this prejudice when she adds, “If you’ve got any brains at all they came from your father” (72). Finally, Helga’s reflects on “the certainty of having proved herself a silly fool” in wanting Dr. Anderson. What the man himself perceived of her “didn’t matter. She could escape from the discomfort of his knowing gray eyes. But she couldn’t escape from sure knowledge that she had made a fool of herself. ... She couldn’t go on with the analysis. It was too hard. Why bother, when she could add nothing to the obvious fact that she had been a fool?” (101-2) Considering how often the narrator steers the audience to read Helga against the grain of her own thoughts, making a fool of oneself may not be as bad as Helga believes. The repetition of this epithet also underscores how our foggy memory of sentimentalism divorces feeling from the masculine realm to present it as an utterly feminine trait.

women, middle-class black women—are trapped in life with no satisfactory alternatives. Sexuality must be repressed, yet intellect is a dangerous commodity, because thinking leads to unhappiness and misery. Since intelligence and passion cannot operate simultaneously with any degree of relative happiness, the only possible escape is into emotion—abandonment of the mind. (72-73)

For Helga, foolishness finally comes to mean willfully choosing to expose oneself to love and all the susceptibilities that come with that gesture. The vulnerability of it, so the novel implies, is something an educated black woman cannot afford to risk.

Quicksand's voice of protest deepens further still when we view Helga's choice to be a "sentimental fool" in relation to racial uplift, particularly its trust in the politics of respectability (Larsen 59). Larsen chooses the person who stands for all that is decent about uplift to drive this meaning home. As the reader finds, Dr. Anderson will not part with "one particle of his own good opinion of himself. Not even for [Helga]," not even when he can clearly see how fiercely she desires "something special from him" (100). For Helga, being a sentimental fool finally means wanting—not "an appeal to well-bred sentiment"—but one to the human heart," to borrow Ann Douglas's words in defense of Stowe ("Introduction" 20). Or to apply John Rollert's formulation, being a sentimental fool means choosing "'softness' of spirit" over "the bitter wisdom of a hardened heart." In redrawing the sentimental heroine away from well-bred sentiment to face what her heart desires, Larsen underscores the persistent relevance of the sentimental values for twentieth-century American life. Larsen shows how even sophisticated, educated women can sometimes want love and a place to belong. Admitting this desire as legitimate and present in the text in some ways runs counter to our twenty-first century sense of what constitutes good protest, mainly because it continues to locate meaning not in the marketplace or public sphere but in the

ideologically fraught domestic one, making family, once again, the unit of protest. But a good deal of the force of Larsen's vision and the disquieting portrait it produced rests in the individual.

To read *Quicksand* as a protest novel depends, as I initially asserted, on our ability to read in Helga's story "the abiding human element through all the change in which it is implicated" (Babbitt, *Rousseau* 391). Irving Babbitt clarifies this phrase further by adding that "this calls for the highest use of the imagination. The abiding human element exists, even though it cannot be exhausted by dogmas and creeds, is not subject to rules and refuses to be locked up in formulae" (*Rousseau* 391). Babbitt is referring here to the quality of truly great literature—the scope of which has thankfully broadened since his time. He writes with Horace and Homer in mind but more importantly to identify their art's ability to provide a "true center," a point where imagination and good sense "may come together" (392). I would like to take his point—that to grasp the centering function of literature as a good reader "we ourselves need to be in some measure experienced and imaginative"—and apply this to my reading of the arc Helga's life assumes.

3.10 IMAGINING PROTEST FROM THE OTHER SIDE OF THE FENCE

Contemporary sensibilities lead us to applaud the sophisticated, self-assured woman that returns to Harlem after Copenhagen. When Helga meets her ex-fiancé from Naxos at a party, she behaves as we want her to. When James Vayle asks, "Don't you ever intend to marry," Helga's reply is as sharp as it is baiting: "Marriage—that means children, to me. And why add more suffering to the world? Why add any more unwanted, tortured Negroes to America? Why *do* Negroes have children? Surely it must be sinful." Appalled, James mouths the common uplift ideology: "We're the ones who must have the children if the race is to get anywhere." This

provokes Helga who sharply replies, “Well, I for one don’t intend to contribute any to the cause” (96). Issues of reproduction, race and eugenics are equally enmeshed in Helga’s vehement retort, which we secretly applaud her for. The stance feels victorious. Helga clearly comprehends how the politics of respectability can turn into a “racializing force” (Weinbaum 37).¹¹² Helga perceives how her choice to reproduce cannot evade being a racially overdetermined one. Yet, it must be noted, Larsen does not choose to end her book on this powerful point. Helga utters a vow she will soon break. We must, therefore, reread this scene through the lens of the novel’s ending. Doing so brings other aspects of Helga and James’s exchange to light.

From the beginning, Helga appears not only self-assured but smug in her interaction with James. She sees him as “frightfully young and delightfully unsophisticated” (93). Knowing the crowd at the party as she does, Helga can lean back into the safety net of her New York setting. Though not in so many words, Helga nonetheless conveys in her responses to James her dismissal of the South: “On Helga’s face there had come that pityingly sneering look peculiar to imported New Yorkers when the city of their adoption is attacked by alien Americans. With polite contempt she inquired: ‘And is that all you don’t like?’” (95). Where James finds the racial mixing in Harlem offensive, Helga found Naxos, Alabama, spirit-chafing. When James shares that he is now assistant principal there, Helga finds it hard to greet the news with enthusiasm: “Naxos was to her too remote, too unimportant” (95). If she were speaking today, Helga might call Alabama a flyover state. Helga’s attitude strikes an important chord with our contemporary moment, which remains polarized along similar lines of urban and rural sensibilities. *Quicksand*’s ending exposes this

¹¹² Helga and James’s conversation throws into relief what Alys Eve Weinbaum calls the “race/reproduction bind.” In *Wayward Reproductions*, Weinbaum addresses the role of reproduction in making transatlantic modernity as a force unthinkable outside the imbricated issues of racism and sexism because, as she argues, “reproducing is a racializing force” (37). Working within the same set of assumptions, Daylanne English, in her study *Unnatural Selection*, reads this same passage for its disturbing proximity to eugenics.

polarization as an impediment to aid-giving. Its ending also indicts the kinds of dismissals this polarization leads to, dismissals James and Helga both make.

In *Helga*, Larsen shows how a person can feel one way in one setting, and then feel, with equal authenticity, quite another way in a different setting. In theory, Helga believes in abstaining from reproduction. In the day to day grind of her life, she survives through other choices. In some ways, Helga's transformation echoes the one Senator Bird undergoes in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Unlike Senator Bird, Helga does not find her true self-expression through a chance encounter with a person in distress. Instead, she "gets" religion. What would it mean if we were to take Helga's conversion seriously, to elevate it above a bad faith attempt at finding comfort when she has hit rock bottom? Simply interpreting this conversion as a reversal undermines the larger protest in the novel.

There are reasons why Larsen might have drawn a protagonist who "gets" religion before facing one of the most difficult living situations her time had to offer. There is a long tradition of thought in the United States of looking to religion as the foundation of good governance.

"Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people" (John Adams).

"Liberty cannot be established without morality, nor morality without faith"

(Tocqueville). "In teaching this democratic faith to American children, we need the sustaining, buttressing aid of those great ethical religious teachings which are the heritage of our modern civilization. For 'not upon strength nor upon power, but upon the spirit of God' shall our democracy be founded" (FDR). (McGurn)

William McGurn, a former speechwriter for George W. Bush, uses this collection of quotes to locate a long tradition of calling on "the irreplaceable role of religion in cultivating the morality

citizens need to be capable of self-government.”¹¹³ Such invocations often serve as evasions in addressing real social problems. By portraying Helga finally as a Christian, Larsen’s novel foresees and blocks the political move of invoking this heritage. Under Larsen’s adept hand, it becomes hard to claim Helga as a part of the misguided masses who cannot govern themselves. Yet she cannot even manage to maintain her own physical health, let alone her household. By depicting this reality, Larsen underscores how even with religion, certain social problems need social solutions. Helga’s turn to religion does not just signal the beginning of her fall; it represents her thoroughly human standing in the novel and offers Larsen’s strongest challenge to a certain political tradition that would deny aid to those in need.

Helga’s final choices in the novel lead to a life that truly matters to her. She loves her children and finds motherhood an enriching experience: “No matter how often or how long she looked at these two small sons of hers, never did she lose a certain delicious feeling in which were mingled pride, tenderness, and exaltation” (114). Indeed, it is this love that makes the ending all the more poignant: “Of the children Helga tried not to think. She wanted not to leave them——*if that were possible*” (124, emphasis added). Audaciously, Larsen implies that Helga may not have a choice when it comes to abandoning her children. Her health may force her to leave them. Perhaps Helga’s own father had found himself in a similar bind. *Quicksand* ends by placing Helga’s own children in the same position as she once was, in a position, that is, of needing humanitarian aid.

¹¹³ On October 11, 2019, Attorney General William Barr gave a speech at Notre Dame University’s Law School. He began by referencing the “strong consensus about the centrality of religious liberty in the United States” (Barr). The tradition has also historically worked to flout the Christian dictum to love one’s neighbor in shaping government policies (for more on this, see chapter three).

In returning to the South, Helga resumes the same spirit of uplift she had previously embraced at Naxos. In emphasizing how full circle her thoughts and feelings had come, Larsen retains the same adjectives and verbal construction from her opening pages: “in her first hectic enthusiasm she intended and planned *to do much good to* her husband’s parishioners. Her young *joy and zest* for the uplifting of her fellow men came back to her. She meant to subdue the cleanly scrubbed ugliness of her own surroundings to soft inoffensive beauty, and to help the other women to do likewise” (110, emphasis added).¹¹⁴ The verbal phrase *to do to*, rather than *to act with*, or even *learn from*, speaks to an imposing, hierarchal, perhaps even unconsciously arrogant, form of help. Like her former students, Helga’s neighbors meet her efforts with “smiling agreement and good-natured promises,” but again like her students, “they would shake their heads sullenly over their wash-tubs and ironing-boards” after Helga went away (110). Finding how her own “children used her up” and struggling through morning sickness to put food on her husband’s table, Helga’s weakening spirit wonders, “How...did other women, other mothers, manage? Could it be possible that, while presenting such smiling and contented faces, they were all always on the edge of health? All always worn out and apprehensive?” (115) Helga’s earnest questions offer a complex picture of the difficulty rural women face as well as the challenge faced by those committed to alleviating some of that difficulty. Part of that challenge, as Helga’s experience attests, lies in the difficulty of reading adversity, particularly when one is outside it.

How could the Helga who taught at Naxos even have begun to understand the Helga that ended up living in the hinterland of Naxos? In *My Larger Education* (1911), Booker T. Washington

¹¹⁴ The late passage duplicates much from the earlier one: “Helga Crane had taught in Naxos for almost two years, at first with the keen *joy and zest* of those immature people who have dreamed dreams of *doing good to* their fellow men” (5, emphasis added).

characterizes the gulf between teacher and student he saw in his work in higher education. He could have been characterizing an even more general gulf between aid worker and aid recipient:

It is a rare thing, so far as my experience goes, for students in the Negro colleges to have had an opportunity to make any systematic study of the actual condition and needs of the schools and communities in which they are employed after they graduate. Instead of working out and teaching methods of connecting school with life, thus making it a center and a source of inspiration that might gradually transform the communities about them, these colleges have too frequently permitted their graduates to go out with the idea that their diploma was a sort of patent of nobility, and that the possessor of it was a superior being who was making a sacrifice in merely bestowing himself or herself as a teacher upon the communities to which he or she was called. (299)

Larsen's depiction of Helga at Naxos largely corroborates Washington's diagnosis. Frustrated, Helga wishes for a more liberal arts-style education during her time at Naxos. In this wish, she shares an important fellowship with Irving Babbitt and even W. E. B. Du Bois. Both looked to the most educated members of the community for leadership. In depicting the many forms of intelligence survival requires, *Quicksand* ruptures the idealism of such a vision. Instead, and this is a vision much of the criticism on the novel overlooks, *Quicksand's* portrait of Helga's affective agency affirms Booker T. Washington's vision.

By the end of the novel Helga has experienced firsthand the actual conditions and needs of the community she had previously taught. It would have been far better if the gulf between aid worker and aid recipient could have been bridged before this point. A liberal arts education of the kind Helga wishes for at Naxos, of the kind Babbitt's works champion, promises to broaden the forms of identification to which its students can turn. A liberal arts education nurtures imaginative

identification—ideally, a kind that acknowledges how the creativity, on which imaginative identification relies, materializes through the emotions—without becoming ensnared in them. When Helga identifies with her father in Copenhagen, she has yet to experience being a parent herself. If her identification had been imaginative rather than emotional, she might have been able to recognize the gap between her own experience and her father’s sooner. Direct experience, though, should not be a condition for reaching productive forms of human sympathy. Yet Larsen shows how direct experience becomes a requirement when a subject cannot manage empathy on her own. Because Helga is so often operating in survival mode, she cannot step away from herself and into someone else’s shoes. Securing subjects this baseline requirement is not a direct duty of an educator.

Still, liberal arts educators work to instill values in a community that foster general welfare. In Du Bois’s words those values are “intelligence, broad sympathy, knowledge of the world that was and is, and of the relation of men to it” (“Talented” 33). Babbitt’s vision of the liberal arts proves important as well here because it retains the power to name the dysfunctionality that arrests Helga throughout much of the novel: a reliance on emotional rather than imaginative identification. With clear vision, Babbitt fought the compulsions that were increasingly coming to characterize the modern subject: her “stuckness in place,” as literary critic Jennifer Fleissner describes it in her study of literary naturalism (x). “To grasp the meaning of this [sort of] plot”—a plot such as Helga’s—Fleissner asserts, “we must leave behind the old notion of naturalistic determination and replace it with that of ‘compulsion,’ a psychological category” (x).¹¹⁵ Compulsion in this sense

¹¹⁵ Fleissner’s work opens a pathway for seeing how compulsion in naturalist narratives “can lead, not to dumb repetition, but to the possibilities of creativity and critique” (x). I consider my reading of Helga’s compulsive polarity as vividly highlighting this critique function. Compulsivity might even be said to be what pushes the novel into the protest genre.

constitutes “a repetitive, rule-based behavior that a person feels they must perform [...] to feel normal and in some cases to prevent negative consequences from happening” (“Compulsion”). Helga Crane’s compulsion, however, is not clinical; it ensures her survival. We might define it as follows: susceptibility to sentimentality but only in confined bursts, checked by ironic intelligence. H. L. Mencken applauded Theodore Dreiser’s depiction of compulsion in his rendering of Caroline Meeber. Sharper and more discerning than Carrie, Helga eventually abandons her characteristic compulsion.¹¹⁶ This final act of abandon requires Helga to risk everything. That gesture should win our admiration and stir our compassion. It should also give us pause. We might do well to take that pause to consider why a crusty old scholar like Irving Babbitt would condemn such a psychological style, while working to assure that subjects like Helga do not have to resort to it.

¹¹⁶ Tragically, she abandons her characteristic polarity only to fall victim to compulsions not entirely of her own devising, under the repetitive cycles of life among the rural poor.

4.0 CLAUDE MCKAY'S CREATIVE REJOINDER TO ADAM SMITH: READING THE SENTIMENTAL HISTORIES IN *BANANA BOTTOM*

How does a human being attain reflective autonomy, the ability to think for herself and from her own experiences, as a ward of a Christian missionary couple, as a dark-skinned woman in a racially charged, socioeconomically stratified colony? This is the question Harlem Renaissance artist Claude McKay raises in his third novel *Banana Bottom* (1933). After publishing one of the first black-authored bestsellers in the United States, *Home to Harlem* (1928), and its sequel, *Banjo* (1929), both tales of black vagabonds navigating urban landscapes, McKay turns from a world of men and travel to the circumscribed, rural, mostly domestic world of a young woman in Jamaica.¹¹⁷ Despite such a change, his overarching project and insistent question as a novelist remains: how does a person of African descent living in a hostile environment learn to think when the social messages one receives do not confirm one's feelings, thoughts, experiences, or background? Under the weight of such a question, Kant's imperative *sapere aude* ("Have the courage to use your own understanding"), the motto of the European Enlightenment, assumes a more urgent meaning, particularly for *Banana Bottom*'s protagonist Tabitha Plant.

The tradition of reading McKay's primitivist aesthetic as a general rebuke of Western civilization has prevented readings of his work as in any way aligned with Enlightenment thought, particularly its rationalist branch. Primitivism is often understood as the elevation of African sensuality over and against Western civility, science, materialism, and ideas of progress (Coles

¹¹⁷ Michael Maiwald records that *Home to Harlem* "as one of the first African-American bestsellers—achieve[d] five printings in fewer than six months and s[old] over 50,000 copies" (825). Felicia R. Lee identifies McKay as the "author of the first novel by a black American to become a best seller."

and Isaacs 4). However, McKay's primitivism is not monolithic.¹¹⁸ Even in its challenge to the colonial history of European modernity, McKay's art does not outright reject Western values, nor does it reduce African values to the celebration of pleasurable pursuits. Even the most cursory reading of *Banana Bottom* reveals an author thinking beyond such simple binaries. Yet, partly because it seems such a misfit, the novel is rarely read in classrooms and fairly sidelined in McKay scholarship. As Leah Rosenberg observes, "*Banana Bottom* appears to be a shocking reversal of the radical politics of gender and aesthetics that McKay developed in *Home to Harlem* and *Banjo*," (114). *Banana Bottom* also appears to negate his earlier effort to imagine racial unity beyond the bounds of nationhood and, to some extent, even the novel (*Banjo*'s subtitle reads "A Story without a Plot").¹¹⁹ The *bildungsroman* and romance elements of *Banana Bottom* bring it into the orbit of the national novel. Though the novel ends by presenting its protagonist Bitá as an "intercultural worker" reading the Christian apologist Blaise Pascal "against the grain of assumed norms" (Bharucha 33).¹²⁰ Bitá reads while her young son plays under the mango tree and her husband

¹¹⁸ For examples of readings that engage the complexity of McKay's primitivism see W. Cooper 43-44, Hutchinson 185, Kelley 500, Lively 231, McCabe 475-476, M. North 116-123, Stoff 126-46, and Xavier 724-725. Among discussions of McKay's primitivism, Adam Lively's distinction between "exotic" and "protest" primitivism is the most productive. Lively argues McKay's art falls into the latter category. Also see Tracy McCabe's reading of Ray's primitivism in *Home to Harlem* as a progressive, anti-racist reconfiguration of existing primitivist aesthetics.

Primitivism's French iteration, the Negritude movement, is perhaps even more known for its binary thinking in pitting European modernity against African primitivism. For comments on the cultural dualism of the group, see Ashcroft and Soyinka. Though not a founder of the movement itself, McKay's novel *Banjo* played a crucial role in inspiring its founders. Léopold Sédar Senghor, one of the founders, called McKay "the veritable inventor of *Négritude*...not of the word...but of the values of *Négritude*" (W. Cooper 259).

For a reading that places McKay's primitivism in this more straightforward history of rejecting European modernity see Leah Rosenberg's *Nationalism and the Formation of Caribbean Literature* (2007), chapter four (91-121).

¹¹⁹ Yet the nature of the novel from its inception has been genre defying.

¹²⁰ Theater director and critic Rustom Bharucha, speaking largely to a postcolonial context of cultural exchange, describes a process in which "importations and borrowings ... become indigenized." After a time, such texts shed their intercultural status by signifying new norms. Such a process de-hegemonizes the taken-for-granted category of the ordinary (32). Much like Bitá as McKay presents her, Bharucha's

works nearby. In all other respects, the cozy closing scene rather curiously evokes mid-nineteenth-century domestic fiction, a genre that relied on the power of feeling to lead readers to right conduct.

This ideology preoccupies much of the narrative throughout *Banana Bottom*. To take one example from the novel, consider how this chapter-ending reverie emphasizes, if not precisely the relation of will to intellect, then surely the formation of a mind under a particular kind of education:

Desire was a radiant thing, more precious than gratification. [Bita's] thoughts raced away and brought back a sharp fleeting reminder of a brief holiday in England and a sentimental encounter with a relative of one of her college mates. But only a memory.

For her emotional thoughts even were finely framed in that realm of the practical, which her higher training had always emphasized. (191)

The hint of a turn-of-the-century biracial romance, now “only a memory,” indicates a well-ordered, discerning mind, while the phrase *emotional thoughts* (pace Descartes) implies a Stoic model of mind. As Thomas Pfau explains, under Stoicism, “[p]assion [...] is not a distinct antagonist of reason but evidence of the latter’s as yet incomplete cultivation. To the extent that passion holds sway over someone’s mind, it points to one’s failure to apprehend and appraise the propositional nature of ‘impressions’ with the requisite care” (*Minding* 336).¹²¹ Following a Stoic understanding,

intercultural worker “disimbricates her intervention from existing hegemonies by working consciously, if not subversively, against the grain of assumed norms” (33).

¹²¹ Here and in later sections, I rely on some of Thomas Pfau’s commentaries on Stoicism and his close readings of Adam Smith from *Minding the Modern*. I disagree with Pfau’s classification of Smith as a proto-behaviorist, though I am sympathetic to Pfau’s frustration with the contemporary trend to instrumentalize knowledge. I disagree, however, with the larger thrust of his book in its reading of modernity as a crisis. And though I feel deeply indebted to the Platonic-Christian tradition myself in both personal and scholarly levels, I disagree with Pfau’s belief that the authority of this tradition should be reinstated. I view the inclusion of various belief systems under secular liberalism as an unquestionable good. In arguing for the reinstatement of a divine logos, Pfau leaves out history and material circumstances as forces that give rise to and shape ideas (in other words, his work remains far from any Marxist considerations). Moreover, he does not acknowledge the strides we have made under modernity to include the plurality of voices his canon excludes. See Elizabeth Pritchard’s review and Victoria Kahn’s response to *Minding the Modern*.

“emotions are not simply blind surges of affect” (Nussbaum, *Therapy* 369). Emotions are “propositional in nature,” “entail judgments,” and “involve evaluative assessments of existing states of affairs” (Pfau, *Minding* 336; Grenier 2). As Epictetus writes, “it is not things themselves that disturb men, but their judgment about things” (Long and Sedley 418). Through this framework, it becomes possible to see *Banana Bottom* as McKay’s attempt to implant Stoic elements in domestic fiction’s soil.

In keeping with such a philosophy, Bitá’s memory of the passionate encounter poses her no threat because she has cultivated an inner calm. Whether this scenario implies an entirely progressive politics is debatable. “The physical display of emotions,” Valerie Purton notes, “is inevitably public, affective, and as a result potentially politically dangerous” (xviii). *Banana Bottom* appears worlds away from the fiery spurring tone of “If We Must Die,” McKay’s 1919 revolutionary lyric penned in response to the white violence against African Americans in the postwar period. *Banana Bottom* unmistakably values its protagonist’s inner balance, as it impresses upon the reader the beneficial order that comes from a Stoic model of mind. The narrative’s frequently mocking tone is absent here as the chapter ends. Finally, the passage’s ranking of self-control above pleasure counters the licentious image McKay won for himself with *Home to Harlem*. Many of its early, more prudish reviewers would be surprised, no doubt, by this passage. However, it well represents the narrative’s larger thematic investments. Concepts of mind and their relation to feeling dominate *Banana Bottom*’s prose, underpinning the novel’s larger reckoning with “sentimental encounters.” The direction and meaning of McKay’s undertaking increase in clarity when we understand this passage, and also *Banana Bottom* in general, as calling for a Stoic approach to emotion. While this orientation grows most evident in the final pages of the novel, it originates in its revisionist account of sentimental reflection.

To track the evolving meaning of the term *sentimental* in the narrative, I propose seeing *Banana Bottom* as McKay's creative rejoinder to another Enlightenment thinker, Kant's near contemporary, Adam Smith.¹²² Admittedly, it is an eccentric proposal to bring a conservative Presbyterian Scotsman and the father of modern economics into dialogue with a black Marxist poet accused of being "the enfant terrible" and "unabashed 'Playboy of the Negro Renaissance'" (Locke 63-64). But to consider Smith means to explore a branch of philosophy that grants feeling a prominent role in the process of moral reflection and takes practical social interactions as foundational for a working moral system. As a key representative of sentimentalism and leading figure in the Scottish Enlightenment, Smith, and a study of him, highlights the affective component of what has been understood as a chiefly rationalist movement. And as Hina Nazar argues, the sentimental branch of the Enlightenment "shaped one of [its] principal legacies to the modern world: the ideal of autonomy or moral self-direction, which began to compete with an older morality of obedience in the eighteenth century" (1-2).¹²³ More specifically, to consider McKay alongside Smith means to account for sentimentalism's legacy, its theories of sympathy and fellow feeling, in community formation particularly as they intersect with modern patterns of ethical and even economic reasoning from the position of Britain's colonial subjects. *Banana Bottom* centrally

¹²² McKay's search for self-actualization also retains some echoes of Smith's near contemporary Immanuel Kant whose imperative *sapere aude* ("Have the courage to use your own understanding") gave the European Enlightenment its motto (Fleischacker, *What* 13).

Where Kant's Platonic-rationalist ethics makes reason the master of the passions, Smith's account of moral reflection grants the passions a prominent place (though those passions receive the tamer, more socially-mediated form of *sentiments*). Smith's ethical theory of the impartial spectator works from practical observations unlike Kant's categorical imperative, which offers a formalist approach. I will read Smith's account of moral reflection as growing out of a tradition that gives credence to emotion as part of the process. The line of moral sense philosophers Smith's thought extends were known best and valued most "for their general vindication of feeling, for their argument that rational society is based on an intuitive and emotionally registered condition" (M. Ellis 14).

¹²³ Nazar's study indicates the ways in which key works in the sentimental tradition renders a "postmetaphysical character" to autonomy, guarding it against charges of negligence concerning "the social and material contexts of subjectivity" (2).

explores this legacy and its intersections. *Banana Bottom*'s apparent conservatism turns out to be a more complex iteration of McKay's lifelong search for viable and substantive forms of black community.

My reading of *Banana Bottom* takes its cue from three features in the novel. First, *Banana Bottom* repeatedly references the sentimental tradition, a tradition Smith helped to shape by writing *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), a monumental study in what we now classify as social psychology.¹²⁴ Second, the narrative spends considerable time depicting and diagnosing the Jamaican economy especially under colonial rule. Finally, *Banana Bottom* illustrates, may even be seen as tenaciously thematizing, how entangled ethical and economic thinking can become. Certainly, the plot asks its readers to consider this entanglement as a problem.

McKay leads readers to question the priority of economics over morality when he depicts religious leaders becoming embroiled in business ventures, when he shows how charitable money comes with expectations that its recipients exhibit certain moral behaviors, and when he mocks social climbers for putting on airs of learnedness, piety, and purity.¹²⁵ Frequently McKay parodies

¹²⁴ Smith was the student of moral-sense philosopher Francis Hutcheson (1694-1746) and later his successor to the Chair of Moral Philosophy at the University of Glasgow (1751-64). Here I use sentimental tradition to refer to the philosophical tradition of moral sentimentalism. Also known as the moral-sense school, its key figures Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, Hume, and Smith proposed a view of morality based on the sympathetic connection we feel for others. Moral sentimentalism's high valuation of the emotional response we have to experience proved foundational not only for the sentimental novel, that depicts "sympathy as the mechanism by which we become concerned for the happiness of others," but also for eighteenth and nineteenth century novelists more generally (Soni, *Mourning* 297). As Rae Greiner writes, "literary evidence shows Smith's name, book titles, formulations, and chosen metaphors regularly alluded to throughout the period [nineteenth century]. In Maria Edgeworth's *Belinda* (1801), *Theory of Moral Sentiments* sits alongside La Bruyere and John Moore on a reading table, and *The Wealth of Nations*—along with a slew of invisible hands—is referenced openly in such texts as Harriet Martineau's *Illustrations of Political Economy* (1832-34) and George Eliot's *Middlemarch* (1871-72)" (6-7). For other references, see Anna Kornbluh's *Realizing Capital*, particularly chapter 3, Imraan Coovadia's "George Eliot's Realism and Adam Smith," and David Marshall's *Figure of Theater*.

¹²⁵ Despite her designs to bring Bitia into the circles of Jamaica's technocratic elite, even Mrs. Craig finds its culture of pretense unacceptable when a "native gentleman" in the Civil Service confesses he reads only newspapers, though "it's nice to furnish a room like this with fine books and bookcases." He explains to

the ethical imagination of those who take existing economic relations as natural. In one memorable example, when knitting needles start disappearing from the church sewing circle, the reverend's wife, Mrs. Priscilla Craig, a white British émigré to Jamaica, begins to suspect her parishioners, of whom most are black, of taking them. After hearing her husband benignly suggest it might be a "case of kleptomania," Priscilla asks, "How could such a crime of high society exist among such backward people? It was just plain downright stealing" (228). Underneath the humor of mocking vignettes like this one lies the gravely serious question: if the social order is nothing more than economic order, what grounds a moral order?

The entwined and overlapping discourses of moral sentiment and political economy remains an abiding topic among scholars of sentimentalism.¹²⁶ Gillian Skinner, for example, opens her study by asserting that eighteenth-century sentimental novels, like Henry Mackenzie's *The Man of Feeling* (1771), were "based not simply on feeling, but on feeling and *money*" (1). Skinner draws attention to how Samuel Richardson's gallant nobleman Sir Charles Grandison "quite consciously uses the response to financial generosity as a barometer of moral worth" (1-2). As Marianne Noble explains, "the intersection of principled and tender feelings at the individual level with commerce and politics at the larger public level makes sentimentalism a valuable object of cultural analysis" (171). McKay complicates such an analysis by making it contend with the social dynamics of colonialism in Jamaica, particularly in the aftermath of a plantation economy. The

Mrs. Craig, "It is the fashion and gives distinction." And though she is often the target of the narrator's scorn, Mrs. Craig dishes out a little of her (and likely McKay's) own with her reply: "I think reading good books should be a *moral* necessity to every literary person" (215). Bitá finds the bookshelves full of volumes whose pages remain uncut. Bitá's own interest draws her to Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* as well as sets by Walter Scott and Charles Dickens (214).

¹²⁶ See G. J. Barker-Benfield's *The Culture of Sensibility* (1992), Markman Ellis's *The Politics of Sensibility* (p. 107), chapter three of Anna Kornbluh's *Realizing Capital*, Wendy Motooka's *The Age of Reasons*, Gillian Skinner's *Sensibility and Economics*, and Aaron Ritzenberg's *The Sentimental Touch*.

racial and colonial discord his protagonist experiences in the plot can hardly be said to be the standard fare of sentimental novels, yet the use of the term *sentimental* by the novel's narrator, its inciting action (a rape inspires charity), and its final scene of domestic bliss (a tableau that imparts a familial and pastoral utopia) draw the story into the genre's general purview. Admittedly, the novel does not follow the sentimental conventions of feelings receiving their due and natural confirmation, of the heart's wisdom appearing evident, or of spontaneous compassion inspiring ethical action. Nevertheless, Bitá's story finds its way, albeit by a more circuitous route, to principled and tender feelings.

On the individual level, then, *Banana Bottom* tells the story of a rape's aftermath. After being raped at the young age of twelve, Bitá Plant attracts the charitable interest of British missionaries Reverend Malcolm Craig and his wife Priscilla. To save Bitá from scandal, the Craigs send her abroad for an English education. The main action of the plot begins seven years later with Bitá's return. Refined and educated, Bitá comes back to Jamaica a young lady, poised to fulfill the Craigs' plans for her. She will live on the mission, marry their male protégé Deacon Herald Newton Day, and together the two will set a good example of Christian stewardship for the native population. Bitá's own sense of fellowship with her fellow islanders, however, disrupts those plans. While wondering through the village market, she experiences an oceanic feeling of connection with the folk. Shortly afterward, she meets a different kind of mentor, an eccentric British expatriate and folklorist named Squire Gensir who encourages her to experience more of her native culture by inviting her to a tea meeting.¹²⁷ Gensir leads her to rethink her polite

¹²⁷ A traditional gathering featuring music, performances, and dancing that went late into the night. Formal invitations were usually sent for these gatherings and small admission fees were charged. The main attraction of the evening typically involved a cake auction. Young men of the village took particular pride in winning the cake, which was symbolic of the crown or gate of the village, and quite usefully usually ended up covering the cost of the event for the host (Cooper, *Claude* 59-60).

education and see Afro-Jamaican culture and traditions as equal to and even, in some ways, superior to its European counterpart. In concert with Bitá's moral development growing out of her sympathy with the folk, the novel ends with Bitá following the wisdom of her heart and marrying her father's drayman to live a quiet country life. In these last features, especially, *Banana Bottom* may be read as echoing the conventions of the sentimental novel (and echoing the plot structure of *Quicksand*, as noted in my previous chapter).

On the larger public level, *Banana Bottom* tells the story of slavery's aftermath and Jamaica's reckoning with the economic order it leaves behind. McKay means his audience to read the particularity of Bitá's experiences within an equally particular history, one he outlines in the novel's opening chapters. The first chapter tells the story of a culture that springs up from a Scotchman's emancipation of the village of Banana Bottom, Bitá's birthplace. While Bitá's family hails from the slaves of the Banana Bottom estate, the man who rapes her is a mixed-race descendant of their liberator. As McKay's narrator discloses, the lighter-skinned Adair line garners the "sentimental" regard of the villagers even as it holds a monopoly over the village livestock and general store (9).

The second chapter unfolds the history of the "sentimental friendship" between the Plants and Craigs (17, 25). Before the scandal of Bitá's rape, her grandfather, Jaban Plant, once supported Malcolm's father, Angus Craig, through a scandal of his own. Seeing the poor coffee growers of the congregation suffer from being at the mercy of the market, Rev. Angus Craig of the Free Church of Jubilee proposes his parishioners form a collective, storing their harvest until all can secure better prices for their coffee on the market. But that year, white dealers from town did not offer the higher prices they typically did later in the season. Under the suggestion of gossip from town, the poor farmers in the collective began to suspect Angus of colluding with the big white

dealers behind their backs. Only Bitá's grandfather Jaban stands by Angus through the turn in local opinion against him. As a local agent in town who traveled through rural back roads to purchase native produce, Jaban could see the larger reason for the collective's failure and, therefore, knew Angus's efforts were in good faith. Jaban's explanation, however, fails to convince the members of the collective, and soon he becomes the only worshipper attending Sunday service. Jaban's support through this trying period cements the bond between the families. The novel's opening exposé shows that the solidarity that grows out of this history makes the Craigs' charity toward Bitá no random act.¹²⁸

In short, the histories in the opening two chapters prove fundamental for understanding Bitá's later experiences of sexual assault and racism—and even the nepotism behind the island's lighter-skinned, technocratic elite that her education, despite her dark skin, has positioned her to enter. In narrating *Banana Bottom* as he does, McKay asks us to conceive of the impact of colonial history on Jamaican society and to account for the consequences of that impact, for many of the same social problems the exposition portrays recur. Their recurrence accentuates the attitudes perpetuated by a colonial mentality. This tenacious attitudinal structure represents the chief obstacle against which Bitá must fight to gain reflective autonomy. Bitá's fight exposes the porous boundaries of the self within a racially based, colonial social structure. Before turning to Bitá's struggle within this sentimental colonial matrix, let me sketch in some historical background on the sentimental aspects of the matrix that will make McKay's rendering of it more intelligible.¹²⁹

¹²⁸ Altruism, McKay would seem to argue, is more systematic than the villagers believe (when some of the girls and their mothers wish they had been raped in Bitá's place).

¹²⁹ In the term sentimental colonial matrix I am adapting Silvia Xavier's argument that Claude McKay's "construction of identity shows the problematic nature of a 'sympathetic' racial matrix" (725).

The sentimental colonial matrix is colonial in carrying all the attitudinal effects of unequal power relations that follow from Jamaica being the property of the British Crown, particularly its history of enslavement (1655-1834). The system takes on the quality of a matrix in the ubiquity of this attitudinal

4.1 SYSTEMIC SENTIMENTALISM: THE COFFEE SCANDAL

The story of the coffee scandal begins and ends by drawing attention to “the close sentimental friendship” that grows out of it (17, 25). The episode’s opening appears to cue an ironic reading of sentimentalism. A single case of loyal friendship crossing racial lines foreshadows a feel-good ending:

For Malcolm Craig, frank, hearty, God-praising soul, it was not impossible to scent something of God’s mysterious ways in the rape of Bitá and her subsequent coming under his mission roof. It was giving him an opportunity to demonstrate in full the measure of the family friendship that began with his father between the Craigs and the Plants, the white man and the black. (17)

The opening rib against Malcolm’s providential belief (so earnest it makes rape appear as part of God’s plan) highlights the questionable accounting sympathy seems to encourage. The hint of a balancing of debts in the phrase “in full the measure” appears to taint (ever so slightly) Malcolm’s gratitude and, in so doing, reveals an aspect of sentimentalism *Banana Bottom* works to interrogate—and, finally, cast off—the economic metaphors governing sympathetic transactions, which partially corrupt the exchange. As Amit Rai explains, under Smith’s theory and the logic of sentimental ethics in general, “sympathy is a gift one gives to another, but one that, as a gift, and despite anything the other might do, immediately yields a certain profit, a return, a pleasure in/to oneself” (53). While Malcolm’s degree of satisfaction records this aspect of sympathetic exchanges, the narrative will later show that not all displays of sympathy afford the agent

system; so impossible is it to escape its imprint and effects, the net result of which disorients the individual caught up in it.

satisfaction. As testament to the complex portrait of sympathy the narrative provides, the opening rib against Malcolm's belief comes with an equally insistent emphasis on his kindness, which the narrative always keeps intact, for McKay means to have his readers find the sentimental impulse behind the Craigs' missionary work admirable, genuinely useful, and aligned with the proper values. The Craigs' mission, we are told, was abolitionist in its roots and stood against "the pious aristocratic slaveowners [who] had their Anglican chapels upon the great estates" (19).¹³⁰ The

¹³⁰ The sincere portrait of friendship in the novel draws on McKay's own life. Four years after *Banana Bottom*, in his memoir *A Long Way from Home* (1937), McKay tells the story of his father's friendship with a white missionary, a friendship he defends as authentic in its affection and mutual in its respect. McKay contrasts the integrity his father recognized in his friend with the animosity he felt for another white clergyman who he saw as conniving and crooked. *Banana Bottom* replicates this history exactly, down to its portrait of the opportunistic preacher Jacob Brown. In his memoir this family history comes to stand for something more. McKay draws a parallel between the honest clergyman his father befriended and the supportive artistic patrons he knew. Similarly, he compares the crooked preacher his father detested with the exploitative patrons of the Harlem Renaissance. As David Levering Lewis notes, "Much of McKay's writing was completed under the aegis of one form of white patronage or another" (63). By the time of *Banana Bottom* this was certainly the case. Rather than simply reading McKay as protesting too much, I would like to give proper weight to his argument against using friends for social advantage. In comparing his friendships with whites with those of his father, he means to protect friendship from self-interest (and commercial society): "I make this digression about white friendship and my father, because, like him, I have also had some white friends in my life, friends from the upper class, the middle class, and the lower and the very lowest class. Maybe I have had more white than colored friends. Perhaps I have been impractical in putting the emotional above the social value of friendship, but neither the color of my friends, nor the color of their money, nor the color of their class has ever been of much significance to me. It was more the color of their minds, the warmth and depth of their sensibility and affection, that influenced me" (*Long* 37-38). For McKay, white friendships had meaning, being both authentically affectionate and creatively productive, but they were also lived out within a larger social order of racial tensions that required serious contextualization and commentary.

Adam Smith did not anticipate the ways in which artistic patronage would continue into the modern era, and he certainly did not account for the impact slavery and colonialism would have upon its practice. As historian Richard Godbeer explains, Smith imagined he was writing at a moment in history in which "an understanding of friendship as a form of alliance or patronage was giving way to an emphasis on emotional attachment." Under his argument, evolving commercial societies freed citizens to form friendships "based on personal compatibility rather than calculations of interest" (Godbeer 157). In *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Smith claims this shift away from clan-based alliances to friendships freely entered into makes space for a greater expression of human virtue: "But of all attachments to an individual, that which is founded altogether upon the esteem and approbation of his good conduct and behavior, confirmed by much experience and long acquaintance, is, by far, the most respectable. Such friendships, arising not from a constrained sympathy, not from a sympathy which has been assumed and rendered habitual for the sake of conveniency and accommodation; but from a natural sympathy, from *an* involuntary feeling that the persons

background of the Craigs' mission, in other words, alerts the reader to a second version of sympathy, which is less involved in disciplining citizens under class society and consolidating empire than it is in nurturing critique against the status quo. As Rai writes, "for evangelists, abolitionists, missionaries, [and] reformers, the family was the preeminent work space for the functioning of sympathy. [...] As 'a spiritual art,' sympathy could be a kind of refusal or challenge to capitalist norms, colonial culture, or even Anglican hegemony" (13).

It quickly becomes clear that, in ministering to his congregation, Malcolm's father practiced sympathy under this more subversive spirit. The story of the coffee scandal begins with Reverend Angus Craig witnessing the peasants' "misfortune" and being "touched" by it (18). The reader learns that, as ex-slaves with little to their name, peasants living hand to mouth were forced to sell their crop immediately after harvest when market prices were always low. Seeing their plight year after year kindles Angus's sympathy, which serves as the catalyst for his social action. A thoroughly sentimental operation founds the Free Church coffee pool, a plan to store the beans from the year's harvest until all the peasants, poor and more well off alike, can secure good rates for their product. Everyone signs on, carried away on the feeling of the imminent success the cooperative seems to promise. But that year as the peak season approached, coffee prices dropped rather than climbed as they had in the past. Forced to hold the coffee over until the following year, the peasants faced even grimmer prospects. When circumstances failed to improve the next year, they sold receiving the lowest price "in the history of the bean as West Indian commodity" (20).

to whom we attach ourselves are the natural and proper objects of esteem and approbation; can exist only among men of virtue" (VI/ 265).

However much Smith's picture of human behavior seems the better part of wishful thinking from our contemporary perspective, it is, nonetheless, reflective of his larger project to find in sympathy the root and conduit of human virtues. But where Smith entwines the emotional and social value of such sympathy, McKay teases them apart.

By presenting a scenario in which a well-intended religious leader fails to make a positive intervention in his congregation's well-being, McKay, in a sense, asks his reader to contend with the Adam Smith Problem, a debate in Smithian scholarship about the compatibility of benevolent actions and self-interested ones as they play out in commercial society, or, put another way, the compatibility of *Theory of Moral Sentiments* with Smith's subsequent work, *The Wealth of Nations*. The failure of Angus to successfully calculate his moral intervention through the collective also appears to bear out Bernard Mandeville's thesis in *The Fable of the Bees* (1714): as society grows more complex, "individual action becomes impotent or loses its meaning, not because it is without effects, but because the effects of actions have become radically unpredictable" (Soni, *Mourning* 316).¹³¹ Sentimental ethics, according to Vivasvan Soni, develop as a direct response to the crisis in ethical activity Mandeville diagnoses and the solution he proposes. Faced with the crisis of ethical activity, Mandeville advised, each individual should pursue his or her own self-interest above all else. Across the writings of sentimental moral philosophers, *Fable of the Bees* provoked fervent protestation. That Mandeville's recommendation

¹³¹ I borrow Vivasvan Soni's interpretation of Mandeville's thesis here because he both clarifies the ethical implications at stake in Mandeville's worldview and argues for its widespread acceptance by mainstream philosophers. Soni's account illuminates the historical background and ethical stakes that the turn from a narrative to a visually based ethics entails: "The significance of moral theory in the eighteenth century—its labor to limit the sphere of responsibility—can be understood only from the perspective of the crisis of ethical activity. [...] Since private vices lead to public benefits, as the paradoxical subtitle formulates it—since prostitution protects the chastity of married women, and the gin trade provides employment—it is impossible to calculate reliably the effects of actions. Individual action becomes impotent or loses its meaning, not because it is without effects, but because the effects of actions have become radically unpredictable Mandeville's thesis is historically specific; the problem of the imminent obsolescence of the ethical arises only in modernity. Mandeville has begun to glimpse the existence of structural problems within the social order that are beyond the reach of individual actions; the lawlike statistical regularities of society operate on principles that are not (easily) altered by acts of individual volition" (315-16). Moral theorists want to refute Mandeville; but, as Soni contends, they "succeed only by dignifying the very impotence of practical activity Mandeville had diagnosed and reinterpreting inconsequential action as ethical. Despite the persistent demonization of Mandeville, theorists accept his hypothesis as the starting point for ethical reflection" (*Mourning* 316). Soni identifies the writing of Smith, Ferguson, Malthus, Kant, and Hegel as departing from this common eighteenth-century premise in social theory.

was principally rhetorical appears to have been lost on many whose literal interpretations missed his irony.¹³² Smith, in particular, in *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, dismisses Mandeville's text as "wholly pernicious" (TMS vol. 2 Part VII. Section II. p. 290).

Reading *Banana Bottom* in relation to sentimental history allows for a clearer delineation of the kind of sympathy McKay finds politically productive in colonial Jamaica as well as the kind he finds detrimental. *Banana Bottom* takes the scandal out of Mandeville's argument. As a man of God, Angus draws no such conclusion from the backfiring of his plan and continues presuming that practical activity can eventually achieve its ends. Doubling down in his ministry, Angus interprets the coffee collective failure, not as a sign that his congregation pursue self-interest, but that he must cede his position of leadership. He begins an adamant campaign to install native leadership.

4.2 THE ADAM SMITH PROBLEM

The exact relationship between Adam Smith's ethical system and his economic philosophy caused some confusion among Smith's nineteenth-century German interpreters who wondered if he had changed his mind between the writing of his two most famous books. German capitalists and Marxists argued over an apparent incongruity in his vision between *The Theory of Moral*

¹³² If sentimental philosophers do misinterpret Mandeville, their misinterpretations are suggestive given the longstanding division between sentimental and ironic cultural styles which frequently marks political differences between conservative and liberal audiences. Carl Wilson's study, *Let's Talk About Love: Why Other People Have Such Bad Taste* (2014), makes this divide particularly clear, especially in his discussion of subversion in chapter ten. For a summary of scholarly positions about whether or not to classify Mandeville's *Fable* as a satire, see Alessandro Chiessi's chapter in *Bernard de Mandeville's Topology of Paradoxes: Morals, Politics, Economics, and Therapy* (68-70).

Sentiments (1759) and *The Wealth of Nations* (1776); his first book being based on sentimentalist virtue ethics; his second, ostensibly on individualist libertarian economics. Dubbed the Adam Smith problem “by the Swiss-based German economist August Oncken in 1898,” the quest to reconcile Smith’s works remained an interpretive dilemma for nearly a century (Hont 18).¹³³ By the early nineteen-eighties, however, scholars had come to a critical consensus that there was no such inconsistency in Smith’s view from one book to the next.¹³⁴ The problem, most agreed, had resulted from either a distortion of what Smith meant by sympathy and self-interest or a failure to read his work altogether. Recently, the dominant trend among Smith scholars is to work toward integrating his writing by using *Theory of Moral Sentiments* as a foundation upon which to

¹³³ Richard Teichgraeber summarizes the history in “Rethinking *Das Adam Smith Problem*,” *Journal of British Studies* 20.2 (1981): 106-123. Also see Keith Tribe, “The German Reception of Adam Smith,” in *A Critical Bibliography of Adam Smith* (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2002): 120-152.

¹³⁴ In *Adam Smith and the Virtues of Enlightenment* (1999), Charles Griswold argues that TMS and WN “together...form a coherent whole” (30). Griswold interprets Smith’s political economy within his wider moral philosophy. Like Vivienne Brown (1994), Griswold reads the two books in dialogue. Brown reads the “invisible hand” metaphor as it first appears in TMS as a moral one with Stoic roots detailing happiness as unconnected to material wealth (79). In Smith’s second use of the metaphor in WN, Brown argues, much like Jonathan Schlefer, that commentators misapprehend the metaphor as an endorsement of free markets but that the metaphor occurs in a chapter about “restraints on imports” in which Smith argues that “domestic industry rather than foreign industry is naturally preferred and is also more advantageous to the public interest” (160). Also see Teichgraeber (1981) who argues that the reductive form of the problem can be quickly dismissed but the “complex task” of reconciling Smith “as a moral and social theorist” is a real one (111). A year later, the editors of the Glasgow edition of TMS, D. D. Raphael and Alec Macfie, named it “a pseudo-problem based on ignorance and misunderstanding” of the relation between the two studies (20). Other works include: Glenn R. Morrow, *The Ethical and Economic Theories of Adam Smith* (New York, 1923); A. L. Macfie, *The Individual in Society* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1967); T. D. Campbell, *Adam Smith’s Science of Morals* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1971); Robert Boyden Lamb, “Adam Smith’s System: Sympathy Not Self-Interest,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 35 (1974): 671-682; Andrew S. Skinner, *A System of Social Science: Papers Relating to Adam Smith* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979); Athol Fitzgibbons, *Adam Smith’s System of Liberty, Wealth and Virtue: The Moral and Political Foundations of the Wealth of Nations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995); Amartya Sen, *On Ethics and Economics* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987): 1-28; Patricia Werhane, *Adam Smith and His Legacy for Modern Capitalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); Donald Winch, *Adam Smith’s Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1978); and, James R. Ottenson, *Adam Smith’s Marketplace of Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2002). Most recently, Chris Clarke argues, “attempting to solve the Adam Smith Problem actually reproduce a mythology of coherence by reading back into his work a level of consistency that might not be supported by his actual texts” (28).

interpret the economic arguments in *Wealth of Nations*. As Chris Clarke notes, “viewing his work as a comprehensive whole is one of the key features in the renaissance of interest in Smith over the last thirty years” (28).¹³⁵

The Adam Smith problem can be viewed as symptomatic of a larger tendency within the field of economics to narrow its view of human action. Economist and philosopher Amartya Sen, for example, opposes an economic model of human action based chiefly on motives of rational self-interest.¹³⁶ Against the utilitarian emphasis of neoclassical economics, Sen argues for a return to an older, Aristotelian conception of economics that includes the study of social well-being with a broader understanding of human agency in its purview. Sen attributes the misappropriations of Smith to a failure to read his theory of ethics in relation to his economics: “it is precisely the narrowing of the broad Smithian view of human beings, in modern economies, that can be seen as one of the major deficiencies of contemporary economic theory” (28). Our foggy memory of Smith grants many commentators in the popular press license to cite him as an authoritative source on contemporary capitalist relations. This common move, however, disregards Smith’s broader social concerns and decontextualizes his references to an older commercial society, specific to the rapid evolution of labor and markets in seventeenth and eighteenth-century.

Academic discussions of Smith position him as narrowly economic in his formulations as well. Many critics view Smith’s moral theory as compromised by its rhetorical reliance on commercial society. For example, philosopher Charles Taylor identifies an important paradigm shift in how we organize ourselves socially:

¹³⁵ Other scholars who have noted a similar trend include Horst Claus Recktenwald (56) and Jan Peil (7).

¹³⁶ Sen’s position poses a direct challenge to the two main premises of neoclassical economics: (1) that analyses of economic systems can be separated from social systems and (2) that the rational action of individuals optimizes personal utility. Sen draws on moral and political philosophy to enrich economic understandings of human behavior as motivated by more than rational self-interest.

Conceiving of the economy as a system is an achievement of eighteenth-century theory, with the physiocrats and Adam Smith, but coming to see the most important purpose and agenda of society as economic collaboration and exchange is a drift in our social imaginary that begins in that period and continues to this day. (181)

Many literary critics follow Taylor in dismissing Smith, even as they acknowledge the significant influence Smith's aesthetic model of sympathy has had on the novel.¹³⁷ The tendency to naturalize political economy should be opposed. Yet laying the blame on Smith for this present-day mindset causes us to lose a potential ally in this effort. Skilled interpreters of language should not concede to the common, talking head notion of Smith as a free-market ideologue bent on promoting a purely self-interested model of human behavior. Misinterpreting him in this way only further fortifies the stronghold economic reductionism and rational-choice theory have on our social imaginary.¹³⁸ Rereading McKay in relation to Smith seems like a useful step toward working our way out of this stronghold, particularly because McKay's imagination is so effective at challenging the common

¹³⁷ Taylor, I think incorrectly, maintains that Smith, "in no way wanted to reject this order [of commercial society], merely to find some prophylactic for its dangerous potentialities" (185). For examples of literary scholarship that forwards a similar view (thus condemning sentimentalism), see Thomas Pfau's *Minding the Modern* (chapter 12) and Vivasvan Soni's *Mourning Happiness* (chapter 8). Anna Kornbluh's *Realizing Capital* (chapter 3) shows how *Middlemarch*'s references to Smith mount a critique of sympathy based on an economy of scarcity. Wendy Motooka's *The Age of Reasons* (chapter 6) mounts a similar argument about the entwined nature of sentimental and economic discourse, opposing the economic reductionism that results from such a view of human motivation.

¹³⁸ As Noam Chomsky argues, Smith's standing as the mascot of rational self-interest topples with any close reading of his *Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (1776), particularly its notorious metaphor the invisible hand, which is actually an argument against what is now termed neoliberalism (see the 2008 documentary *American Feud*).

For a reading of Smith that positions him against dominant contemporary culture, see *Adam Smith: Father of Economics* (2018) by Jesse Norman, a conservative Member for House of Commons in the United Kingdom. Norman lucidly dispels the modern readings of Smith as a free market ideologue.

sense view that would naturalize a certain equivalency between exchange of human affections and the exchange of goods.¹³⁹

4.3 MCKAY'S CREATIVE REJOINER

McKay uses the coffee scandal to show how humans struggle to understand the scale of a global economy. A certain circularity characterizes the whole event which begins with the peasants' frustrations with the big white dealers in town cheating them of profit and ends with their belief that Reverend Angus Craig colluded with white dealers to swindle them even more. The planters believe their problems originate on the national market. Deprived of access to information to know better (the only source of information they have is the middleman Jaban Plant's word), their vision remains local, and racial tensions thicken. McKay provides the reader with the bigger picture. Through a narrative aside, we learn the real problem behind the coffee collective's failure: "What had happened was the spreading of the world market of Brazilian coffee, competing with West Indian coffee" (21). That the coffee farmers never consider foreign commodity's impact on their market dramatizes the irrationality of overproduction brought on by the global market. The

¹³⁹ Over and above his literary output, McKay earns his credentials in this regard as a writer and editor for the socialist magazine *The Liberator* and the socialist newspaper *Workers' Dreadnought*.

The pervasiveness of this view, as Karl Polanyi notes, may be seen in how thoroughly liberal and Marxist thinkers alike have signed on to this "economistic fallacy,"—"the belief that the evolution of society has been principally determined by such economic considerations as the search for efficiency or greater profit" (F. Block 27). Many have falsely attributed Smith with views that are more properly attributed to Mandeville. See, for example, Jeffrey J. Sallaz (2013) and Jack Russell Weinstein (2016). As Sallaz writes, "insofar as mainstream economic discourse about work and labor is today considered common sense, it would be no exaggeration to say that we live in a Smithian world." Weinstein puts a finer point on what constitutes this common sense view: "We live in a Smithian world, one in which self-interest has priority, if not selfishness itself" (357).

narrator's comment also upsets the national framework of the novel, forcing its themes into more international considerations.

It is significant that the drastically altered price point for coffee on the island is due to competition from Brazil—the last country in the Americas to abolish slavery in 1888. *Banana Bottom*'s portrait shares parallels with the Caribbean coffee crisis of the 1830s-1840s. Perhaps McKay consciously alluded to the event to highlight in his own story the significant conceptual demands global capital places on the humans caught up in it.¹⁴⁰ In *Banana Bottom*, the reader learns that contrary to the village gossip, white buyers on the island had not caused the price slump; competition from Brazil proved the likely source of a destabilized Jamaican coffee market, specifically its use of cheap slave labor. And, as the narrator will later point out, Jamaican peasants have little defense against this precarious shift in the world coffee supply: their monoculture of coffee being itself a response to global economy.¹⁴¹ If the novel's opening does not outright suggest that our imagination is weak when it comes to reckoning with distant suffering in the far-

¹⁴⁰ McKay's historical source here is likely the coffee crisis of the 1830s and 1840s. See Trouillot's "Coffee Planters and Slaves in the Antilles." While secondary to Jamaica's sugar industry, coffee exports between 1805 and 1814 annually grossed almost half the profits of sugar (124-125). "Monocultural coffee cultivation in Jamaica occupied 15 to 17 percent of the slave labor force between 1810 and 1832. [...] This left coffee far behind sugar (70 percent) but still the uncontested leader among the secondary crops" (125). The Haitian Revolution (1791-1804) impacted the coffee market, producing a spike in prices, prompting overproduction and a period of crisis in the 1830s and 1840s "when Brazilian competition became intense—crippled most Caribbean planters" (126). Trouillot writes that "in many Caribbean colonies coffee seems to have been the preferred crop of the underdog in the free segment of the population—free blacks, European settlers of modest means and ethnic or religious minorities. [...] the attraction of coffee can be easily explained: a combination of limited capital requirements and relatively high returns" (127). By contrast, sugar production required much greater capital investment. The degree to which coffee cultivation enhanced the lives of free people of color in Jamaica is questionable, especially given the more unpredictable market for coffee than sugar.

¹⁴¹ Toward the end of the novel, we learn of the effects of a drought and hurricane on the peasants: "The destruction of farm products was sweeping and paralyzing. Since the decade of the boom in the banana many peasants had taken to cultivating that plant only, to the exclusion of other crops. And now that all the full-grown and fruiting trees were destroyed whole families who had barely managed to subsist throughout the drought were right up against starvation" (281).

flung economic connections of the world-economy, it at least implies that there is a strong human impulse to treat distant economic pressures as pressures that originated closer to home. In directing blame at the local level, the impoverished coffee farmers attest to the very human desire to trace virtuous or vicious actions to a tangible, knowable source and even to imagine relationality on a local, rather than global, scale. It is significant that Adam Smith's ethical system and sentimentalism more generally grow out of a similar desire even as it records that desire's growing futility.

In McKay's allusion to Brazilian slavery I see a rewriting of Adam Smith's parable of distant suffering. McKay's scenario, however, removes the privilege Smith's man of humanity enjoys, placing the more humbly positioned peasants in his place. Smith's often-cited anecdote about an earthquake in China, added to the second edition of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1760), speaks to the human desire for proximity in one's ethical relations and the necessity (even if it is a struggle) to imagine ethical relationality in the absence of that proximity:

Let us suppose that the great empire of China, with all its myriads of inhabitants, was suddenly swallowed up by an earthquake, and let us consider how a man of humanity in Europe, who had no sort of connection with that part of the world, would be affected upon receiving intelligence of this dreadful calamity. He would, I imagine, first of all, express very strongly his sorrow for the misfortune of that unhappy people. [...] And [...] when all these humane sentiments had been once fairly expressed, he would pursue his business [...] with the same ease and tranquility, as if no such accident had happened. The most frivolous disaster which could befall himself would occasion a more real disturbance. If he was to lose his little finger to-morrow, he would not sleep to-night; but, provided he never saw them, he will snore with the most profound security over the ruin

of a hundred millions of his brethren. (TMS III.4.4: 137-138)

To be clear, Smith maintains that the man of humanity would rather lose a finger than risk the lives of many in an earthquake, even if what disturbs his sleep is the fate of his little finger. Smith's point, as Jennifer Pitts perceives, "is precisely to note the inability of feelings alone, without reflection and communication, to produce adequate moral judgments" (Pitts 565). Sensible and wise, Smith's meaning here represents an older, often forgotten branch of sentimental thought. Though its meaning is often misconstrued, Smith's hypothetical scenario remains gripping.¹⁴² His

¹⁴² As Eric Hayot argues, "Smith formulates for the first time a philosophical conjecture that has remained, in a variety of derivative forms, a crucial figure of European thought over the last two centuries: What is the relative worth to you of harm done to a Chinese stranger?"(4). After making this intriguing claim, Hayot traces its provenance onward from Balzac's *Le Père Goriot* (1835) through Walter Benjamin to Carlo Ginzburg's 1994 *Critical Inquiry* article "Killing a Chinese Mandarin." Through such figures, Hayot unfolds a genealogy of sympathy as a "natural" feeling to implicate the colonial assumptions that underpin its construction. Empathy and its claims to forming notions of what constitutes the universal subject, in Hayot's argument, become a monopoly of Europe and the United States and their means of asserting moral authority over the rest of the world. While undoubtedly true, I would add that this does not nullify the moral import of sympathy as a concept.

Toward the end of *Banana Bottom*, another episode thematizes distant suffering. A hurricane sweeps the island. Floods destroy roadways and take down telegraph poles, cutting rural stretches off from city news. In a pattern that has become typical throughout the novel, the narrator turns his commentary to highlight the mindset the events stirred: "although the hurricane was catastrophic in extent, native imagination had nevertheless invented exaggerated stories of it in many regions" (281). During this time a third-generation British missionary Rev. Malcolm Craig is away at a church conference. When news of his hometown finally reaches him, the Reverend learns that the wind had lifted the roof of his mission off its foundation. Worried about the welfare of his wife, he asks his best friend, Jordan Plant, to help him cross the high river separating him from his home in Jubilee. Jordan, an island native whose demeanor goes against the narrator's report, thinks forging the river unwise, but his sympathy for Malcolm wins out and together they meet their death on the high waters. McKay's essayistic framing of the incident underscores the overriding impression *Banana Bottom* imparts, namely, that the sympathetic imagination often fails us: "[E]ven the most sensitive and universal-minded of mortals may come short of realizing the full tragedy of an experience of suffering in which they did not actually participate. The bad news from Jubilee crowded out all other sad reports of the hurricane from Malcolm Craig's mind. He could not communicate by wire with the town and could think of nothing but the fate of his frail wife, whom he imagined dead or lying ill and helpless with the roof gone from over her head" (282).

Rather than posing the sympathy of the self for the distant other, McKay casts the problem in simpler terms, in the form of distress we feel for endangered loved ones—that this danger is imagined and not a real threat. In this moment of crisis emotional susceptibility wins out over rational judgment. McKay shows a man whose distress gets the better of him when Malcolm cannot heed caution and act in a way that would prevent more suffering. McKay jettisons the typical formulation of this anecdote that has come to footnote the standing philosophical problem concerning physical distance and moral judgment. In this late episode

imagination captures the pressures a global economy exerts on human imagination and urges the development of better practices for establishing ethical relationality.

The scale of Smith's hypothetical appears not to be as fanciful when one considers the consequence of colonial powers arranging sugar, tea, and coffee industries to their benefit. Commodities produce the moral connection Smith outlines. As Bruce Robbins explains, "The powers [Smith] invokes in his hypothetical merely make manifest objective social relations that join China to Scotland" (*The Beneficiary* 74). On the license of the tea trade, Robbins contends, the famous paragraph nearly implies, "I could prevent the equivalent of an earthquake, [...] and I could do so by sacrificing something as relatively trivial as a little finger, perhaps the one crooked outside the tea cup" (*The Beneficiary* 74). For Smith, that connection was tea; for McKay, it was coffee.¹⁴³ For both, the ability to make the connection dwells in the imagination, not the emotions. Robbins highlights the literary operation inherent in Smith's exercise, in which he "builds a bridge, [...] a causal connection [...] that] creates the possibility for a moral connection" (*The Beneficiary* 72). Smith's imagination, as Robbins identifies, "supplies a necessary precondition for the empathetic function of literature" (*The Beneficiary* 72). With *Banana Bottom*, McKay redirects the empathic function away from the metropole to vest it in the colonies.

of *Banana Bottom*, unlike earlier ones that contemplate what constitutes the challenge to be a modern, sympathetic human being, McKay drastically abridges the physical distance his characters have to reckon with (making it the space between a village and its neighboring town) and utterly discards the self-other equation of the scenario. Malcolm contemplates the suffering of his wife. Such sympathy, the sympathy for a loved one, is not a difficult exercise. Indeed, it forms the basis of national sympathy, as patterned on the family, as Elizabeth Barnes has argued. The crux of the hurricane example McKay offers comes in the action it inspires, namely the risky fording of a perilously high river, and an action that puts Malcolm's black-skinned best friend in danger.

¹⁴³ For us, that connection is technology, particularly smartphones. In *When I Was a Child I Read Books*, Marilynne Robinson echoes Smith's formulation when she writes, "Those factories that run on the labor of children, filling our world with so many attractive products that are really much cheaper than they ought to be—have they gone away? No, but our attention has wandered, and that is the next best thing from the point of view of our spiritual comfort" (56-57).

McKay's portrait of the Jamaican coffee market belies the wishful thinking underlying Smith's invisible hand theory in three ways: (1) it underscores the dominance of an international market over national ones; (2) it shows a scenario in which Jamaican entrepreneurs are not inclined to support domestic industry ("big white dealers" have no allegiance to Jamaican growers and therefore offer no security to the nation in preferring foreign coffee to domestic because it is cheaper); and (3) it highlights a wasteful, irrational economic order. Essentially, then, the fiasco of the collective makes a case for native leadership in forging an independent domestic market (in practice, for example, this would mean maintaining food production at a national level) and a widening of the human imagination in grasping the connections one shares with others in the world. Because Reverend Angus Craig does not register the international market as the source of the problem, he does not experience a crisis of ethical activity. So while the episode of the coffee scandal literalizes the scenario that would produce Mandeville's dilemma, for Angus and the peasants the dilemma is not a crisis of ethical activity but a problem of colonial histories, specifically, the economic order they propagated, the more local agricultural order they disrupted, and the racial resentments they sustain.

The reader's attention, then, is redirected elsewhere: to the way colonial codes of status organize the social sphere. Even before the great loss of the coffee collective, in the long interim of waiting, gossip from town begins to turn hearts against Angus Craig:

Some native persons, chiefly those who were employed in *minor* posts by the whites as shop clerks, foremen on estates or domestics, and who delighted in *putting on airs over* those who tilled the soil, made *a pretense* of a fundamental knowledge of city and business affairs. [...] And they put out the story that the big [white] buyers had deliberately slumped the price of coffee because they were infuriated by the peasants'

audacity in cooperating to hold their produce over for higher prices. (20, emphasis mine)

Riddled with status-marking words, this small passage outlines the jockeying for regard characteristic of colonial societies. The personalization of the coffee collective, so much so that its formation is interpreted as an act of disrespect to white dealers, is reflected in the narrator's word choice of *audacity*. Far beyond describing the collective, this word does more to reveal the mentality of the gossips. These gossips worked in the socially stratified world of colonial whites that defined their occupations as *minor*. The assumed superiority of their employers, it is implied, meant these workers labored in an atmosphere that daily chipped away at their dignity. These workers use gossip to salvage some of their lost dignity, and in so doing, they perpetuate the colonial logic that assumes dignity is a scarce commodity. In locating the target of Rev. Craig's fallen reputation, McKay illuminates what Martinican psychiatrist Frantz Fanon and Brazilian philosopher Paulo Freire will later call horizontal violence, a concept that describes situations in which individuals lash out at those near them as a substitute and release for their inability to reach more powerful figures. Members of oppressed groups with limited access to resources, financial and institutional, are most likely to use such violence.¹⁴⁴ In opening with the history of the coffee scandal, McKay shows how colonial and racial attitudes circulate in colonial Jamaica and how absolutely destructive to sociability they can be.

As I have already noted, *Banana Bottom*'s satiric target is often polished society, and when it is not, it targets those who seek the approval of others before consulting their own moral sense. Where *Banana Bottom* depicts society as misguided by gossip and deformed by colonial values,

¹⁴⁴ In her writing about why the Me Too movement has taken hold at this moment in time and not another, Ashwini Tambe cites Freire's concept of *horizontal violence*. Tambe identifies President Trump as the inaccessible target. Also see Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* for a discussion of self-imposed violence.

Smith presents society as a “mirror” for the self that promotes self-reflection and enables self-scrutiny (TMS 110-112).¹⁴⁵ Though the two appear to be at cross-purposes, they share a middle ground. Smith qualifies his mirror metaphor, claiming a moral agent is not motivated to gain the admiration of others but to be worthy of such admiration: “This desire of the approbation, and this aversion to the disapprobation of his brethren, would not alone have rendered him fit for that society for which he was made. Nature, accordingly, has endowed him, not only with a desire of being approved of, but with a desire of being what ought to be approved of; or of being what he himself approves of in other men” (III.2.6-7). Only caricatured understandings of Smith take his trust in propriety as entirely uncritical. Likewise, only shallow understandings of McKay take his mockery of propriety as his final message. As the narrative develops, *Banana Bottom*’s investment in replacing specious forms of propriety with real models of decency becomes clear. If we give Smith the benefit of the doubt and presume that he also means to forward authentic forms of decency, we can begin to perceive how these two thinkers share common ground and a common project in delineating a truly sympathetic community of feeling.

For McKay, this project partially involves defining the forms of group togetherness that fall short in achieving full community. Towards this end, McKay offers Jacob Brown, a dishonest preacher who ingratiate himself among the more materially minded set.¹⁴⁶ Brown’s version of

¹⁴⁵ The famous passage from *Theory of Moral Sentiments* reads as follows: Were it possible that a human creature could grow up to manhood in some solitary place [...] he could no more think of his own character, of the propriety or demerit of his own sentiments and conduct, or the beauty or deformity of his own mind, than of the beauty or deformity of his own face. [...] Bring him into society, and he is immediately provided with the mirror which he wanted before. [...] We examine our person limb by limb, and by placing ourselves before a looking-glass [...] endeavor [...] to view ourselves at the distance and with the eyes of other people. [...] We suppose ourselves the spectators of our own behavior, and endeavor to imagine what effect it would, in this light, produce upon us. This is the only looking-glass by which we can, in some measure, with the eyes of other people, scrutinize the propriety of our own conduct. (TMS 110-112)

¹⁴⁶ Jacob Brown’s preaching finds a contemporary counterpart in “prosperity gospel,” as it has come to be known, a distinctively American theology that equates strong Christian faith with financial success. For a

sympathy operates according to the logic of status. For Angus Craig, the real crisis is not the fate of ethical activity under a global market but the twisting of morality Jacob Brown's preaching spawns. The crisis reaches a critical point when his congregation shifts allegiance to Brown. This leaves Angus to conclude that the real problem lies in a lack of native leadership to guide his congregation. Brown himself was "a product of an English institution for waifs and strays," "sent to the colony when his charitable Christian training was ended" (21). Representing a drastic shift away from the spirit of Angus's ministry, Brown's preaching exploits this atmosphere of economic suffering by equating material well-being with virtue: "To the people Jacob Brown was a warm-speaking young white man, appearing very nice. And now that he was preaching to them such homely truths concerning their material existence, things that Angus Craig never mentioned from the pulpit, there was no doubt that he was wise" (22). McKay's satire targets a moral rhetoric distorted by economic self-interest, or as the narrator puts it, "the springing up of a new faith from black despair under the involuntary shifting of material values" (24). Mandeville's solution, that everyone should pursue his own interests, seems quite literalized here. This seduction based on appearances leads the congregation away from any substantive moral reckoning with the present social order. Seen as a commentary on moral sentimentalism, McKay's portrayal calls into question facile forms of sentimentalism that would unreflectively endorse the intelligence of crowds and optimistically endorse a natural inclination to relieve suffering in others. Benevolence as a motivator for moral action appears weak in McKay's depiction. His attack on this facile understanding of sentimentalism comes in two parts. First, he gives us a portrait of a man who exploits, rather than alleviates, suffering; he associates this charitable model with the mother

recent study of this phenomenon, see Kate Bowler's *Blessed: A History of the American Prosperity Gospel*. Arguably, the tendency to equate divine favor with the rewards of hard work has been a mainstay in Protestantism for some time, as Max Weber noted in 1905, looking back to the Reformation.

country, as specifically English.

The second part of McKay's critique comes in his depiction of the crowds that follow Jacob Brown. Brown "*roused them to revival frenzy* with that strange mixture of social aphorisms and celestial analysis that became his principal weapon throughout his career of holding the natives *under his spell*" (22, emphasis added). This portrayal of public sentiment, of mesmerized and frenzied group experiences aligns with the longstanding philosophical position to suspect and fear the passions. Wholesale dismissal of passion, however, proves not to be McKay's aim. The text here levels criticism against shallow passions, directed by self-interest, that do not undergo critical examination. Such passions do not produce a community of feeling, where emotion undergoes thoughtful consideration and prompts changes in action; these passions, instead, draw people into affective convergence only. McKay's portrayal of the defectors in Reverend Craig's congregation act under a herd mentality that merely confirms the existing commercial order; the people move toward pleasure and away from pain in synchrony with the market.

The portrait of Jacob Brown animates a dominant critique against moral sentimentalism: that it aims at the appearance of virtue, rather than the real thing. Again the narrator fills the reader in on details of which the larger community remains ignorant:

The Free Church folk had never known why Jacob Brown was dropped as assistant. The thing had been done quietly after a consultation between Angus Craig and members of the executive of the Baptist body who were responsible for Jacob Brown's appointment. Among the church members it was whispered vaguely that it was an affair of mortal sin involving one of the *best* native families of the congregation. (22, emphasis added)

In his portrait of Jacob Brown, McKay accounts for the possibility of deception corrupting an ethics based on sympathy. In his depiction of Brown's use of social pretense to ingratiate himself

into the circles of certain esteemed families, McKay suggests how often we, as humans, sympathize based on appearance and, therefore, risk misjudgment, rather than sympathize after a longer, diligent period of introspection. Even then, as the case of Jacob Brown reveals, it may not be possible to apprehend the larger set of circumstances that would allow one to judge another's moral integrity. Smith, in contrast to McKay, conceives the possibility as always present: "Even our sympathy with the grief and joy of another, before we are informed of the cause of either, is always extremely imperfect" (I.I 16). McKay's portrait of Jacob Brown adds a harsher realism to Smith's scenario in identifying elements, such as secrecy and duplicity, that interfere with the ability to judge, to grant, or to deny another sympathy. The narrator's voice here also goes far in establishing how indistinguishable moral sentiments can be from social convention—the primary target of the narrative's satire at this point. For example, what distinguishes the particular native family with whom Jacob Brown became mixed up as among the *best*? In showing how easily the distinction between social and moral sentiments can be blurred, the narrator exposes the weakness of using sentiments alone as a guide for integrity. *Banana Bottom* exposes much to suspect in society's standards as well as its habits—suspicions Smith did not always share. "Society and conversation," Smith writes, "are the most powerful remedies for restoring the mind to its tranquility, if, at any time, it has unfortunately lost it" (23). In delivering a satire that upsets such a worldview, McKay defines his preference for a Stoic model of moral agency.

Smith borrowed from the late Renaissance movement to revive Stoicism under Christian thought.¹⁴⁷ His notion of *concord* represents another way to delineate affective convergence from

¹⁴⁷ In a harsh dismissal of Smith in a chapter entitled "Virtue without Agency," Thomas Pfau characterizes *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* as follows: "While there is an obvious and significant Stoic dimension to Smith's view of moral sentiments as quasi-judgments, his *Theory* no longer furnishes any frame of reference for such evaluation independent of (or anterior to) the social interaction whose success or failure

sentimental community. The following passage from *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* indicates how, for Smith, the movement of concord requires the reflective processes of imaginative identification rather than the automatic ones of emotional identification:

In order to produce this concord, as nature teaches the spectators to assume the circumstances of the person principally concerned, so she teaches this last in some measure to assume those of the spectators. As they are continually placing themselves in his situation, and thence conceiving emotions similar to what he feels; so he is as constantly placing himself in theirs, and thence conceiving some degree of that coolness about his own fortune, with which he is sensible that they will view it. As they are constantly considering what they themselves would feel, if they actually were the sufferers, so he is as constantly led to imagine in what manner he would be affected if he was only one of the spectators of his own situation. As their sympathy makes them look at it, in some measure, with his eyes, so his sympathy makes him look at it, in some measure, with theirs, especially when in their presence and acting under their observation: and as the reflected passion, which he thus conceives, is much weaker than the original one, it necessarily abates the violence of what he felt before he came into their presence, before he began to recollect in what manner they would be affected by it, and to view his situation in this candid and impartial light. (TMS I.i.4 22)

For Smith, the exercise of sympathy requires cognition. To refer back to Bruce Robbins's formulation, the procedure Smith outlines above requires the spectator to "build a bridge, [...] a causal connection [...] that] creates the possibility for a moral connection" (*The Beneficiary* 72).

such judgments ratify" (*Minding* 350). Seeing the value in Smith's social model of moral development, I credit Smith with more substance and value in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* than Pfau does.

Moral connection requires active judgment, not passive reception of an emotional contagion. The whole process moves toward a weakening of passion's hold and a final pose of studied dispassion on the spectator's part. Mindful individuals undergo an exercise in emotional modulation whose end result produces concord of thought, not concord of emotion. For Smith, an individual's emotional composure implies self-possession and, thus, an ability to orient action beyond base material pursuits. Where classical Stoicism defines moral introspection as occurring internally and apart from, even preceding, socialization, Smith's adaptation of its tenets acknowledges how the expression of moral integrity requires a social context.¹⁴⁸

McKay offers a single example of Stoicism to stand against the misguided crowds that follow Jacob Brown. As a literary rather than theoretical engagement of Stoicism, *Banana Bottom* shows moral integrity to be hard won and, therefore, rare, earned primarily by going against the dominant views of the majority. Only one member continued to attend the Jubilee Free Church, Jaban Plant, Bitá's grandfather. As an agent for a city dealer, Jaban knew more about the coffee market than most and could see the global market as the actual source of the broken trust:

As a small produce-purchaser Jaban Plant's business had been almost ruined by Angus Craig's pooling scheme. For the peasants up in the high hills and the woods whom he used to hunt down for produce had all refused to sell. They were attracted by the pool. But as agent for a city dealer Jaban Plant *knew* that the fall of coffee was real and a little of what was the cause of it. When he tried to convince the peasants of the truth they accused him of being the accomplice of Angus Craig. But he maintained his position and

¹⁴⁸ Pfau characterizes Stoicism "as drop[ping] out the social character of 'dialectic' in judgment": "Stoic logic was to approach judgment through a formal analysis of moral and cognitive predicates to be (ideally) pursued and completed by the individual independent of (or prior to) its eventual socialization" ("The Letter" 294).

was the only officer left in the Free Church. And thus was sprung the close sentimental friendship between the Craig and the Plant family. (24-25, emphasis added)

In other words, the sentimental friendship between Jaban and Angus forms as a result of Jaban's commercial knowledge (his proximity to the town and the glimpse into the market logic that affords him) and the sympathetic reading it allows. In sympathizing with Angus, against his self-interest, Jaban displays, in Smithian terms, considerable self-command. I do not refer here to Smith's use of self-command to indicate the actor's emotional composure under suffering (his example is the admiration we feel at Socrates' calm before death, implying that if Socrates had wept incessantly, this would not be so.) (I.iii.1.14); instead, I refer to self-command as a person's ability to control an appetite for immediate gratification, to postpone pleasure for a greater good (IV.2.6).¹⁴⁹ Jaban does this. He exercises reason before forming sentimental attachments; his loyalty to Angus has a cognitive basis. Through Jaban, McKay corrects the order of sentimental attachment he diagnoses among the peasants: the impartial spectator first sympathizes, then reasons, and finally forms sentimental attachments. Jaban embodies Smith's model of ethical exercise as delineated in the metaphor of "changing places": "The compassion of the spectator must arise altogether from the consideration of what he himself would feel if he was reduced to the same unhappy situation, *and, what perhaps is impossible*, was at the same time able to regard it with his present reason and judgment" (I.I p. 14, 17, emphasis added). Here, Smith identifies how the cognitive capacity to reason and judge might desert a subject experiencing severe distress. In contrast with Hume's spectator, Smith's "spectator sympathizes with the sentiments that

¹⁴⁹ In this sense, Smith's moral system departs from earlier moral sentimentalism that proposed a person's feelings of pleasure or pain as in response to suffering others as guiding moral action (theorized under benevolence as a motivator for moral action). Departing from Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, and Hume, Smith views sympathy, not as contagious, but as an intellectual act of the imagination. This shift in definition sets him against the cult of sensibility and closer to a Stoic position that subordinates passion to reason.

motivated the actions of the *agent*, not, as Hume had claimed, with the feelings [or even the sensations] of the person affected by the action” (Foster 62). In other words, for Smith and his impartial spectator a sympathetic reading does not mean a reading that indulges the passions. Although such a reading depends on imagining the feelings of others, it does not make those feelings its final resting place. This strain of sentimental thinking, and not its caricature, defines McKay’s portrayal of the “sentimental friendship” that develops between Bitá’s grandfather, Jaban Plant, and her patron’s father, Angus Craig.

If McKay’s repeated references to “the sentimental friendship” may be construed as an allusion to the sentimental tradition, he adds his own commentary to the feasibility of such in creating social change: Angus and Jaban’s friendship does not reverberate through society. The peasants do not see from Jaban’s vantage point; they disregard his counsel, preferring to believe the town gossips instead. The contrast between the two movements of sentiment define McKay’s project for the novel as a whole: on the one hand, McKay depicts an individual whose sentimental attachments have a cognitive basis and, on the other, he gives us a crowd attracted to sentiments that provide a release for certain very real frustrations but it is a release that misses having its full basis in reality. In this regard McKay’s style loosely conforms to what William Morgan identifies as “U.S. literary realism’s critique of naïve sentimentalism [as] an enabling fiction,” pointing out that “although works of realism consistently construct sentimentalism as naïve, they also consistently locate in sentimentalism ‘a continuing social project’ that their authors, as realists, ‘(in some form) still want to sign onto’” (6).¹⁵⁰ The story of the defectors from Angus’s coffee

¹⁵⁰ Morgan is using the structure of Bruce Robbins’s argument that modernists and postmodernists perform much the same operation in their depictions of naïve realism. And, of course, *Banana Bottom*’s throwback style (partly owing to its national novel feel) delivers a reading experience that falls somewhere between realism and modernism. See Robbins, “Modernism and Literary Realism: A Response.”

collective and his church illustrate the more naïve sentimentalism McKay wishes to reject, a kind of sentimentalism that confuses and fuses affect “with judgment [...] rather than making a genuine space for autonomous judgment” (Soni, “A New” 244). Jaban’s model of reflection provides a counterexample to the crowd that follows Jacob Brown. His sympathy with Angus does not provide him with the self-satisfaction his son will later feel in inviting Bitá to join him at the mission. Jaban’s display of solidarity finds no admiration among his brethren nor is it derived from taking social behavior as a guide or inspiration.

McKay rescues sentimental moral reflection, in part by drawing Jaban as a Stoic moral agent. Stoicism as a moral code is a great equalizer, holding in equal esteem a philosopher who was a slave (Epictetus) and a philosopher who was an emperor (Marcus Aurelius). Its leveling criterion for a worthy life discounts wealth and status—both attributes that a proper Stoic beholds with indifference—in preference of a sole criterion, the cultivation of a well-ordered soul that rationally strives to live a virtuous life. The method for doing so is a process of continual introspection, a form of “judgment as a process of skeptical self-scrutiny” (Pfau, “The Letter” 294). *Banana Bottom* privileges a Stoic model of moral discernment in forwarding Jaban as an admirable moral agent, a singular image of virtue against the misguided social majority.

Through Jaban’s example, McKay forwards a form of moral reflection that favors more complex intellectual operation, which uses reason to work through feelings toward evaluative judgment. The Stoic element of the process provides a means to guard against social sentiments that arise from commercial and colonial orders, while the story of the friendship manages to separate human moral order from commercial order. It is significant that Jaban admires Angus’s integrity and forms a sentimental attachment to him that goes against his own material interests, (for Angus’s collective impedes Jaban’s ability, as a produce-purchaser, to buy from many of the

peasants). In fictionalizing a history of how a strong sentimental friendship springs from failed commercial relations, McKay forwards a Stoic order in locating the bond of sentiment after the exercise of reason. In this sense, McKay offers his readers an anti-capitalist version of the sentimental. In McKay's account, a Stoic form of sentimental reflection can assist a person in breaking from colonial habitation. This kind of reflection provides a necessary form of resistance in a colonial environment where society and its sentiments exhibit undesirable moral norms, norms shot through with racism, colorism, and misogyny. Under such a framework, McKay advances a model of mind that must claim an "inward source of moral orientation" as a necessary means of countering pernicious colonial attitudes and misguided social sentiments (Pfau, *Minding* 344).

4.4 SENTIMENT AND KINSHIP: THE CLAN SOLIDARITY OF THE ADAIRS

In what follows, I provide a reading of the narrative's opening attack on village sentiment as it unfolds in the first subplot—an account of its protagonist's being raped when she was only twelve.¹⁵¹ Aloof from the crowd, *Banana Bottom*'s narrator is quick to observe what sentiments unify a group, before, during and after a scandal, and because of this, McKay's novel offers a prescient meditation on what happens when emotion topples reason. Read this way, *Banana Bottom* is an arresting depiction of public sentiment with resonances for how it drives politics today.¹⁵²

¹⁵¹ Mervyn Morris identifies the same "hierarchical cohesiveness" at work in the village of Banana Bottom as in stories set in Jamaica collected in *Gingertown* (84). Mervyn Morris, "Contending Values: The Prose Fiction of Claude McKay," *'Is English We Speaking' and Other Essays*. Kingston, Jamaica: Ian Randle Publishers, 1999. 74-90. (Reprinted from *Jamaica Journal* 9.2-3 1975. 36-42, 52.

¹⁵² See Dierdra Reber's *Coming to Our Senses: Affect and an Order of Things for Global Culture* and William E. Connolly's *Neuropolitics*, especially page 64, "nationalists and dogmatists," Connolly notes,

McKay's tonally odd account of Bitá's rape has led many readers to overlook the social blame the narrative assigns in the passage preceding the text's description of the rape:

Then Crazy Bow was twenty-five and Bitá past twelve, and neither Jordan nor Naomi Plant [Bitá's father and stepmother] nor even the wags of Banana Bottom *gave the slightest thought* to that companionship. Crazy Bow was *harmlessly light-headed* and *none could imagine him capable of any natural aberration*. Besides, the village was sentimental about Crazy Bow because of his antecedents. Every Banana Bottom child was acquainted with the origin of the Adair family, the story of which had been told from generation to generation. Of that taciturn tradition-breaking European who by one great gesture created Banana Bottom and placed it among the first of independent expatriate—Negro villages.

The village *would have been proud* if Crazy Bow had been able to make good at books and go into the Civil Service, the place where all the intelligent light-colored young men went. (9, emphasis added)

Absent from this passage (and all subsequent references to rape that follow it) is the customary censure modern society allocates rapists.¹⁵³ Dispensing judgment through mock excuses, the passage instead focuses on the villagers: first, by overstating their naïveté—no one *gave the*

“already actively engage in” “modes of thinking below [consciousness's] reach.” While not...deny[ing] that there are dangers attached to this feat of the human condition,” Connolly urges “liberals, democrats, pluralists, and cosmopolites” to consider “the positive possibilities” of attending to the affective register of thought (64).

¹⁵³ The absence of censure becomes all the more notable late in the book in the near sexual assault Bitá suffers as an educated woman. As Carolyn Cooper observes of the scene, “the possibility of abuse seems to be downplayed by the omniscient narrator” (46). It is all the more notable, then, that the text of *Banana Bottom* is unwavering throughout in naming Crazy Bow's act as *rape* (2, 14, 17, 62, 88, 109, and 115) and classifying Arthur's sexual harassment of Bitá as near-rape in the commentary that follows the scene: “Cases of adult rape were of rare occurrence in the colony and when they occurred they were mainly among the English soldiers stationed inland far from the city” (263).

slightest thought to a friendship between a 25-year-old man and 12-year-old girl; and then, by exposing a communal pattern of excuse-making for Crazy Bow with the phrase *harmlessly lightheaded*. The entire description of the villagers' mentality toward Crazy Bow is more revealing still for its chummy insider tone, carried off to perfection through to the conversational *Besides*, as if suggesting one final exoneration for everyone.¹⁵⁴ The mood of has-been hero-worshipping McKay summons in this passage invites his readers to consider the political work social pride performs in unifying a constituency, while the tenacity of such pride serves as testament to the dogged hold old stories (and their concomitant ways of seeing the world) retain on present perceptions.

In his account of thinking and the place of affect in creative thought, William Connolly makes a point that helps me grasp the nature of "the emotional fog" the villagers often appear to be under: "To thematize the intralayered character of thinking is to discern how thought embodies powerful pressures to assimilate new things to old habits of perception" (McKay, *Banana* 272; Connolly 64). Under McKay's narration, the historical sediment influencing villager sentiment (their "old habits of perception") will "become the fodder for imaginative reprocessing in ways that both expose and transform past events" (Mardorossian 23). Connolly calls this fodder "affectively imbued memory banks" (70).¹⁵⁵ And the first affectively imbued deposit in the community imagination whose political purchase McKay moves to deplete is the village's heroic

¹⁵⁴ In this last disposition to hold onto a dream that can no longer be actualized, the villagers could be read as precursors to the contemporary American tendency Lauren Berlant diagnoses in her term and book title, *Cruel Optimism* (2011), designating a "when something you desire is actually an obstacle to your flourishing" (10).

¹⁵⁵ Caribbean literary studies has theorized its reprocessing attempts as building an "imaginary archive" of the past, especially focusing on "giv[ing] voice to the undocumented subjectivity of the men, women and children" who suffered enslavement (Mardorossian 23). Also see Donette Francis, *Fictions of Female Citizenship* (11).

founding narrative. Crazy Bow is a third generation descendent “of a strange Scotchman who had emigrated to Jamaica in the eighteen-twenties [...] bought the vast mountain estate of Banana Bottom, liberated the slaves and married one of the blackest of them” (2).¹⁵⁶ Although Adair may have liberated many men and women from slave labor, Adair’s estate house nonetheless signifies “the preservation of a racial social estate system” (Lewis and Lewis 39).¹⁵⁷ As Maureen and Rupert Lewis explain,

McKay deals with the locally based plantocracy by depicting the Adairs [...] The founder of the Adair clan in Jamaica was a Scotsman, here an example of the *hypocritically* “*philanthropic*” *landowners*, who, having bought an estate, freed the slaves sold along with it, but sold them in turn small sub-divisions of the land, retaining ten acres for himself. Several generations after his time, this land is planted out in banana and sugarcane. In addition, the Adairs are involved in small-scale animal husbandry and have branched out into commercial activity by running the village grocery. (39, emphasis mine)

¹⁵⁶ Despite Britain abolishing the slave trade in 1807, slave labor in Jamaica did not end for another twenty-seven years (in August of 1834). Adair’s liberation of Banana Bottom’s Afro-Jamaican population, then, occurred about a decade and a half earlier than it did for the island as a whole.

¹⁵⁷ The opening is particularly specific about demographics; soon after disclosing that Crazy Bow was “the color of a ripe banana,” we learn: “For the island was divided into three main groups in a political and social way. The descendants of the slaves were about three-fourths of the population and classified as black or dark brown. The descendants of Europeans and slaves were about one-fifth of the population and classified as colored or light brown. The rest were a few thousand East Indians and Chinese and perhaps the same number of pure European descent” (4). In other words, McKay can “use Crazy Bow’s ancestry to sketch in the social history of the island” (Jay 180). And while it is true, as Paul Jay observes, that this mixed-race ancestry “foreground[s] white attitudes toward both mixed marriages and black sexuality,” I argue that it is far more important to see that McKay is highlighting the behavior of the largely black population of the village to implicate their sentimental identification with Adair, for their pride in his lineage strikes an odd cord of compatibility with the island’s social “problem of mulatto ascendancy” (Jay 180; Scott, “Temporality” 167).

As the Jamaican historian Don Robotham argued in *Our Struggles* (1975), these “philanthropic” sales of land to ex-slaves often embroiled peasants in generation upon generation of indebtedness (66). In tracing the fiction supporting such a system, *Banana Bottom* implicates the villagers’ sentimental regard for the Adairs in supporting the racialized order under which they suffer. Indeed, the initial union of Adair with “one of the blackest [slaves]” rewrites the foundational fiction of the country’s history of racial and sexual violence. Much later in the text, *Banana Bottom* exposes the reverberations of that history by recording Bitá’s traumatic near-rape by Marse Arthur drawn to remind the reader of the white, land-owning class. Indeed, Crazy Bow benefits from the persistent color hierarchy because his skin, unlike most of his “dark brown” relatives, “was the color of a ripe banana” (a hue I take to a tannish yellow or beige) (4). In its elaboration on the social consequences of this process, McKay’s representation identifies the draw ancestral pride poses alongside the forgetting it imposes. And while these consequences appear mainly economic at first, their implications quickly become cultural when Crazy’s interests lead him to what is not a social option, music, and away from a promising career in civil service. In this respect, his story serves as an important cultural barometer when what would have been an exceptional musical career does not find a suitable atmosphere for flourishing—a tragedy that makes Carolyn Cooper’s observation that “Crazy Bow, the ‘rapist,’ is himself a victim,” quite on point (44).

This history of Crazy Bow as the talented “last child...of the Adair stock” completes the opening’s potent literary vision of how communities actually think, and how such thinking, mindful or not, influences the way particular persons within the community are singled out for support and aid (4):

Crazy Bow was the first of his clan to go to a higher school. From the village school he was sent to a private institute for boys at Jubilee. It was expensive enough for a peasant

boy. But his folks' land was good for banana and sugar cane. Besides they raised pigs and goats and ran the village grocery shop. *The whole clan was proud of Crazy Bow and kept him supplied with clothing and money.* (5, emphasis added)

In the case of Crazy Bow, it was the village schoolmaster who initially urged "his parents to give [him] the benefit of a secondary education," because, as the narrator explains, "[h]e thought the boy would be good for an official job some day" (4, emphasis added).¹⁵⁸ The second narrative blocking the village's imaginative vision, then, comes in the form of a fairy tale, which Carolyn Cooper identifies at the opening of her reading of the novel:

A recurring fairy tale motif in Afro-Jamaican folk culture is the persistent belief in the instrumentality of book learning as an engine of upward social mobility. The trajectory of the narrative of progress requires the "happy ending" of comic closure: the miraculous reversal of fortune of a promising, poor, black character, who is rescued from the ubiquitous threat of social disgrace by the redemptive power of formal education. (40)¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁸ Subsequently, the reader learns that the boy "was the color of a ripe banana" and that "a modicum of intelligence and push could assure him one of the little polite places that were always the plums of the lighter-skinned colored people" (4). Colorism organizes the students designated most suitable to aspire to higher education. Following this information, then, when the narrator explains that "*the whole clan* was proud of Crazy Bow and kept him supplied with clothing and money," the implication is that the largely "black or dark brown" population of the village supports a colortocracy against their interest.

In an article on class structure in the African American community beginning with Du Bois's *The Philadelphia Negro* (1899), Elijah Anderson writes that in the old class structure, "[i]ndividual members of the colortocracy at times developed a notorious but distinctive racial complex involving an ideology that set them apart from those they viewed as their inferiors. They would take excessive pride in their 'white' features, including light skin, thin noses and lips, and 'good' hair. Often 'colorstruck,' they mimicked and voiced the anti-black prejudices of whites, whose fears, concerns, and values they understood and partly shared" (57). While McKay will deal later with the phenomenon from the upwardly mobile members' point of view (in the figure of Herald Newton Day), he first identifies the way this sentiment receives expression from the majority of the villagers who, though they do not share the physical markers for this kind of career promotion, still believe in (or capitulate to) mulatto ascendancy as the main path to upward mobility.

¹⁵⁹ Cooper goes on to detail how McKay "melodramatically subvert[s]" this fairy tale structure (41).

If the emotional arc of this myth has captivated the imagination of most of the characters McKay sketches (*The whole clan...kept him supplied with clothing and money [for civil service school]*), it has also placed them at a disadvantage. The village schoolmaster suffers from a lack of imagination in interpreting Crazy Bow's promise (instead of a civil servant, he turns out to be a musical prodigy).¹⁶⁰ Blinded by the sentiment of clan pride to such a degree, the villagers overlook that the Adairs have a monopoly on their food supply (as the only grocers and butchers around). These misguided sentiments highlight the power of the civil service dream among those who supported him with whatever scant means they had at their disposal. And when the dream dies, rather than give it up, the villagers go on to call him crazy. And "what is deemed craziness," in Raphael Dalleo's reading, "is in fact his preference to follow his artistic longing rather than a practical career especially in a place where 'there were no pianos'" (57-58). At the close of this small story about the somewhat misdirected philanthropy of the villagers and the fake philanthropy of their landlords, then, how much the people's ability to dream about careers in the arts has to do with their ability to finance and foster such dreams has become a mostly rhetorical question, as has the degree to which the villagers' sentimental regard for the Adair clan and its progeny has edited their vision. As an account of what moves a public, McKay's portrait of Banana Bottom

¹⁶⁰ Crazy Bow's educational trajectory and the way it shapes his relationship to the villagers serves as much as a litmus test for Bita's own as its foil. Through the retrospective gaze this backstory enables, the artistic foundation of the companionship of Bita and Crazy Bow clearly emerges, and it is an alliance that is at odds with the villagers' valuation of civil service over the arts—an order McKay works to overturn. Both share artistic proclivities he wishes to see elevated, as Bita's means of securing acceptance through the piano concert demonstrates. Also see Lowe, *Calypso Magnolia* p. 225 on Crazy Bow's final scene in the novel, in which he demonstrates an affinity between the two cultures and represents a different route Bita did not take.

remains strikingly diagnostic in its depiction of the way sentimental regard acts as “a miraculous form of social glue” (Taylor, qtd. in Didion).¹⁶¹

4.5 RE-PRESENTING RAPE

It is likely not an accident, then, that McKay chose to explore how communal structures of sentimental regard could be implicated in a rape. In the criticism on the novel the scene has been condemned (by many feminist readers), overlooked (it’s weird), and even celebrated (as a primitivist expression of precocious sexuality).¹⁶² But I find it most surprising that a writer of African descent chose to write the scene at all. As a novelist for a mostly American audience, one can understand the hesitation McKay might have felt about depicting even a fictional black man

¹⁶¹ McKay describes the communal belonging villagers feel in Banana Bottom in a way that resembles what Lauren Berlant calls “intimate public” (viii). As Berlant explains, she does “not mean a public sphere organized by autobiographical confession. [...] What makes a public sphere intimate is an expectation that the consumer of its particular stuff *already* share a worldview and emotional knowledge that they have derived from a broadly common historical experience. A certain circularity structures an intimate public, therefore: its consumer participants are perceived to be marked by a commonly lived history; its narratives and things are deemed expressive of that history while also shaping its conventions of belonging; and, expressing the sensational, embodied experience of living as a certain kind of being in the world, it promise also to provide a better experience of social belonging—partly through participation in the relevant commodity culture, and partly because of its revelations about how people can live. [...] an intimate public is a space of mediation in which the personal is refracted through the general, what’s salient for its consumers it that it is a place of recognition and reflection. In an intimate public sphere emotional contact, of a sort, is made” (viii). This is finally not the kind of emotion McKay finds promising for establishing mutual fellowship. His vision develops away from the circularity and consumer logic of an intimate public. The kind of belonging an intimate public develops, insofar as a patron is representative of such a public, under McKay’s view, can be constraining, can rob the protégée of the ability to act autonomously, especially if that protégée happens to be an artist.

¹⁶² David Nicholls offers the most comprehensive comments on McKay’s representation of rape, calling his “stance toward rape” *experimental* (84). Nicholls writes, “McKay’s attitude toward Bitá’s rape resembles the detached, experimental attitude exhibited by the Craigs—an attitude his narrative aims to critique” (84), but this seems incongruous, so, agreeing with him that McKay’s approach is experimental, I’m proposing that its purposeful experimentation toward deconstructing the historical residue around rape, which McKay, I think, saw as largely propped up by a sentimentalism with troubling racist inflections.

as a potential rapist. As Carine Mardorossian points out, “In the post-Civil War era the myth of the oversexed black male body would also serve to justify violence against black men and fraudulent rape charges were routinely invoked as grounds for lynching. By the 1890s, rape was so irremediably configured as the violation of white women by black masculinity that rape soon became a metaphor for the ‘Rape of the South’” (25). Again, Smith’s impartial spectator bears mentioning here, mainly because the sentiments that spectator sorts through during ethical deliberation necessarily have a social cast. What Smith does not account for (and many Smithian scholars miss this too) is “why constructs of the imagination have normative force” (Foster 63). McKay’s writing challenges this normative force in its engagement with the construct of virginity as a signifier of social respectability. McKay understood how rape charges worked to organize public sentiments along racial lines.

McKay learned to be an astute reader of images of racial violence first in the States, then later in Europe. His fluency in reading images in the American context comes through clearly in his early treatment of rape in his short story “Crazy Mary,” published just a year before *Banana Bottom*. The stories collected in *Gingertown* (1932), whether set in Jamaica or Harlem, likely bear some impress of his early encounters with American racism, both in the Alabaman and Kansas, where he attended school (1912-1914), and in his early years as a worker based out of New York City (1914-1919).¹⁶³ To take but one illustrative example, McKay had already been living in New

¹⁶³ In his early years abroad, both in the States and Britain, McKay witnessed “a whole cultural register generated in the course of late-nineteenth-century interracial conflicts and national identity formation” around sexual violence. In the United States this formation congealed “around what W. J. Cash in the early 1940s labeled the “Southern rape complex,” according to which the presumed sexual violation of white beauty by black beast figured the “rape” of the South during Reconstruction and legitimized retaliation through lynch violence. At the same time, this complex inflicted a fear of rape that, like the threat of lynching, kept a subordinate group—women just in the process of fighting for suffrage—subjugated” (Sielke 1-2).

York a year when D.W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* (1915) became the country's first blockbuster film. Among its many scenes of racist propaganda, "a white actor in black face chases a white woman, who rather than succumb to his advances—symbolic of the rape of the South—throws herself from a cliff" (Fleishman).¹⁶⁴ Against the background of images such as this one, "Crazy Mary" can easily be read as McKay rewriting of the virgin's jump to implicate Anglo-American constructions of femininity around virginity.¹⁶⁵ The impetus for the short story likely had another source as well.

One of the most famous cases of racially charged rape accusations, the trial of the "Scottsboro Boys," had made headlines by April of 1931, a year before McKay published "Crazy Mary." Though abroad at the time, McKay likely encountered the story in the news, given his practice of reading "newspapers from America" (Long 63).

In 1918, in *Pearson's Magazine* McKay wrote about his first encounters with racism in the South: "It was the first time I had ever come face to face with such manifest, implacable hate of my race, and my feelings were indescribable. At first I was horrified; my spirit revolted against the ignoble cruelty and blindness of it all. . . . Then I found myself hating in return, but this feeling could not last long for to hate is to be miserable."

¹⁶⁴ This image has a long history. McKay was surely aware of this. Well before McKay traveled to the U.S. South to study, "rebellious slaves were regularly rumored to have designs on white men's white wives. In the American Revolutionary era, allegations of the rape of American women by British soldiers signified an attack on liberty and the rights of Americans. Even after the British imperial threat dissipated in the first decades of the nineteenth century, rape continued to be transformed from an intimate sexual act into a public symbol" (S. Block 244).

¹⁶⁵ Set in Jamaica, the story recounts the unraveling of sewing-mistress Mary, when a mother accuses the schoolmaster of raping her daughter, a schoolgirl quite like Bitá in having "just turned thirteen" (198). This news ruins Mary, who "was locally conceded" to be a virgin and expected soon to be his betrothed, as it bumps her off the path to a higher social standing. The schoolmaster leaves, the scandal dies down, and Mary goes away for a period of several months, suggesting the cover-up of an unwanted pregnancy. Upon her return, Mary remains homebound for a period. When she finally emerges, she walks the village, unkempt in appearance and strange in behavior. The old schoolmaster returns with a wife, pushing the story to a dramatic climax when, Mary, thought to be "harmless" in her craziness, responds by throwing herself over "the perilous edge of [a] waterfall" (202). Midway through the tale, McKay's agenda to upset the "hierarchical cohesiveness of the community" comes through most clearly: "There was *nothing dishonorable* in the fact that girls were deflowered at a tender age and young virgins were few in the country, nevertheless the village folk took a *pride-like interest* in any young woman of whom it could be said she was a virgin up until the time of her marriage" (Morris 84; McKay 198, emphasis added). While the minor status of the girls hardly seems to bother the narrator, the story does work to deromanticize the colonial construction of virginity underpinning social mobility when it records (though hardly ballyhoos) the gendered double standard around chastity (the schoolmaster attends church service with his new wife and receives a hearty welcome). The story appears to be consciously in conversation with the sentimental tradition in two ways. First, McKay depicts Mary in the tradition of the sentimental heroine: her return

Little more than a decade before writing *Banana Bottom*, as a journalist in London, McKay would have reason to remind his British audience of the “colonial histories in which white soldiers in the West Indies raped black women” (Donlon). Writing for Sylvia Pankhurst’s *The Workers’ Dreadnought*, McKay calls upon this history in his response to a sensational, racist article published in the *Daily Herald*, titled “Black Scourge in Europe: Sexual Horror Set Loose by France on the Rhine,” in which the author, Edward Morel, identifies the French colonial troops from Africa, then stationed in Germany after WWI, as a sexual threat to European women. McKay contests Morel’s sentimental ploy that white women need to be protected by white men with reason, citing experiences of his own that serve as counterexamples to Morel’s remarks, destined, as he saw it, to stir up race prejudice. McKay clearly saw that racial images persisted under the window dressing of sentimental appeal, particularly when pitched to defend the honor of white women. Honor of this sort, invoked as an unassailable moral category, frequently harbors some rather unsavory views; it aids in racist scapegoating when publics face (but do not want to acknowledge) the frustrations of deeper economic troubles.

Let me consider one of the most publicized examples of this dynamic: the case of the Central Park Jogger (1989); the rape of a middle class white woman and the subsequent accusation

home begins both her madness and her prolonged neglect of her body culminating in her suicide. Second, the ending procures the characteristic melodramatic response: “Mary ran down a little track leading to the waterfall. Her pursuers stopped in the road, paralyzed by her evident intention, and began shouting to her to stop. And watching from the churchyard, the folk began to *bawl and howl*” (202, emphasis added). Significantly, it is churchgoers who stand in for the sentimental novel’s audience. Like Mary, Star of the Sea, the church that acts as the backdrop for the “Nausicaa” episode in *Ulysses*, Mary’s end also shares the backdrop of a church (she first sees her old beau and his wife just after a church service): The folk’s response here suggests the response sentimental novels procured from their audiences.

McKay’s characteristic attention to skin tone is also notable: “a pure ebony” schoolmaster jilts a “pretty young yellow woman,” not once but twice, for “brown” women—a scenario that upends the racial hierarchy of Jamaica’s colonial inheritance and the racial imagery driving American and British fear-mongering when it comes to protecting white women from black men (194, 192, 195, 201).

of six black and Latino youth from Harlem, an event that churned up some of the most racially charged commentary in recent American history.¹⁶⁶ While many studies treat the case illuminatingly under the rubric of intersectionality, only an analysis of the sentimental underbelly of the white press coverage can locate the sources of power behind the mass circulation of Trisha Meili's story.¹⁶⁷ Drawing on literary criticism, Joan Didion rallies the classic argument against sentimentalism to mount an incisive critique of the coverage and the wider historical sensibility of which it is a part.

A preference for broad strokes, for the distortion and flattening of character [...] has been for well over a hundred years the heart of the way the city presents itself: Lady Liberty, huddled masses [...] eight million stories in the naked city; eight million stories and all the same story, each devised to obscure not only the city's actual tensions of race and class but also, more significantly, the civic and commercial arrangements that rendered

¹⁶⁶ In the spring of 1989, Trisha Meili, a 28-year-old Caucasian woman and investment banker went on a jog through Central Park at night. The next morning she was found unconscious, brutally beaten and raped. New Yorkers would spend the next couple years making her story theirs—theirs as defined against the accused: five black and Latino teenagers from Harlem. Tried, convicted and thirteen years later found innocent, the Central Park Five, as they became known during the two years following the rape, would become a symbol of what was wrong with their city.

As sociologist Natalie Byfield writes, “The rape [was] used by the media to invent a new form of urban terror labeled ‘wilding.’ That a mostly white media used language like ‘savage,’ ‘wolfpack,’ ‘animal’ and even ‘feral’ to describe the group of African American and Latino teens 13 to 16 years old accused of rape automatically then, as it does now, points to the racial context in which the media placed Meili’s assault.”

¹⁶⁷ See Crenshaw, “Mapping the Margins” and Valerie Smith, “Split Affinities: The Case of Interracial Rape.”

Again, Wanzo’s study, referenced in chapter one and two, provides a useful analytic (sentimental political storytelling) for understanding this case. Trisha Meili fit a particular profile: young, upwardly mobile, and white—a symbol to localize, confine, and smooth over the problems New Yorkers faced. Her crime provided a safe zone for the venting of anger over race and class tensions (economic problems were blamed on the city’s “underclass,” a word newly minted), while Meili’s story, the story of a miraculous recovery, would fortify New Yorkers with its image of courage. Didion writes, “[Meili] would become for David Dinkins, the first black mayor of New York, the emblem of his apparently fragile hopes for the city itself: ‘I hope the city will be able to learn a lesson from this event and be inspired by the young woman who was assaulted in the case,’ he said. ‘Despite tremendous odds, she is rebuilding her life. What a human life can do, a human society can do as well.’”

those tensions irreconcilable. [...] Stories in which terrible crimes are inflicted on innocent victims, offering as they do a similarly sentimental reading of class differences and human suffering, a reading that promises both resolution and retribution, have long performed as the city's endorphins, a built-in source of natural morphine working to blur the edges of real and to a great extent insoluble problems.¹⁶⁸

In moving the scale of human suffering from the broadly social to the narrowly personal, this story offered the larger public a release valve for racial and economic tensions. Reporters went into imaginative overdrive, coining the word *wilding* to portray the alleged assailants as animals beside their victim (Byfield; C. Smith).¹⁶⁹ Within this ongoing history of the public portrayal of rape, McKay's depiction of Bitá's rape begins to make sense.

¹⁶⁸ Didion quotes historian William R. Taylor presenting on "the popular 'New York' stories written between 1902 and 1910 by William Sidney Porter, or 'O. Henry.'" Taylor "spoke of the way in which these stories, with their "focus on individuals' plights," their "absence of social or political implications" and "ideological neutrality," provided "a miraculous form of social glue": "These sentimental accounts of relations between classes in the city have a specific historical meaning: empathy without political compassion. They reduce the scale of human suffering to what atomized individuals endure as their plucky, sad lives were recounted week after week for almost a decade.... Their sentimental reading of oppression, class differences, human suffering, and affection helped create a new language for interpreting the city's complex society, a language that began to replace the threadbare moralism that New Yorkers inherited from nineteenth-century readings of the city. This language localized suffering in particular moments and confined it to particular occasions; it smoothed over differences because it could be read almost the same way from either end of the social scale."

¹⁶⁹ As Didion observes, the victim's story became the city's story and Central Park, its pastoral space of democratic harmony. In many ways, Didion's characterization of New York's response to the case echoes McKay's characterization of Banana Bottom's relation to its founding narrative: "[T]he preferred narrative worked to veil actual conflict, to cloud the extent to which the condition of being rich was predicated upon the continued neediness of a working class; to confirm the responsible stewardship of "the gentleman" and to forestall the possibility of a self-conscious, or politicized, proletariat. Social and economic phenomena, in this narrative, were personalized." The gentleman for the villagers is old Adair. As a figure, Adair provides the kind of "social glue" as the Central Park jogger did.

McKay draws Bitá's experience, then, in part, to disturb the historic relation between white racism and "a patriarchal discourse of honor and chastity" (Viridi 266).¹⁷⁰ Consider how McKay's portrait of Bitá's father contrasts starkly with macho declarations about protecting women's honor: Bitá recalls "[h]ow strange and terrible her father's face had been" during the period following her rape (288). At another point in the novel, we are told:

Once she caught her father's eye tear-dimmed, for he was remembering that it was right after Bitá had received a Sunday-school prize for good conduct that the rape occurred. And she, intuitively aware, *was assaulted by the same thought* and the ribald ditty *brutally pounding her memory* "Crazy Bow was first, Crazy Bow was first." (62, emphasis added)

In this short passage McKay portrays the awful discord between the public framing of the rape and the private aftermath of its continued experience in Bitá's life. The villagers' song pokes fun at sexuality as a mark of social distinction by alluding to Bitá's virginity (the patriarchal value placed on the female body as untouched property) with an emphasis on priority (who was *first*)—and abusively imagined as the first of many. The ditty further objectifies Bitá by reducing her to a (prized) body by casting the whole thing as a competition. In this sense, the song evokes the historical "definition of rape as a property crime of man against man" (Stewart 15). Carried on the jovial, mocking tune, its message appears cruelly tactless when placed alongside the pain of Bitá's father. As images, her father's face and eyes divest the reader of any notion that virginity could be a badge of masculine pride (ego finding no foothold in a man beside himself with grief). McKay's *tear-dimmed* portrait of Jordan Plant, if anything, feminizes him (insofar as the sentimental

¹⁷⁰ Jyotika Viridi argues that rape depictions represent a double bind for feminists because "the erasure of rape from the narrative bears the marks of a patriarchal discourse of honor and chastity; yet showing rape, some argue, eroticizes it for the male gaze and purveys the victim myth" (266).

tradition, as it is now remembered, leads us to associate tears with femininity).¹⁷¹ Still, the focus of the passage remains Bitá; and though it shares the violence she endures, it does so in a way that bars the reader from any personalization of her story (contrary to the case of the Central Park jogger). In other words, McKay is working hard to change the register of rape through his presentation of it in the novel. Here he captures the longer timeframe of psychic violence in contrast to journalistic accounts confined to reporting the physical and pinpointing it to a brief time period. That the novel abstains entirely from so much as hinting at the physical violence Bitá endured has been a source of confusion among critics.¹⁷² Critics object that Bitá's interiority is also entirely excluded from the rape scene.¹⁷³ Notably, the novel *does* record Bitá's pain but at a distance from the event—and then, in a measured manner, through memory and without any sensational detail. In doing so, the novel both risks misreading and blocks the reader from sympathetically responding to her. But this misreading is, in part, the point (in the final section of this chapter, I will take up the issue of the tepid character-audience relationship McKay crafts by presenting his protagonist in this manner).

¹⁷¹ See Milette Shamir and Jennifer Travis's *Boys Don't Cry? Rethinking Narratives of Masculinity and Emotion in the U.S.*

¹⁷² David Nicholls crystallizes the objections most directly: "[McKay's] narration will not investigate Bitá's point of view concerning the rape and its consequences; in this sense, McKay's attitude toward Bitá's rape resembles the detached, experimental attitude exhibited by the Craigs—an attitude his narrative aims to critique. Where McKay creates a silence about Bitá's inner experience of these events, however, he also explores the processes by which various constituencies in her community seek to define the experience for her" (84-85).

¹⁷³ In this regard, McKay follows Fielding over Richardson: his focus is on cultural mores and publics rather than interiority and psychology—though I realize the senses in which this dichotomy is a false one. Linda Schermer Raphael explains the dichotomy as follows: "Ian Watt makes the case that, in the eighteenth century, two divergent tendencies in novel writing, emanating from Henry Fielding and Richardson, had both been affected by Cartesian dualism, resulting in the acceptance of both internal and external reality by each novelist. Yet, Fielding emphasized the external life and codes of conduct, whereas Richardson used the epistolary form to stress the inner states of his characters" (Raphael 26). See Watt, pages 21-39.

The narrator sets the reader up to expect a certain kind of narrative: “Bita was a girl with a past. Between the years of twelve and thirteen she had been raped. She had been raped by Crazy Bow Adair” (2). Thus primed, many readers, myself included, experience dissonance when reading the rape scene.¹⁷⁴ If, however, we view McKay’s portrayal as an intervention in journalistic framings of rape, his portrayal of the scene begins to gather more meaning, even if the scene continues to be disturbing for the way it glosses over the fact that a young girl is losing her bodily autonomy. By divesting his description of many of the typical features of a rape narrative, McKay jams the common circuits of meaning rape sets in motion.

One Saturday noon Bita and Crazy were romping together in the caressing fox-tail grass sloping down to the Cane River. The Cane River for about ten chains was the natural boundary of Jordan Plant’s property.

As they romped, Bita got upon Crazy Bow’s breast and began rubbing her head against his face. Crazy Bow suddenly drew himself up and rather roughly he pushed Bita away and she rolled off a little down the slope.

Crazy Bow took up his fiddle, and sitting under a low and shady guava tree he began to play. He played a sweet tea-meeting love song. And as he played Bita went creeping upon her hands and feet up the slope to him and listened *in the attitude of a bewitched being*.

And when he had finished she clambered upon him again and began kissing his face.

¹⁷⁴ John Lowe describes McKay’s depiction of Bita’s rape as “*quite ambiguous*, in that she teases and embraces Crazy Bow passionately as they romp in the wood,” echoing Carolyn Cooper (1992) who named “the circumstances surrounding the ‘rape’ [...] *quite ambiguous*” as well (Lowe 207; Cooper 44). Cooper’s repeated use of scare quotes provides even more evidence that she finds the label the novel gives to the encounter unconvincing (43, 44, 46). Kay Van Mol refers to the encounter as “Bita’s alleged rape” (50). Again using scare quotes, Paul Jay writes, “The act is referred to in the novel as a ‘rape’” (191).

Crazy Bow tried to push her off. But Bitá hugged and clung to him passionately. Crazy Bow was blinded by temptation and lost control of himself and the deed was done” (10, emphasis added)

The scene offers up no image of Bitá as victim, nor does it paint Crazy Adair as the guilty, much less monstrous, perpetrator.¹⁷⁵ The difference between victim and assailant—often remarked upon in news stories and frequently an invitation to vent racial and class tensions—is virtually nonexistent here. Absent as well is the story of the crime that has been committed. The depiction resists attempts to make Bitá’s rape illustrative (in other words, it resists the slide in scale that marks sentimental political storytelling). Denied a record of sexual assault, the reader becomes separated experientially from the characters in the novel that gossip about the rape and sing its ditty (the villagers) and feel pity (the Craigs) because the reader does not experience the rape as passing into story in quite the same way as the characters. This is McKay’s attempt to shift the normative framing of rape and the organization of public sentiments such framings effect.

Missing the gravity of a rape scene, many critics have read McKay’s portrayal of Bitá as a straightforward primitivist reversal of Anglo-American bourgeois values.¹⁷⁶ It must be

¹⁷⁵ In Bitá’s first encounter with sexual violence, McKay creates a scene that entirely evades the dominant victim-perpetrator frame surrounding rape (Sielke 4). This is certainly not the case much later in the narrative when Bitá is nearly raped—again by the Cane River—by Arthur Glengley, the light-skinned son of a local landlord (260-265).

¹⁷⁶ Richard Priebe identifies McKay’s project as presenting Bitá “as an archetypal earth-mother figure whose soul is rooted deeply in the soil and the communal spirit of those who make their living from it.” Only an “ethnocentric vision of the world,” Priebe argues, “would have us “view her ‘rape’ by Crazy Bow as an unfortunate event to be washed away by seven years of education in England. But she herself was an active participant in the sensual communion” (27). Or, as Kenneth Ramchand puts it a couple of years earlier, “Bitá is drawn *like a natural creature* ‘creeping upon her hands and feet up the slope to him’ and Crazy Bow is involuntarily possessed. The incident does not call for a moralizing gloss [...].It establishes Bitá’s natural connection with the Banana Bottom world. (263-264, emphasis added).

While Ramchand argues “McKay expresses cultural dualism not by setting up explicit contrasts but by celebrating the *Banana Bottom* community,” Raphael Dalleo, Bitá’s is not a complete “return to the folk” (Ramchand 264; Dalleo, “Bitá” 60). Dalleo argues, more convincingly to my mind, that rather than denying her English education abroad entirely, Bitá Plant returns to the folk as a literary intellectual, embracing and

remembered, however, that McKay never shies away from naming Bitá's encounter with Crazy Bow as *rape*, even quite late into the novel, even as the initial depiction clearly casts Bitá in the more active role in the sexual encounter. In this regard, it seems inaccurate to classify the depiction as a primitivist celebration of Bitá's precocious sexuality. A modified version of this argument, then, cast within the sentimental framework I am proposing here, might go something like this: McKay has overcorrected the sentimental heroine's lack of volition by making his protagonist appear to be the aggressor in the incident. And, indeed, as Rhonda Cobham observes, "McKay's presentation [...] fanfares agency on Bitá rather than Crazy Bow."¹⁷⁷ That is quite a big claim to make about a child. It would also make agency in the scene solely a matter of sexuality, even if it upends the generic marker of "rape as a property crime of man against man" in sentimental plots that depict the raped "woman [as] being stolen away from a father or husband" (Stewart 15). This argument parallels Mary Vermillion's reading of Harriet Jacobs use of the sentimental form in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, but Jacobs' method erases her body in the text, even as it claims her will. McKay, throughout *Banana Bottom*, appears intent on reconciling body and mind, not separating them.

admiring them but maintaining some distance necessary to critique their conditions and value the education she received, above all for its "culture of sensibility." As Dalleo argues, McKay's interest lies in exposing a conflict within the Jamaican middle class and aligning himself with the literary intellectual over the technocratic colonial middle class pursuing practical jobs: Bitá "is rejecting the 'realm of the practical, which her higher training had always emphasized,' and aligning herself with something different from 'training,' the idea that the life of the mind should be pursued purely for its own pleasures" (Dalleo, "Bitá" 60).

¹⁷⁷ Throughout the novel, McKay is at pains to draw Bitá as agential. His difficulty arises from the tension between the romantic trajectory of the plot and the realism of his setting with its rich sociological image of a community swept up by gossip and, later, revivalism. As Mervyn Morris writes, "Though the plot is manifestly wish-fulfilling, the world of *Banana Bottom* is established in detail and with historical depth" (85).

Bitá's behavior leading up to the rape does not make her an agent in it. Her behavior does not indicate volition. As an attention to the language in the scene shows, McKay's account of rape turns away from a record of violence suffered to emphasize the power of art instead. Namely, the narration gives itself over to depicting the power of art to charm and fascinate us with its beauty and, more crucially, its power to shape "the attitude" of its audience.¹⁷⁸ In this sense, the portrait does fit the sentimental tradition in making rape stand for uncontrolled passions (Block 36).¹⁷⁹ Cobham identifies this thread when she observes, "Bitá draws Crazy Bow to herself because through [him] she can gain access to a culture of sensibility" (66). As a close reading shows, Bitá does not exercise her will in this scene. Bitá acts but she acts as "a bewitched being," and moreover "in the attitude of" such a being. In other words, this role comes to her as already scripted, meaning the cultural form (a sweet tea-meeting love song) is an old one, while the response it elicits is so much as set. The reading of the scene that makes the most sense, then, sees McKay using Bitá to complicate more straightforward models of behavior and agency. Expressing a common prejudice against sentimental philosophy, Vivasvan Soni writes, "'judgment' in sentimental theories is so often reflexive rather than reflective: that is to say, reflexively conditioned by the dynamics of affective response rather than properly deliberative" ("A New" 244). Interpretations of Bitá as agential in this scene would take a transitory feeling as a sign of agency. It would prematurely fix her will and character, surely an absurd thing to do to a twelve-year-old.

¹⁷⁸ In this regard, McKay's depiction shares tendencies with the opening of the "Nausicaa" episode in *Ulysses* (1922), where a narrator, in the style of sentimental prose, describes a young lady with a head full of romantic notions, Gerty MacDowell, knowingly tantalizing her onlooker, Leopold Bloom (just how knowingly we're not sure). McKay recognized the "bigness" of *Ulysses* but ultimately found D. H. Lawrence to be the "more modern" writer (McKay, *Long* 190).

¹⁷⁹ Sharon Block explains, "As a cause of uncontrolled, potentially uncivilized behavior, the passions explained all forms of illicit sex, including rape. The publications and writing on rapists in the Revolutionary era repeatedly linked uncontrolled passions to rape" (36).

Meditations on the rivalry between impulsive and deliberative action, between passion and reason as the stronger motivator of action are many in literary history. Particularly galvanizing within this history are the core lines of William Wordsworth's *The White Doe of Rylstone* (1815):

Action [Greek *praxis*] is transitory—a step, a blow,
The motion of a muscle—this way or that—
'Tis done, and in the after-vacancy
We wonder at ourselves like men betray'd.
Suffering [Greek *pathos*] is permanent, obscure and dark,
And shares the nature of infinity. (III.v.60-5)

Originally written for his tragedy *The Borderers*, Wordsworth delivers in these lines a warning against the human tendency to be overconfident in taking action. Writing in the aftermath of the French Revolution, the lines conveyed his disenchantment. Finding the world in no want of action, Wordsworth stresses the importance of character, offering in his play's preface "the first major work of romantic character criticism" (Arac, *Impure* 31).¹⁸⁰ Jonathan Arac identifies this passage with "a change in the status of literary character. No longer the traditional Aristotelian one who acts, nor, as in many great nineteenth-century novels, one who speaks, a character becomes one who is known" ("Politics" 255). The inner world of a character proves determining. Surely this is an elevation in the status of feeling, if ever there was one. Feeling, as Wordsworth figures it, represents no passing whim: invoked as an emotional state that is nurtured over a period time, the weight of which, proves to be truly portentous.

Another way to think about this shift might be to perceive feeling as part of the incremental changes within a fixed scale of action, promising a heightened capacity for perceiving the span of

¹⁸⁰ Coleridge would later turn to the above lines in his lecture on *Hamlet*.

an action. Fredrick Burwick offers this alternate but related interpretation of Wordsworth's meaning when he contends that the theme of *The Borderers* forces a widening of the concept of tragic action:

The crucial point is that the action to be imitated was not the mere end, but the process, be it rational or emotional; in Aristotelian terms, not the *praxis* but the *proairesis*. Action as *praxis* is simply the deed: brandishing a sword, striking an enemy. To imitate human action as *proairesis*, the playwright must reveal the process that gives rise to action: responding to a circumstance, deliberating about it, choosing what to do (*Poetics*, 2 II 1448a; 6II 1450b). (155)

The story of Bita begins with *praxis*, the old story and action of Bita's rape, but the dominating and final emphasis rests on Bita's "choice of one thing before another," which is the literal translation of the ancient Greek *proairesis*. Also translated as *will* or *moral character*, *proairesis* is a foundational idea in Stoic writing of Epictetus, signifying the moral action or choice one makes when either assenting to or denying an impression (of reality). Read within this literary history, *Banana Bottom* appears as a text obsessed with the ways affect can jam action at *proairesis*. In sketching Bita's eventual trajectory into agency, McKay works to emphasize the fraught environment in which Bita must struggle to give or withhold her assent to impressions. The story of the rape (of Bita's not entirely volition-driven action) represents the first episode on her way toward more conscious encounters with impressions (reflective autonomy)—a journey that becomes considerably more complicated under the pressures of her patron, Priscilla Craig.

4.6 THE PATRONAGE OF PRISCILLA CRAIG

Presenting sentimental aid as “a drama of attempted mind control,” McKay continues his complex account of agency in his depiction of Bitá under Priscilla Craig’s patronage recalling the likes of Othello, Trilby, Renfield, or Lucy (Burwick 166). While the Craigs’ aid is not presented as entirely incompatible with Bitá taking an active role in her education, she nevertheless identifies the ways in which her person, perhaps more specifically her nervous system, has been taken over under their patronage:

It had never been lost upon her, from the time that the Craigs adopted her after the rape, that she was the subject of an experiment, and as she grew in understanding she had voluntarily conceded herself as one does to *a mesmerist*. Neither had she ever been blind to the advantages of it as compared with her peasant heritage. She had never had any anxiety, never had to think about the future. And now to prolong that state indefinitely and for ever she had simply to go straight through the motions of compliance *with automatic gestures* in harmony with the decorous righteousness of the mission life. (109, emphasis added)

What the novel later casts as a critically important distinction between training and education, at this point appears as an equivalency, at least under Mrs. Craig’s ideology. “You have received an education to make you see and do the correct thing *almost automatically*,” she tells Bitá (45, emphasis added). Much later in the novel, Mrs. Craig wonders incredulously, “Was [Bitá’s] Aunt Nommy too ignorant to realize that Bitá’s *high training* had removed her life far from her peasant way of thinking and that it was not a thing to dispose of lightly like that of any ordinary Negro girl?” (223, emphasis added). Throughout the text, Priscilla’s mindset muddies and reduces the traditional thrust of sentimental philosophy. As Kyla Schuller argues, “Sentimentalism [...] was

deployed to intercede in the impressibility of the civilized body by cultivating the ability to respond to sensory stimulations on the basis of emotional reflection, rather than instinctive reflex” (*The Biopolitics* 4). While a part of Bitá’s automaticity might be said to include the unconscious expressions of the British culture that typifies her patronage, the more critical part rests with the Craigs’ practical and spiritual designs on her as a model parishioner.

Schuller’s framing of sentimentalism as a form of biopower proves particularly useful for understanding Bitá’s plight. The key term in Schuller’s study is *impressibility*, “the capacity to be transformed by one’s environment and experiences.”¹⁸¹ Nineteenth century racial distinctions, Schuller argues, boiled down to impressibility; civilized bodies possessed it, while primitive ones did not. Impressibility distinguishes itself through time. As Dana Luciano notes, sentiment draws on the human ability to reflect over a period of time in contrast to sensation, which registers in the body immediately. Referring back to the Aristotelian categories, then, the romantic emphasis on *proairesis* gave concrete and meaningful expression to sentimental ethics. It also supported illustrations of the kind of mindfulness to which Stoicism aspires.

In presenting Bitá as dangerously close to becoming an automaton, McKay casts Priscilla Craig’s version of mentorship in terms that resemble John B. Watson’s 1913 manifesto,

¹⁸¹ I take this definition from the book description (also see page 7 in *The Biopolitics of Feeling* for further definition of *impressibility*). This is a concept that bears an important relation to chapter one and two’s concept of affective agency. One question that arises is how close impressibility and affective agency are to the psychoanalytic notion of identification, the “psychological process whereby the subject assimilates an aspect, property, or attribute of the other and is transformed, wholly or partially, after the model” (Laplanche and Pontalis 205). For Freud, sympathy is dangerous because it is not based on healthy intersubjective identifications. A person sympathizing with another frequently mistakes what is actually a passing coincidence for a more substantial analogy. This mistake, or false belief, may lead to a psychotic form of identification. Freud suggests repressing the affect that arises from impressions of the coincidences we find between our egos and those of suffering others. For a slightly more extended discussion of Freud’s view on sympathy see Glenn Hendler’s *Public Sentiments*, pages 5-7.

“Psychology as the Behaviorist Views It.”¹⁸² In laying out this new area of study, Watson pursues a field of knowledge whose main objective was the prediction and control of behavior through stimulus-response patterns and conditioning. In the passage from the novel quoted above, McKay’s main metaphor for describing Bitá’s obedient reflexes is mesmerism. The metaphor underscores how Bitá’s complacency under her tutelage places her selfhood at risk. Her unique perceptions and foreign (to Priscilla) ways of judging undergo a transformation under the Craigs’ guidance—a transformation that, as Bitá later comes to realize, has aligned her habits with values she would not have consciously elected for herself, for the social discipline Priscilla’s sympathy institutes also works to cover the differences between her and her protégée’s background.

In casting Priscilla’s aid as a prolonged period of training, *Banana Bottom* highlights the disciplinary use of sympathy. The sympathetic attentions that produce civilized bodies, rather ironically, lead to a form of highly effective behaviorism in its subjects. This is ironic because sympathy is meant to civilize (to cultivate emotional reflection rather than physiological reflexivity), but behaviorism operates under the principle of immediate response to sensation (what in the nineteenth-century was frequently aligned with the animalistic or primitive). When the Craigs present Bitá with a suitor, Deacon Herald Newton Day, the text again underscores the automatic aspect of Bitá’s education: “she had not felt even a reaction to refuse, because, like her training, it was designed to serve a purpose that was more than herself” (109). Though the idealism and the method for achieving the goal are at odds, aspiring to be more than oneself masks the somnambulant quality of Bitá’s response to the Craigs’ matchmaking. That Bitá and Day, a heterosexual couple poised to procreate, represent the apotheosis of the Craigs’ sympathetic aid,

¹⁸² To push the comparison to an even stronger position, Bitá’s automatic responses are presented as nearly Pavlovian, an image that holds a good deal of affinity with Zora Neale Hurston’s governing metaphor in her 1943 essay on white Southern literary patronage of black artists, “The Pet Negro System.”

underscores the way sentimentality, as Schuller argues, “operates as a fundamental mechanism of biopower” (*The Biopolitics* 2). Glenn Hendler observes how such a mechanism operates at the level of reading as well. “[M]ore than an exchange of ideas and emotions,” sentimentality, for Hendler, means “a form of embodiment, a ‘bodily bond’ that links character and reader to each other and the social body” (*Public Sentiments* 36). The full process of identification that began Bitá’s education under the Craigs will find its circle completed when Bitá occupies her place on home soil once again. Having become the decorously righteous character of the Craigs’ design, Bitá serves as a model for the Afro-Jamaican congregation to emulate.

The desire to forward a model underpins the marital match. The couple’s example needs to be visible, on display for all the townsfolk to see. As a wife, Bitá is expected to take up the weighty responsibility of “serv[ing] a purpose that [is] more than herself,” a mediator between the class of her patrons and her people that, to some degree, she represents. Bitá’s position recalls Reverend Angus Craig’s aspiration to sponsor genuine native leadership. Priscilla and Malcolm, also, we are told, are “determin[ed] to have a Negro succeed them at Jubilee” (95). The education Bitá has received appears to position her and her intended to become a new social formation, a new model of Afro-Jamaican citizenry. Seen in another light, Bitá’s education appears as part of a process of colonial political subjection. Her story illustrates how “nineteenth-century biopower consolidated in a sentimental mode” worked to “regulate the circulation of feeling throughout the population” (Schuller, *The Biopolitics* 5). As Schuller stipulates, however, this philosophy pertains to “the feelings of the civilized individual—and only the civilized individual—as the kernel of liberal democracy” over and against “primitive bodies deemed to be impulsive and insensate” (*The Biopolitics* 2, 4). The Craigs educate Bitá under the presumption that they shepherd a congregation full of civilized individuals, even if Mrs. Craig’s remarks, at times, imply otherwise.

The narrative rather amusingly upends the Craigs' dream of making Bitá a decorously righteous example of Protestant living, by showing how their attentions produce a decidedly un-Protestant-like aura around their protégée. The glamour of Bitá for the townsfolk becomes most evident in a moment when her brief flirtation with the town dandy, Hopping Dick, jeopardizes the terms of her patron's support. Priscilla requests that Bitá cease appearing with a man of his reputation: "I do not ask you to consider me at all. But the work of the mission and your connection with it. The duty we have to perform before God" (218). Called upon by the Craigs, Bitá's stepmother Anty Nommy steps in to act as a clever arbitrator in the conflict. After gathering all the parties together, she slyly proposes the two "get married at once" (223). Through subtle bullying of Bitá's would-be beau, Anty Nommy reveals a suitor who found Bitá "piquant ...*as* the young lady of the Jubilee mission." Indeed, "[h]e had never thought of her out of that setting" and "wouldn't attempt to spoil Bitá's life at the mission for anything in the world" (224). Of course the practical concerns of a place to live and "the formidable cost of marriage and a wedding feast" also dissuade the young man.

But what McKay most carefully underscores throughout the whole scene is the role the imagination plays in structuring Hopping Dick's relation to Bitá. For Hopping Dick, the whole flirtation revolves around a fantasy of social status, quickly dispelled by the daily demands of peasant life: "Even if he should be deprived of associating with her he preferred to visualize her as *the fine lady* of the mission rather than his wife. In fact it was impossible for him to visualize a Mrs. Hopping Dick just then even if his imagination were raised to the ninth degree" (224). Attracted to the status of Bitá's position, Hopping Dick has no wish to trade in the respectability that underpins it. The social capital of the protégée here does not operate in any substantive way to inspire this congregant to righteousness, much less deliver on the promise of native leadership

as originally intended by Angus Craig. For Bitá, the scene not only marks her departure from the mission, it also and more crucially plays a key role in initiating the reeducation of her perceptions. As she clearly sees, “Mr. Delgado...is not the cause” of the rift between her benefactress and herself; her attraction to him is more of a symptomatic outburst. In the trajectory of the plot, the rift serves as a pre-political formation of resistance, helping Bitá to recognize in no uncertain terms what Priscilla’s continuing endorsement requires of her.

McKay’s dramatization of the stakes of those terms evokes the most famous relationship of patronage during the Harlem Renaissance—the relationship between Langston Hughes and Charlotte Mason.¹⁸³ Like Priscilla’s sponsorship of Bitá’s education, Mason sponsored Hughes’s college expenses. McKay’s portrait of Priscilla also nods to the tradition of protégé escorting patron.¹⁸⁴ Aaron Douglas, another recipient of Mason’s aid, reportedly “felt sorry for Hughes [who] looked like a ‘terrier’ on Mason’s arm when he attended concerts with her” (Kirschke 35). McKay angles his depiction to emphasize what the patron got out of this service: “Priscilla Craig...had never felt so rare travelling as when she took her brown ward” around Europe with her (32). Again, Hughes’s example is instructive for unpacking this feeling—a feeling that places a considerable amount of strain on the patron-recipient relationship. Hughes explains the strain in his autobiography in terms of performance: “She wanted me to be primitive and know and feel the intuition of the primitive. But, unfortunately, I did not feel the rhythms of the primitive surging through me, so I could not live and write as though I did” (325). Hughes names the demand as

¹⁸³ Mason also supported McKay, but her support of Hughes became the more iconic reference in Harlem Renaissance scholarship.

¹⁸⁴ As Bruce Kellner reports, “At one time or another during the Harlem Renaissance, [Charlotte Mason] considered as her personal property both Hughes and Hurston, as well as Aaron Douglas, Richard Barthé, Hall Johnson, Claude McKay, Louise Thompson, and especially Alain Locke. None of them was permitted to divulge her identity as the source of their good fortune, even though one or another of them served as escort on several occasions” (56).

contrived, since he also suffered the same ailment (civilization) as Mason. In Bitá's case, McKay locates the strain in Priscilla's request that her protégée perform Protestantism. Though Bitá's relation is to a different community than her Harlem counterparts, she nonetheless experiences a dynamic similar to that of Harlem Renaissance artists, namely the dynamic that unfolds when a patron asks a protégée to perform an identity. To return, then, to the rare feeling Priscilla experiences "when she took her brown ward" around Europe, we might name the aura around the patron-protégée relationship as producing a certain commodified affect that interferes with philanthropic aspirations to found native leadership.¹⁸⁵ In this way the novel shows how patronage fits into a larger story about the imbrication of emotional and commercial ties as they shape group dynamics. Like her grandfather, Bitá learns to see beyond her direct economic self-interest. Guided by youthful rebellion, she dares to leave (and therefore lose) her lifestyle at the mission and begins to build her identity outside the social place that life would have assured her.

While Hopping Dick and others would see Bitá as the high-water mark of distinction, Bitá sees her relationship with them in more communal terms. Bitá's excursions to the village marketplace in the early stages of her rebellion from Mrs. Craig's care help her see a different form of being. Casting off her chaperone, the Craigs' cook Rosyanna, Bitá chooses direct contact with the people:

¹⁸⁵ Viewing the performance of the "primitive" as a commodified affect, as a precursor to hip hop-styled blackness or *Will and Grace*-styled queerness, helps to illuminate the frustrations many critics express about what white patronage did to the Harlem Renaissance. Writing about a more recent context in *Virtuous Vice: Homoeroticism and the Public Sphere*, Eric Clarke explains "the production and circulation of commodified affect" as follows: "This affect articulates identification and social belonging as adjacent to and yet incommensurate with traditional notions of community (and thus also begs the question of what relation there may be between what Marx termed 'real communality and generality'). Commodified affect is, [Ronald] Judy argues, something by which one "can belong with millions of others in an asynchronic moment of consumption of the same affect, the same passion." Its production and circulation signals "the end of morality as the basis for identity beyond commodification" (58). See Ronald Judy's "On the Question of Nigga Authenticity" (227).

Bitá mingled in the crowd, responsive to the feeling, the color, the smell, the swell and press of it. It gave her the sensation of a reservoir of familiar kindred humanity into which she had descended for baptism. She had never had that big moving feeling as a girl when she visited the native market. And she thought that if she had never gone abroad for a period so long, from which she had become accustomed to viewing her native life in perspective, she might never had had that experience.

Many young natives had gone to the city or abroad for higher culture and had returned aloof from, if not actually despising, the tribal life in which they were nurtured. But the pure joy that Bitá felt in the simple life of her girlhood was childlike and almost unconscious. She could not reason and theorize why she felt that way. It was just a surging free big feeling.

The noises of the market were sweeter in her ears than a symphony. (40-41)

Here McKay appears to be rewriting the cultural capital of the Harlem protégé. The surging rhythms of the primitive to which Hughes refers becomes a more cosmopolitan, communally unifying sensibility for Bitá with an important distinguishing characteristic: Bitá's experience abroad, her seven-year European education, acts as an enabling condition or prerequisite for this kind of feeling and communal awareness.¹⁸⁶ Importantly, Bitá's cosmopolitan sensibility shapes the sensation of kinship she gleans from the atmosphere at the marketplace. Such circumstances lend credence to David Nicholls' hopeful assertion that Bitá's identification with the folk hardly

¹⁸⁶ Tatiana Tagirova also reads Bitá's market experience as enhanced by her period of separation from her homeland (96). Drawing a distinction between Bitá and her second mentor on the island Squire Gensir, Tagirova further remarks, "He can appreciate the culture of the Jamaican peasants only intellectually, whereas she is emotionally attached to the life that touches her inner being." And later, Tagirova states, "Bitá's sense of individuality in spite of foreign influences is remarkable" (97). The village life, its parties and dances provides one of the primary sources of Bitá's sense of self, a self that finds vitality in the simple, rural West Indian way of life.

represents the stuff of “mere nostalgia” or “a sentimental recovery of lost origins” (94). To the degree that Bitá’s sense of kinship with the folk will provide her with confidence to act (even if only at first as a symptomatic acting out against her childhood benefactress), Nicholls’ reading proves true.

In the marketplace, McKay presents affective belonging in a romantic way. He shows how a momentary feeling of affective convergence can contribute to a constructive individual sentiment on which to build a life. The momentary vision supported by this fleeting experience offers Bitá a glimpse of a substantial social place, a form of communality that does not demean or devalue her subjectivity according to any racial or colonial logic. Of equal or perhaps even more importance, this experience makes room for a sense of wonder through a rich relationship to the aesthetic. While it is true that McKay squarely locates the scene in the marketplace of goods, he nevertheless crafts out of this location a distinctly aesthetic experience, rather than a cheap consumer-driven one: “And of the foodstuff on view she felt an impulse to touch and fondle a thousand times more than she wanted to buy” (41). Sensory experience is clearly elevated over the commercial, and the experience, as McKay frames it, is beyond the touch of “reason.” This feeling, even vision, Bitá experiences would appear to be a far cry away from her Stoic turn of mind at the end of the novel. Though one might say the Stoic practice of gratitude, as forwarded in Epictetus’s writing, could cultivate an awareness that might open an individual to experiences of wonder.

In relation to sympathy, Bitá’s experience of wonder also holds significance. In her study of sympathy in American literature, Boudreau makes this most interesting claim: “the most dangerous effect of sympathy [is] its unsettling ability to reduce wonder to complacency” (xiv).¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁷ Situating her argument in relation to American literary history, Kristin Boudreau’s fuller claim is worth quoting for the historical arc it sketches of sympathy’s way of playing out in the American political landscape, a dynamic McKay might have, to at least some extent, understood: “While the earliest

Bitá's wondrous rediscovery of her island and her rebellion against the mission life develop cooperatively. Bitá opens herself to wonder, and it stirs her reassessment of many of the impressions she receives from her environment. By alternating moments of wonder and resistance, the narrative seems to indicate that the emergence of Bitá's selfhood and self-expression require wonder. Nowhere is this more evident than in Bitá's response to being called "Only a Nigger Gal!" After refusing the sexual advances of a light-skinned son of one of the local landowners, Bitá retreats to her room. Standing before the mirror, she reclaims the beauty of her black body. Her subsequent rereading of William Blake's "The Little Black Boy" reclaims the black boy, not as longing for a white soul or body, but as wondrous as he is. Carolyn Cooper calls "one of the great moments of black feminist literary criticism" (48). For a poet-novelist writing his third novel, McKay was well seasoned in creative labor under patronage. Such lived authority imparts a compelling weight to his celebration of wonder. It also emphasizes the considerable complexity of the sources of such wonder, which are more and greater than a simple identification with the folk. Where Nicholls sees this identification as holding out "the promise of free abstract self-expression and the solace of essentialism," I see this identification undergoing a considerable amount of scrutiny in the remainder of the plot (94). At least at this early point in the novel, Bitá's experience of oneness with the crowd is not yet a form of self-expression but an orientating feeling toward it.

proponents of sympathy focused on its benefits, even going so far as to claim that American sentiments were the affective counterparts of 'justice and liberty' ... later writers were less confident that this social panacea had no undesirable side effects. Reluctant to abandon what had, by the early nineteenth century, become an American commitment to sentiment, writers like Frederick Douglass, Louisa May Alcott, Henry James, and William Dean Howells explored the most dangerous effect of sympathy: its unsettling ability to reduce wonder to complacency" (xiv). McKay's novel shows him to be from the same philosophical line in forwarding wonder as an important communal experience for a group. As I argue below, Crazy Bow's piano concert in the novel powerfully illustrates how communal experiences of wonder can be instrumental in startling a group back into a more sober vision, one that perhaps might even prove crucial in securing the greater liberty of the group.

The narration must still work toward a more complex sense of what communality means before its close.

The difficulty, not to be too quickly swept away, comes in Bitá's encounter with the modernist fetishization of primitivism, that is, the modern subject's temptation to see the culture of "the other" as an escape latch from the problems of modernity. Such a desire frequently leads to the false apprehension of a native culture, usually reductive, or downright condescending (of the kind Langston Hughes avoids enabling in his patron the wealthy widow Charlotte Mason). McKay humanizes the danger in his subtle portrait of Bitá's second mentor, the bohemian Squire Gensir, a character modeled after McKay's own mentor in Jamaica, Walter Jekyll.¹⁸⁸ Though McKay refrains in the narration from directly satirizing Gensir's primitivist tendencies (likely because of the fondness yet for Jekyll), traces of Gensir's primitivist tendencies (of which McKay surely would have disapproved) are apparent in his speech. While it is true, as the critic Paul Jay claims, that "Gensir's liberal position mirrors [more] elements of the Craigs" than the narrative directly discloses, I disagree that this "is something that McKay himself does not seem to be aware of" (Jay 191). In my reading, *Banana Bottom* hardly misses recording the repercussions of the ideological contradictions of this mentorship on its mentee.

From the more clearly delineated depiction of subjectivization under the Craigs, Bitá graduates to a subtler one in her second mentor, the unorthodox Squire Gensir, whose name thrice puns the importance of social rank—*squire*, *gentleman*, and *sir* (Lowe 210).¹⁸⁹ Squire Gensir assumes a different kind of authority over Bitá by challenging her to give her birth culture more

¹⁸⁸ Walter Jekyll's death in 1928 in some ways figures the novel as a eulogy. The novel's dedication to Jekyll reads "In Homage to Pâcjo," which is, as Cobham explains, "the peasants' affectionate nickname for the eccentric little Englishman" (57).

¹⁸⁹ Here I follow John Wharton Lowe's observation about the "satiric shorthand" and "triple redundancy" in Squire Gensir's name: "Squire Gentleman Sir" (210).

esteem. In this sense, he truly does seem to be the ideological opposite of her childhood mentors. Where Priscilla Craig urges Bitá “not ... to consider [her, Priscilla] at all. But the work of the mission and [Bitá’s] connection with it. The duty we have to perform before God,” Squire Gensir speaks against a “life [lived] for some noble ideal of service: a class, a cause, a loyalty.” (218, 122). In contrast to the coupling of duty and training Bitá experienced under Priscilla, Squire Gensir offers her an understanding of “[e]ducation as a thing for *individual* cultural development” (122). Gensir gestures toward the “ideal of the liberal arts,” the sense of liberal as associated with license or “free will” (R. Williams, “Liberal” 179-181). Under his guidance, Bitá begins to move away from an ideology of living as a group representative to living more according to her individual impressions, as discerned by her own mind. To a substantial degree that produces tangible results in her action, Gensir models for Bitá what it means “to think and to act independently” (122).

As noted, however, Gensir’s speech does reveal his mentorship to be less liberatory than it first appears, and readers are left to their own devices about whether or not to be suspicious of the text’s straightforward depiction of Gensir as an ally. We are apprised of Gensir’s motive for using the Afro-Caribbean culture as a means of rebellion against his own subjectivization under the British system, an educational model he dismisses as wrongly aiming “to fit [everyone] into a rigid pattern.” Further expounding on the British system, Squire Gensir confides in Bitá,

But I never meant that kind of artificial educated freedom. The peasants’ mind couldn’t grasp that. Your cousin Bab, yes. For he’s educating himself up from the peasantry. I like him very much *in a personal way*. Even more than I do the peasants *in a general way*. But I think he is restless and unhappy. And he’ll be worse when he wins his desire and gets into that Civil Service jacket. But when I speak of the freedom of your peasants, I

mean that unconscious freedom in their common existence, their natural instincts. They don't know what repression is. (121)

Even as Gensir celebrates Jamaican culture, his assumptions about the peasant mind divulge his condescension. His speech captures his romantic essentializing of the peasantry. Without calling the peasants primitive, Gensir imagines them as untouched by the experience of repression. British education, repressive as it might be, still grants, in Squire Gensir's mind, Bitá and himself a leg up in critical awareness. It separates them and elevates them from the larger peasantry. This hierarchal thinking escapes the narrator's censure, as Gensir's own rebellious stance obscures the ways he continues some of the prejudices Bitá rejects in Priscilla. As Paul Jay identifies, "the values of a dominant, colonialist ideology continually reappear in subtly disruptive ways in the liberal language of a counter-ideology" (177). The "absolute *difference* between the Craigs' neo-colonialist position and Squire Gensir's liberal one" finally does not hold (Jay 177).

While McKay refrains from being explicitly critical of Squire Gensir, he does place words in his mouth that clearly oppose his narrator's values. Perhaps Gensir escapes McKay's censure mainly for the role he plays in inspiring in Bitá the confidence she needs to live more between her two identities and depart from the formation she received at the mission to pursue a more solid connection with the values she finds in village life. In this sense, the narrative appears to affirm the individualistic ethos of Gensir's liberalism, a movement that would affirm Bitá's trajectory as a roughly autobiographic protagonist. In his life, McKay consistently places his own individual sensibility and judgments over and above any preordained group sensibility his mentors would have him fit.¹⁹⁰ In practice, Bitá's confidence in her socioeconomic and ethnic birth identity

¹⁹⁰ See Wayne Cooper's biography *Rebel Sojourner*, especially in relation to his work during the decade of the thirties: "Broadly speaking, McKay tried to maintain ... the independent, left-wing stance he had first adopted as a *Liberator* editor after World War I." For Cooper, "[t]he positions [McKay] took on the great

translates to her defection from the social circles the Craigs would have her frequent. Raphael Dalleo defines what Bitá's defection amounts to in class and cultural terms: "Through Bitá's different suitors, the novel explores various models of middle-class allegiance, so that the primary opposition is not really between European literary culture and Jamaican popular culture. What Bitá ends up rejecting is becoming part of the professional technocratic brown middle class in order to value an alternative middle-class identity, the literary intellectual" (101). In broader strokes, Bitá chooses a lifestyle that affirms an orientation toward an education in the liberal arts rather than training toward a particular profession. This echoes the account of Crazy Bow's choice in the opening of the novel to abandon civil service training to pursue music.

In the protagonist's storyline, however, the dramatic break from the hegemonic structure of education that orients the social and political life of the island (what Dalleo defines as "the technocratic elite of the island") plays out principally in the realm of romantic choice. Even more conservatively put, Bitá's exercise of agency reaches its pinnacle within the marriage plot, a rather disappointing end for a protagonist Dalleo casts as a "literary intellectual particularly suited to speaking for and leading the excluded masses" (*Caribbean* 107).¹⁹¹ I propose to see Bitá's role in *Banana Bottom*'s political vision as occupying a modified role that still manages to address resistance in a literary intellectual's spirit. McKay portrays Bitá, long after her dalliance with

public issues of the 1930s were always clear, disinterested, principled, and consistently moderate" even when "his image as an irascible personality obscured the essential moderation and the truth of his public positions through the 1930s" (346).

¹⁹¹ Dalleo's historically rigorous reading of the novel in relation to the culture of literary journals in the 1940s shows *Banana Bottom* to be promoting a particular kind of political leader, one that possesses the qualities of a poet like McKay—"unbounded creativity, a poetic sensitivity, empathy for others" as concomitant with those that make great "anticolonial intellectuals from Martí to James to Roumain." The novel, in Dalleo's view, "invests its hopes in a literary intellectual class, married to the physical power of the peasantry, as the future for Jamaica" (*Caribbean* 107).

Hopping Dick and her refusal of Deacon Day (whose own fall from grace hardly requires her refusal), as reflecting upon her choice of Jubban, her father's drayman:

They lived life upon a level entirely different from her early romantic conception of love. Once she had thought of love *as a kind of mystical force*, incomprehensible and uncontrollable. But gradually she had lost all that feeling of the quality of love, for it was a borrowed thing, *an exotic imposition*, not a real intrinsic thing that had flowered out of the mind of her race (313, emphasis added)

Her relationship here appears progressive, a sign of the evolution she has made away from European notions of love and closer to a vision of reality, "a real intrinsic thing." Bitá evolves by redisciplining her impulses to choose a romantic partner. The process she uses is a Stoic one. Martha Nussbaum explains the Stoic approach to life:

Part of the sluggishness and carelessness of everyday life as it is normally lived is its failure completely to grasp its own experiences and deeds, its failure to recognize and take stock of itself. The Stoic idea of learning is an idea of increasing vigilance and wakefulness, as the mind, increasingly rapid and alive, learns to repossess its own experiences from the fog of habit, convention, and forgetfulness. (*Therapy* 340)

This fog, for Bitá, becomes more and more recognizable as the conditioning she has absorbed from her acculturation under Mrs. Craig.

Mrs. Craig represents sentimentality as built on reflexivity, on training rather than reflection. As my introduction argues, the historical form of sentimentalism requires a habit of mind that feels along with another, without reducing this other to sameness.¹⁹² The difference

¹⁹² In Thomas Pfau's highly dismissive reading of Smith, sentimentalism and behaviorism bear damning similarities: "To connect habit and habituation with the behaviorist vocabulary of 'stimulus-response' and 'conditioning'—while not intended to rehabilitate Watson's extreme theory—is to recognize a strong link

between training (conditioning, reflexivity) and education (questioning, reflection) bears some resemblance to a difference between motor patterns and higher level thinking patterns, though the two are shown in McKay's account to bleed into one another. That Bitá has grown into subjecthood in relation to patrons who are British subjects themselves means that her very constitution as a subject has been built on racial and colonial categories that do not match her sense of self or her place in society, and under certain conditions, could even be interpreted as demeaning and devaluing them. This reality or susceptibility has important implications for the way she makes sense of the impressions she receives from her environment. As a resolution that aspires to more realism, Bitá's romantic re-disciplining of her heart does not offer much by way of pleasures of romance plot or even believability. Her alliance with Jubban feels ideologically forced. Admittedly, offering Stoic practices as an important part of anticolonial resistance may negatively impact characterization, at least in its traditional assessment where plausibility indicates good prose. I hesitate to categorize this as bad writing before exploring what effect this presentation achieves.

In the passage that follows Bitá's romantic reflections, the language does appear labored, anxiously working to assure readers of the suitability of the couple for one another:

[Bitá] had no craving for Jubban to be other than what he was, experienced no hankering for that grace and refinement in him that the local soothsayers said was necessary to an educated person. She liked to play for him for he had a natural feeling for music and

between modern behaviorism and the concept of socially induced sentiment that rises to sudden prominence in Smith's *Theory*" (Pfau 360). I, on the other hand, see merit in sentimentalism as a mode of connecting with suffering others. I read sentimentalism as a means of forming alliances that uphold rather than collapse the differences of its members. The more saccharine, mainstream and campy spin off of eighteenth-century moral philosophy, sentimentality, I argue, overlooks the differences between reflecting on one's emotions and unthinkingly indulging them.

showed appreciation of even the most difficult things. But he was in no way a hindrance to the intellectual side of her life. He accepted with natural grace the fact that she should excel in the things to which she had been educated as he should in the work to which he had been trained. (313)

Where Bitá's position as living between cultures, her modernity, had earlier figured her future, like her cousin Bab, to be "restless and unhappy," now that future appears to be suddenly overcome (121). Where earlier in the plot, the narrator reported that "sometimes she was overwhelmed with the feeling of it being an empty lonely life," that worry of returning to "that rude and lonely mountain life" now appears to have vanished (123). Insofar as this feeling disappears without being convincingly resolved, the ending seems to move away from emotional realism. But perhaps a more politically important kind of emotional realism persists in the above passage. In this final reflection on the suitability of her most important life choice, Bitá's thoughts betray what will continue to be a site of struggle. The more subtle hierarchy of European culture over Afro-Jamaican culture identified earlier in Squire Gensir's speech appears to have infiltrated her thoughts. Despite choosing the village over the town, despite choosing Jubban over any suitor that the Craigs might have found, Bitá's final characterization of her spouse's "natural feeling" and "natural grace" appears essentializing. This suggests, quite realistically, that Bitá still struggles with the hierarchy she has inherited from her mentors and her country's history. Where Bitá's challenge, as the novel persistently shows, is to reconcile two cultures, her marriage appears to be built on an assumption of their peaceable division and what seems to be a fallacy built on the colonial hierarchy she has inherited: the persistent framing of the disparity between her education and her husband's training that here in this late passage appears internal to her thoughts. Bitá has progressed considerably nonetheless, as evident in her strong rejection of the material and social

standing offered by the Craigs along with her admirable blending of two cultures. The persistent hierarchy within her thinking that subtly places her formation above Jubban's, however, is undermined by the plot action.

4.7 THE NOVEL'S FINAL VALUATION OF LEARNING AND ART

Bitá's frame of mind does not represent the final statement of the novel. Jubban repeatedly demonstrates that he possesses the kind of vigilant critical awareness that makes him Bitá's equal. To her credit, Bitá recognizes in his actions the qualities of sound discernment. Though Jubban plays an important role in saving her from sexual assault by a local landowner's son, Jubban's second rescue of Bitá is perhaps the thematically more important one, coming in the midst of the revivalist fever sweeping the island. One might imagine that Jubban the native, not the foreign educated Bitá, would need to be rescued from the hypnotic trance of the old religion's fetish dance, but it is Bitá who falls under the spell of the old priestess's drumbeats. At the song's culmination, the woman's "uplifted whip" threatens to lash Bitá. As the narrator explains, Jubban "was familiar with the doings of *such fanatic circles*, when young persons gripped by the religious spirit would pitch down like dead and be supple-jacked by the older initiates until they were *all one united circle*" (252, emphasis added).¹⁹³ Jubban's awareness, as the plot underscores, serves as a crucial counterpart to Bitá's susceptibility, her sensitivity to those passing feelings of oneness with the crowd—a feeling that appears benign enough in the marketplace but is shown to be more

¹⁹³ According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, supplejack is "a tough pliant stick" from a tropical shrub used to make walking sticks. In an expression now obsolete, *supplejackically* refers to a lighthearted way of "threatening punishment with a supplejack."

dangerous in the revival setting, where she could have been severely beaten. Fellow feeling here receives a biting makeover when it is placed in relation with the autonomy of Bitá's supposedly educated mind. The experience disorients Bitá and leaves her unconscious. Subsequently, she feels "ashamed" at her loss of control, astounded and unable "to explain what had happened to her" (253). Repeating the same metaphors that described her time under Priscilla Craig, McKay depicts Bitá as taken up by "an overwhelming mesmeric feeling." Proving himself the more aware, discerning subject in this moment, Jubban rescues Bitá just in time from being lashed, taking her away from the group to "recover her senses" (253). Like the Craigs who took a twelve-year-old Bitá away from village gossip to be educated, Jubban takes a much older Bitá away from village religion to come to her senses. Each acts to protect Bitá from a certain kind of group mentality. Education itself is a form of coming to one's senses. Education fosters self-possession. In different ways, the Craigs and Jubban assist Bitá in this endeavor.

Through various storylines, *Banana Bottom* tries to delineate what a good education means in cosmopolitan context of Jamaica. This particularly comes through in a short vignette near the novel's end. Employing verbal irony, McKay places the meaning of a good education and sound judgment in relation to one another. Immediately following a mockery-free account of Bitá's father conveying his gratitude to his friend Malcolm Craig for giving his daughter "a complete education," the narrator offers a history of Jordan's tremendous knowledge as a self-taught cultivator:

Once an agricultural instructor visiting the village during a great bush-burning season had dissuaded some of the peasants from burning the cut bush, pointing out that that method spoilt and impoverished the land. They took his advice and ploughed the bush under.

But Jordan, who had by far the greatest portion of ground cleared, insisted upon burning it before digging. The result was his reaping the finest crops while his neighbors', who had followed *academic advice*, failed, being partly destroyed young by insects. For light burning destroyed insect pests and worms and the ashes were fine fertilizers. (274, emphasis added).

It is with a certain relish that reader and narrator alike come to this lesson, which undercuts any sense of Bitá's foreign education, good as it was, being *complete*. There can be no doubt that Jordan's knowledge of the land (like that of his drayman Jubban) produces an important challenge to what at times appears to be the narrative's straightforward endorsement of Bitá's education and Squire Gensir's authority.¹⁹⁴

In an echo that parallels Jubban's rescue of Bitá, Crazy Bow's final public performance, "his grandest and last in Banana Bottom," breaks "the spell [that] the Revival" had cast on all the villagers:

Crazy Bow played the entire oratorio of Judas Maccabaeus [...] [N]ews spread about that Crazy Bow was playing and soon the schoolroom was filled with a silent attentive audience, happy that the Good Spirit had visited their great musician and brought him home to them. For they did not often have the privilege of hearing him, since he was always wandering and it was seldom now, when he came home to his native village, that he was moved to play.

¹⁹⁴ After this vignette, the reader should look with suspicion on the resolution of Bitá's near brush with religious fanaticism. Instead of Jubban explaining to Bitá how his own understanding led him to rescue her, McKay leaves it Squire Gensir to confess "that he too had registered a similar overpowering feeling," "that the supple-jackers had more authentic power in them than a thousand Evan Vaughns and had assaulted his emotional sense like a magic tempest" (253). His elevation of the native supple-jackers over the imported Vaughn, another instance of primitivist fetishization, should not distract readers from registering as a pitfall his susceptibility to religious deception, whatever its ethnic form.

From Judas Maccabaeus he turned to the Spirituals: “Peter, Go Ring Them Bells,” “Jordan’s River,” “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot,” “Go Down, Moses.” And he made the people weep, recreating again the spirit of the ancient martyrdom that still haunted the crumbled stones and rusted iron of many a West Indian plantation. (257-258)

The parallelism between the scenes places Bitá in the role of the people who need to be rescued and woken from a trance, from a false (or at least incomplete) form of unity. Just as Jubban’s clear-sighted vision of religious fanaticism prompts him to enact a heroic rescue, Crazy Bow’s art rescues the island from the revivalist stupor. Just as Jubban’s knowledge about the dangers in the old religion helps him to bring Bitá to her senses, Crazy Bow’s music brings the villagers to theirs by reminding them of their history, of real experiences from their past. His music moves them to tears, a cleansing weep that evades association with the saccharine. In this way, McKay recovers the sentimental form as a means to enlarged understanding and communal unity. In each example, religious showmen threaten to take away the liberty of the people. In each example, would-be followers manage near escapes by first expanding their sensual awareness with better mental acuity to follow. Significantly, in the second example, the population’s true awakening is accomplished through art.

The role of art, in the novel’s final valuation, resembles the poetic aspiration of William Wordsworth: “to make our emotions conform to reason” (Potkay, “Contested” 1345).¹⁹⁵ As Wordsworth himself put it, “a great Poet ought to do more than [“faithfully reflect ... the feelings

¹⁹⁵ Stoicism, in Adam Potkay’s argument, best describes Wordsworth’s moral purpose as a poet, but Potkay places his Stoic aspirations in opposition to the poet’s literary production of the 1790s, which “have long been seen as extending and revising the sentimentalism ... in the later eighteenth century” (“Contested” 1344). While the opposition of Stoicism and sentimentalism proves illuminating for Potkay’s purposes (to find in Stoicism “a counterpoint to the sympathy, sensibility, and compassion that have attracted much critical attention in the past forty years”), historically, the two philosophical approaches are more complementary than they are commonly taken to be (“Contested” 1344).

of human nature”], he ought to a certain degree to rectify men’s feelings ... to render their feelings more sane, pure, and permanent, in short, more consonant to nature, that is, to eternal nature, and the great moving spirit of things” (*Letters* 1: 355). The alignment of reason with the great spirit of nature not only complements the novel’s vision of knowledge, as presented through Jordan’s farming skills, it also gracefully aligns with the philosophy Bitá finds increasingly useful as the novel comes to a close—Stoicism. Stoic philosophy identified the universe with God, nature, or even the Reason in nature. Thoroughly materialist in its account of life, Stoicism maintains that “only bodies exist.” This grounding principle leads Stoics “to give completely physical accounts of virtue, wisdom, and reason” (Sellars 1-2). Eighteenth-century writings of sentimentalism bear significant influence of the neo-Stoics. This influence translates to a sentimental philosophy that regards emotions as pliable and, therefore, subject to the discipline of reason. In other words, the eighteenth-century culture of sensibility assumes the cultivation of “a moral and proper repertoire of feelings” (Hendler, *Public Sentiments* 2). Such logic, when carried into literary characterization, can spell dramatic failure, a point reflected in William Hazlitt’s estimation of “the frigid characterization” in Wordsworth’s later work *Excursion*—a failure Hazlitt attributes to the poet’s “Stoic sentimentality” (Lampe; Swift 315). The problem of dramatic characterization under Stoic philosophy rests in its ancient and eccentric, according to contemporary notions, formulation of habit (*mores*). Stoic habit identifies the virtuous individual’s way of training herself to the point where she “not only can act rightly, but ...cannot help acting rightly” (Potkay, *Wordsworth’s* 36). Contemporary understandings of agency resist the timeline of this Senecan form of agency, preferring a model that manifests more in the immediacy of dramatic action, rather than over extended periods of habituation. But Bitá’s measured and rational romantic choice follows this latter model of agency, a rational disciplining of the mind that only later opens it to feeling, a

feeling that is cast as the correct one. Crazy Bow's concert also delivers this kind of corrective. Art corrects an earlier form of feeling (in the villagers, the feelings the revival stirred) to align feeling more closely to lived reality (the feeling of "ancient martyrdom" Crazy Bow's music stirs).

McKay's choice of artist, the unsavory Crazy Bow, raises questions.¹⁹⁶ Given the many readings of Bitá as the leader of the folk, it seems she would be the more likely choice for gifting the people with a concert such as this. Instead, it is Crazy Bow's art that stirs a sharpened awareness of reality—what could well be envisioned as a public cultural work of art. Crazy Bow's art, like his person, restores an important (and nearly lost) tradition to the social arena. His music offers the community the power of two important forces, strangeness and wonder. These forces, often generated by good art, fight against inferior forms of social unity (what I name in my introduction as sentimentality's sinkhole of sameness). In the novel's example, revivalism represents the harmful form of social unity that captures much of the island. In Kristin Boudreau's formulation, the very social unity sympathy promises also runs the risk of "destroy[ing] the strangeness that separates individuals" and "depriv[ing] us of a charming bewilderment [by] reducing all relations to sameness and making a 'criminal continuity' of the world of human relations" (xiv). In this final

¹⁹⁶ As an artist, Crazy Bow's relation to the crowd is hardly congenial. He lacks graciousness, as the narrative presents him. He "abruptly finish[es]" the concert "and rush[es] rudely from the building through the admiring throng and away" (258). As if this is not enough to mark his outcast status, the novel tells the reader that hours after the concert, Crazy Bow nearly strangles to death Priscilla Craig's only son. As a result, he is forced back into incarceration, where "after a few violent weeks...he die[s] in the straitjacket" (258). If Crazy Bow is McKay's clearest portrait of an artist in his relationship to his audience and society, social acceptability would almost seem to be a nullifying factor in the production of good art.

Alongside my argument that Crazy Bow represents the true artist of the novel, it seems important to remark on the significance of Bitá not necessarily being portrayed as an artist at all, though she too plays the piano, as noted at the opening and close of the novel. Against the dominant readings of Tabitha Plant as McKay's solution for disempowerment, for leadership, for a reconciliation of European and Jamaican cultures, I suggest that while McKay's protagonist does represent the people, she represents them in the simpler sense of facing the same kinds of struggles her fellows do. She is not a political representative for them, nor is she their artist. Reading Bitá's role in the novel in these terms shifts our attention elsewhere in *Banana Bottom*'s plot for understanding McKay's statement about the artist's relationship to society.

presentation of Crazy Bow, the text seems to imply that his standing as a social pariah is nearly integral to the public service he performs. McKay thus forwards an argument about the profound autonomy of the artist and its political importance for the community, particularly if that community is politically marginalized.¹⁹⁷ The closing scene of the novel reinforces this valuation in showing, as equally important, the complementary independence of Bitá, who must work against the colonial and racial frameworks under which she has been subjectivized.

Rather discordantly, a novel replete with the social movement of sentiments ends on a private scene of reading.¹⁹⁸ However, this unlikely choice completes McKay's ambition to reform unhealthy strains of sentimentality by offering a more historically accurate rendering of sentimental ethics. McKay's corrective bears out how sentimental ethics, as Simon Swift writes, is based on "a view of knowledge as a dialogic, shared, communal effort that depends on an awareness of how opinion is always expressed and held contextually, rather than absolutely." This form of sentimental ethics "draws on a recognizably Shaftesburyian [...] idea of philosophical thinking as polite conversation which refuses, as Shaftesbury has it, 'to take party instantly.'" (Swift 315). Rather than the immediacy of provoking tears, this historical understanding of sentimentalism builds agency on a timeline of cultivating habits. To bear out this truth, McKay defiantly chooses for his final tableau to have Bitá sitting at home reading—a tableau that counters

¹⁹⁷ While powerfully carving out the space of the artist, the novel in my reading leaves the problem of political representation for the people unremarked upon and unsolved (perhaps this defaults into a realistic portrait or a sober one, more circumscribed, in showing the way out of becoming mesmerized and bewitched by passing religious and political fads). In the final count, the notably silent dramatis personae, Jubban and Crazy Bow, both appear to be outside civil society. In what is perhaps the most evocative description of Crazy Bow in the criticism, Josh Gosciak describes him as "that Scottish Creole madman who stalks Bitá...and hovers wraithlike, in silence" (90).

¹⁹⁸ An echo of *Sister Carrie* once again.

“the image of the American domestic woman sobbing in the privacy of her home, her emotions devoid of political agency or efficacy” (Hoeller 343).¹⁹⁹

Bitá’s final act in the novel is to read a Christian text as being “more Pagan and Stoic” in meaning (314). On her lap is a copy of a book from her college days, *Pensées* (1670) by the great Christian apologist Blaise Pascal. Critics Rupert Lewis and Maureen Lewis draw attention to a line from Pascal that Bitá dwells on in the penultimate page of the novel. Rather than translate the line, McKay retains the original phrasing in French. Lewis and Lewis translate the line from the *Pensées* as “[T]he dictates of the mind are rejected by the dictates of feeling” (45). Building on this meaning, they claim,

This is a vindicating epilogue to Bitá’s choice: social and cultural identification with the Jamaican peasantry, and acceptance of Africa. But the imbalance and over-indulgence suggested by Pascal’s dictum lies at the root of McKay’s principal failure in the novel. Because he always defended the idea that art sprang from the emotions and was unconnected to the reason, he pursues his theme without sufficiently exploiting techniques that would make Bitá a convincing personality. (Lewis and Lewis 45)

In choosing to read a European author, Bitá displays a part of her cosmopolitan rather than strictly nativist identity, an identity that is growing autonomous, away from its early subjectivization. While it is true, to some extent, that Bitá fails as a convincing personality, I question how much is attributable to her Stoic ethic. The narrative carefully catalogues the ways Bitá’s emotional state is continually at risk, at risk of sexual assault, at risk from her colonial education, at risk because of the racism that continues to characterize her social interactions in town. Her adoption of a Stoic

¹⁹⁹ At the end of *Sister Carrie*, Theodore Dreiser has his protagonist sitting reading a French novel. Like McKay, Dreiser offers an ironic rendering of the fallen woman narrative. Each end critically evokes the notion of culture, of cultivated feelings leading to good conduct.

ethic—an ethic that understands “emotions (*pathê*) [as] the product of judgments under one’s control”—helps her to survive these risks (Sellars 3-4). While compelling thematically, in terms of the formal aesthetic of the novel, her Stoic character puts her at risk; it makes it difficult for a reader to identify with her character as one likely would if she were a character in a sentimental novel.

By the novel’s end, Bitá proves to be a strong character, discerning in her beliefs. As the narrative tells us, she finds a way to read Pascal as a Stoic. This is a difficult but not impossible feat given that in the *Pensées*, Pascal famously uses reason to disclaim reason as the highest faculty of humankind. In the theistic existential tradition of Augustine, Pascal contends, “the heart has reasons of which Reason knows nothing” (no. 423, p. 154). As Simon Swift notes, for the Christian Romantic Coleridge “the theme of the character of the good Christian, or even the character of Christ himself, was set as a counterexample to the ancient Stoics,” whose egoism and overconfidence he dismissed as absurd (315). Coleridge opposed the Stoic strains in Wordsworth, Kant and Fichte as marks of the corrupting influence of Enlightenment thinking, its atheism and materialism. From a Wordsworthian perspective, however, Bitá’s commitment to Stoicism signifies the value she places on independence, on the moral worth of being a Wanderer, of finding a dwelling on earth that exists apart from the pack, even as it acknowledges “the interdependence of all things” (Potkay, *Wordsworth’s* 11). The pack, for Bitá, represents the island’s misguided technocratic elite, an elite that nurtures little connection to the people or the land. Bitá’s rejection of this kind of community should not be interpreted as a rejection of all community. Separating herself from them, Bitá adopts the path of the Wanderer. Her choice reveals how a Stoic ethic, of independence can complement a different sense of interdependence. Contrary to what Coleridge thought, Stoic agency can support a Christian ethic, especially when understood as the

countercultural call to love one's neighbor as oneself. Bita's interpretation of Pascal, in this sense, might even be seen as forwarding a line of continuity with her Christian education under the Craigs even as she forges her own path in realizing its aims.

Consider the modeling of Bita as an active reader in this scene. Critical and selective, she goes beyond literal meaning, moving against the grain. In contrast to the quote from Pascal, Bita arrives at a belief that clear thinking, not clear feeling, holds great beauty:

[I]n a *receptive and critical mood* Bita turned the familiar pages, picking here and there an outstanding passage at random and thinking how like a risen river overflowing its banks was the man, bigger than the Christian creed in which he was confined.

Alone thinking contemplatively profoundly, the conviction came to her that *clear thinking* was the most beautiful of all things. (314, emphasis added)

McKay follows the quoted line from Pascal with a wholesale reworking of the concept of the ascendancy of passion over reason. In naming the critical reading practice Bita' adopts as one marked by a receptive and critical mood, McKay returns his readers to older practices of reading sentimental novels, as represented, for example, in Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa* (1748). McKay also emphasizes how his protagonist's remains apart from the crowd by ending on a solitary scene of reading. Having become her own individual, Bita has clearly defected from the style of education where "diplomas and degrees" represent "a ribbon on the breast and a plume upon the hat to dazzle the multitudes" (314). At the end of the novel, Bita understands education as primarily an individual pursuit, just as Squire Gensir had. Viewed against the bewitched and mesmerized states which Bita had previously found herself in, clear thinking here assumes real meaning. With the final passage highlighting active reading, McKay alludes to the impediments to clear thinking that had preceded it, categorizing these impediments as predominantly social: encrusted customs,

group thinking, and affective atmospheres that seem to promise communal unity but only deliver a feeling thereof. McKay also seems to intimate by ending as he does that a critical reading practice like Bitá's functions as one of the key activities that bring individuals into deeper mutual fellowship.

In the closing scene, McKay suggests a new order for emotion by explicitly underscoring the Stoicism which he had previously only implicitly valued throughout the narrative: in the initial story of Bitá's grandfather; in Bitá's choice of Jubban as a life partner; and, in Crazy Bow's concert. Through Bitá's active reading, McKay situates Pascal in a tradition that is "bigger than the Christian creed in which he was confined." As Bitá recalls, "Squire Gensir had once said of it [the line from Pascal] that it was more Pagan and Stoic than Christian" (314). Such contextualization draws a parallel between Pascal and Bitá, who also situates herself (through McKay) within a tradition larger than the European model in which she was trained. This contextualization further complements the final presentation of sensual awareness as a piece of reason, helping Bitá to move toward greater reason and greater self-command (an order that, incidentally, follows the Smithian tendency I identified above in McKay's exposition). If McKay begins *Banana Bottom* historicizing the influences of eighteenth-century sentimentalism on colonial Jamaica, it is interesting to consider why he would end his novel with his protagonist interpreting a Christian text in a Stoic spirit. In the final balance, McKay elevates Stoicism over sensibility just as he "sides from the outset with dispassionate reason against (at least indiscriminate) pity or compassion," particularly when sensibility and compassion come in the guise of exotic imposition (Potkay "Contested" 1334).

Bitá orients herself by turning to reason in order to consider the appropriateness of certain emotions; reason promises her judicious discernment in relation to her cosmopolitan

subjectivization. Cosmopolitanism is not, under McKay's account, presented as an arrived-at state. Rather, for his protagonist and likely for her creator, it proves a lifelong occupation in discernment, aided by Stoic tenets. "Stoicism," in Adam Potkay's view, "provides a counterpoint to the sympathy, sensibility, and compassion" ("Contested" 1344). I contend that Stoicism is more usefully understood as sympathy's *complement*. Potkay's argument for Wordsworth applies equally well to McKay: "we overlook much about [his] art if we view it about feeling or emotionality without central reference to a standard for evaluating and correcting emotions—the standard for which Stoics of all eras have, in their varied ways, ever sought and about which literature can make us imaginatively aware" ("Contested" 1345). Reading McKay's most autobiographical novel holds the potential to enrich our understanding of the complexity behind his prose and poetry. *Banana Bottom* discloses an author with an admirably nuanced conception of his own artistry and its social embedment.

5.0 “TO SEE FEELINGLY”: TABLEAU IN MARILYNNE ROBINSON’S GILEAD NOVELS

Lear: ... you see how this world goes.
Gloucester: I see it feelingly.
–Shakespeare, *King Lear* (IV.vi.147-149)

To set *Lear* IV.vi in the context of the *paragone* of the senses is to grasp the step- by-step rejection of these senses, in order to affirm one thing: the heart and its affections as the seat of moral life.
–Judith Dundas

How does one account for the abiding appeal of Marilynne Robinson’s novels in the twenty-first century? Or their attraction across differences of both belief and disbelief? I have been fascinated to find how many people esteem her work, particularly those of agnostic and atheist persuasion. Among contemporary writers, Robinson represents a rare combination of open-minded erudition and outspoken religious belief. A practicing Congregationalist and prolific essayist, Robinson regularly falls into raptures about John Calvin. Her Pulitzer-prize-winning novel *Gilead* (2004) retells the Parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32). I attribute her magnetism partly to the care she brings to her depictions of the natural world and the human life that inhabits it. The quality of this care manifests in the lyrical precision of her prose and its way of bestowing hallowed status to not only the world but also the precarious journey we make with our fellow humans within it.

In contrast to the current political climate, Robinson’s eccentricities feel refreshing. While the media often reports human interactions at their lowest bar, Robinson, in contrast, records “the moral worth of people” and credits their “capacity for empathy” (*What* 44). Showing that truth

need not assume a cynical form, Robinson models and augurs what it could mean to restore generosity to public life (*When* xiv).²⁰⁰ In her words to President Barack Obama, “the basis of democracy is the willingness to assume well about other people” (Obama and Robinson). Though democracy finds a secure place in her faith, she most reveres humanity in its sacred singularity. Not a herd animal, Robinson celebrates the figure of the outsider and the landscape of the wilderness. She traces in essays the abolitionist movement, unfashionably celebrating the evangelical roots of American political reform. She admires the spirit of the Constitution of the United States, its history of protecting the sovereignty of individuals, and calls “the Homestead Act all in all the most poetic piece of legislation since Deuteronomy, which,” she adds, “it resembles” (*When* 93).²⁰¹

Robinson departs from the norm, as well, in standing for a form of Christianity that does not ignore fundamental tenets of the faith to uphold the creed of capitalism. Choosing instead to recognize and exalt the ethic of taking material care of one’s neighbor, Robinson condemns “the current passion for Austerity,” disputing “its status as both practical necessity and moral ideal.” Following the 2008 financial crisis and the government’s “having indulged in two long and costly

²⁰⁰ Her early upbraiding in 1998 of contemporary culture’s cynicism is bracing: “When a good man or woman stumbles, we say, ‘I knew it all along,’ and when a bad one has a gracious moment, we sneer at the hypocrisy. It is as if there is nothing to mourn or to admire, only a hidden narrative now and then apparent through the false, surface narrative. And the hidden narrative, because it is ugly and sinister, is therefore true” (*Death* 78).

²⁰¹ These values align her with the concept of the American frontier and the loner at home within it. See Robinson’s essays “Wilderness” and “When I Was a Child.” “It may be mere historical conditioning, but when I see a man or a woman alone, he or she looks mysterious to me, which is only to say that for a moment I see another human being clearly” (89). “I am praising that famous individualism associated with Western and American myth” (*When* 89).

wars,” Robinson asks how we can conscientiously “permit the onus of fiscal peril to be shifted onto the dependent and the vulnerable” (*When* 41).²⁰²

Political scientists Shannon Mariotti and Joseph Lane read *Lila*, Robinson’s latest novel and last in the Gilead trilogy, as a condemnation of just this sort of fiscal austerity:

Robinson’s protagonist and her vagabond associates wander—unwanted and unwelcome—through the seemingly apocalyptic landscape of the Depression-era Midwest. The looming shadow of “the crash,” a disembodied term that they can scarcely comprehend or appreciate, hangs above them as a specter of a national economic system that is both in disarray and yet all-powerful, exercising massive control over the lives of those people who seem most distant and detached from its mechanisms and its comforts.

[...] *Lila* is realistic fiction operating on the allegorical plane, serving as a reminder of the terrible human costs of policies that today mar the lives of migrant children and rural

²⁰² Opposed to many modern schools of thought (Marxism, Darwinism, Freudianism, to name a few), Robinson defines ideology as “thinking that by definition is not one’s own” (*What* xiv). To my mind Ann Douglas’s definition of ideology, being more conversant in and open to the benefits of modern thinking, serves better: “a coherent body of doctrine to which groups and individuals give their allegiance and which opposes as well as supports their apparent self-interest” (366). Douglas’s definition allows for the inclusion of Christianity, and all religions for that matter, under ideology. Ironically, Robinson’s polemical use of ideology hews close to Marxist uses of it, as “that cluster of concepts by which a ruling class [Robinson has in mind free-market capitalists] perpetuates and solidifies its hegemony” (Douglas 366). I admire Robinson’s efforts at polemic but find her terminology dishonest. How can she not own that dogma, the bedrock of belief, is a species of ideology? Dogma is, after all, to rely again on Douglas’s faculty with clear definition, “the commitment to a certain set of ideas, creates precision not because it fosters the illusion of certainty on all points, but because it can help its subscribers to pick the right chance and nerve them to take it” (166). I imagine Robinson would find that this definition squares with her own thinking as a believer.

For more on Robinson’s definition, see “Austerity as Ideology” in *When I Was a Child I Read Books* (35-58), and the essay that follows it, “Open Thy Hand Wide,” where Robinson writes, “the Son of Man who says, ‘I was hungry and you fed me. I was naked and you clothed me.’ This kind of worldliness entails the conferring of material benefit over and above mere equity. It means the recognition of and respect for both the intimacy of God’s compassion and the very tangible forms in which it finds expression. Cranky old Leviticus gave us—gave Christ—not only ‘Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself’ but also the rather forgotten ‘Thou shalt love the stranger as thyself,’ two verses that appear to be merged in the Parable of the Good Samaritan” (*When* 72).

minorities trapped far from the technological marvels and economic largesse of modern life. (6)

The Gilead novels move from individual to broader concerns about right living. If *Gilead* begins by asking, how an ailing minister will provide, materially and spiritually, for his young wife and son, *Lila* ends the Gilead novels with a broader, more insistent query: how should a society care for its people and who is responsible for providing that care? And, of course, Robinson posits and works out these questions through her characters, who model how to dispense such care, in part through their nearly always respectful, good-faith demeanors toward one another.

From John Ames's words in *Gilead* onward, Robinson summons, in the words of Sarah Churchwell, "a moral accountability based on care." Reverend Ames closes his letter to his son with a sentence borrowed from Lear: "I'll pray, and then I'll sleep"—the signal line for Lear's transformation in perspective and realization that he was meant to protect the "[p]oor naked wretches [...] / That bide the pelting of this pitiless storm." "O," Lear laments, "I have ta'en / Too little care of this!" (Churchwell, "*Lila*"; *Lear* III.iv.27-29, 32-33). Unmistakably, Robinson's novels urge care be directed toward the poor and lowly, rather than the wealthy and powerful. Emboldening her literary gaze without yielding to didacticism, Robinson poses an ethic of care one would hope to find within many areas of American life.²⁰³ Many people would welcome a greater presence of the ethic of care Robinson embodies in her novels, both for the democratic

²⁰³ As Maxine E. Walker notes, Robinson's *Housekeeping* opens wide the answer to the question of the Good Samaritan parable: "who is my neighbor?" In her sermon on the gospel, Marilynne Robinson claims, "The neighbor is definitely not a relative, not the member of the community, not a co-religionist. Jesus's having made his protagonist a Samaritan suggests that he takes the lawyer to expect the definition of the word 'neighbor' to fall within one of these categories, if not more than one." It does not. Rather, for Robinson, the commandment to love includes the law to care for the alien in Leviticus: "When an alien resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress the alien. The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt."

actions it imparts and the human beauty its imparting achieves. Robinson communicates this democratic ethos across her writing, in her fiction and nonfiction alike. “For in fact life makes goodness much easier for some people than for others,” she observes in her first book of collected essays *The Death of Adam* (156). In *Home* (2008), ten years later, the character Jack Boughton brings this wisdom to life, while her most recent novel *Lila* (2014) bestows the reader with yet another luminous testimony to this essential belief.²⁰⁴

Robinson’s long running countercultural attack on the dominant unchristian and inhumane ethos of contemporary American culture takes place on the frontier of the mind. Countercultural in two primary ways, Robinson opposes two interconnected attitudes within American popular culture: 1) a cynicism, which narrows the kind of truth one can acknowledge, reducing truth to a species of disillusionment rather than aspiration and 2) a sentimentality that simplifies our grasp of honorable and dishonorable behavior. In *Death of Adam*, Robinson characterizes our national temperament nostalgical and reactionary: “We want to return to the past, and we have made our past a demonology and not a human narrative” (*Death* 206).²⁰⁵ Robinson’s craft avoids melodrama insofar as thinking in its terms removes the prospect of our identification with wrongful action.

²⁰⁴ In Erin Penner’s beautiful formulation, “Though *Lila* is not a mouthpiece for political propaganda, she is a test of Robinson’s ability to create a generous character in brutal soil” (278).

²⁰⁵ Here I follow British writer Kenan Malik’s characterization of Robinson as a public intellectual. An appreciator of Robinson who significantly diverges from her in worldview, Malik sees in the above passage a summary of the “combination of cynicism and sentimentality that oozes through much of contemporary life and against which Robinson bears arms” (Malik).

Lisa Allardice’s interview uncovers the target and rationale behind Robinson’s attack on cynicism: “There is nothing more stupid than the ‘slick unrelenting cynicism’ she believes has become the default liberal position. Worse than greed, or intolerance or selfishness? ‘Cynicism induces a state of helplessness,’ she replies. ‘It disables resistance to all these ills and reduces those who can see and name them into passive collaborators.’ It is used as ‘a kind of cover for what might otherwise seem naive.’”

Related to her campaign to step out of the oversimplification sentimental ideas of good and evil promote, Robinson also declaims against certain tendency in modern thought that, as she sees it, reduce human nature to simple formulas. She faults, to name a few of the schools, Marxism, Freudianism, and Darwinism; the pop science theory that humans have a “selfish gene” is another argument she dismisses. In his review of *The Death of Adam*, Roger Kimball summarizes Robinson’s stance as being against “[p]uppet theories of

Robinson advises against the muted conscience of a hackneyed sentimental imagination while pointing out how easily it becomes habitual. Two years before World War II, Claude McKay described this imagination as the type that “love[s] vicariously the suffering of others” (*Long* 163). A little over a decade later, James Baldwin critiqued sentimentality on similar grounds. Robinson contributes to American public life by observing the conditions under which such a maudlin mindset thrives, namely, when public conversation become saturated with cynicism. Cynicism serves as a particularly effective rampart to the sentimental imagination; a truth Baldwin well knew. Robinson in her own way also recognizes the “arid heart” and “violent inhumanity” that distinguishes sentimentality’s present style (Baldwin “Everybody’s” 14). “When a good man or woman stumbles, we say, ‘I knew it all along,’ and when a bad one has a gracious moment, we sneer at the hypocrisy,” Robinson writes (*Death* 78). Her words resound in the tone of our daily newsfeed. Cynicism, as Robinson cautions, is not merely an indicator of our shaken trust in government, politics, and public life but also the artisan behind it. The best version of the sentimental actually relies on such trust. “How we think about ourselves has everything to do with how we act toward one another,” she declares in her latest collection of essays—the last of which challenges the slander of Fox News (*What* 43). There is an essential difference, worth noting, between how sentimentality functions in the media and how it works to shape sentimental prose.

human nature[, which] are always popular, partly because they are so simple, partly because they endow their proponents with the illusion of elite knowledge. How thrilling to know that human culture is really only a reflection of economic forces (Marx), that love is merely an alibi for lust (Freud), that altruism is a blind for genetic propagation (some followers of Darwin).” In *Social Darwinism in American Thought*, Richard Hofstadter dispels the erroneous yet widespread understanding that Darwin had anything to do with social Darwinism. His name merely supplied prestige to the American social scientist William Graham Sumner’s theory: “There was nothing in Darwinism that inevitably made it an apology for competition or force” (201).

In *Sentimental Readers*, Faye Halpern asserts that more than plot material or theme, what distinguishes the sentimental as a literary genre is its characters' dispositions of thought toward one another, namely the generous views they adopt of one another's intentions—a prohibition against entertaining any form of judgment that might lead to the wholesale dismissal of any person. Sentimental characterization and character interaction, in other words, assume sincerity of intention and operate under an unstated covenant of good faith. This disposition works on two levels, permeating reader-character perception as well as character-character interactions. Halpern's telling counterexample of nonsentimental disposition is Stephen Crane's novella *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* (1893), the story of a poor girl turned out of her childhood home and abandoned by her lover, who dies a prostitute on the streets of lower Manhattan. The novel closes with Maggie's mother Mary professing she will forgive her daughter, though she is certain Maggie's loss of purity will doom her to hell. As Halpern explains,

what is devastating to sentimentality is the way in which the [final] scene positions the reader in relation to the characters. The scene—the whole novel, in fact—enacts a chain of judgment. No character escapes judgment (even Maggie), whereas in the sentimental novel most of them do, except the villains. [... In Crane's novella,] identification and intimacy are replaced by judgment and distance from the characters. (xv)

And what are we judging, as its readers? Mary's hypocritical subscription to middle class morality:

[Mary] feels morally superior to Maggie and quite confidently feels that her daughter will be judged. Mary cannot identify with her. This inability to sympathize with her daughter means that we lose sympathy with Mary. This scene enacts a hierarchy: everyone is positioned either above or below everyone else. Mary thinks that she is above Maggie, but the reader knows that she is really below her; knowing more than Mary does, the

reader is thus positioned above *her*. (Halpern xiv)

In *Maggie* “sympathy does not come from the heart”; words are “derivative.” Despite sentimental plot material and themes, Crane creates an antisentimental novel by “deflat[ing] the possible nobility of [his character’s] sentiment” (xiii). Halpern’s theoretical framework clarifies and sharpens the terms under which we can consider Robinson’s novels.

Robinson’s storytelling methodology does not employ narratorial or character-based perspectives to destabilize the central storyline by showing the reader what the characters in it do not know about themselves. In Robinson’s novels, we do not find characters who “do not fully grasp the forces they are up against or their own instinctive behavior” (Mulvey 1977/78:55). The absence of limited characters in Robinson’s oeuvre reflects her philosophy of art. That philosophy guards and governs a particular reading relationship, one which requires that her character never be more limited than her audience (i.e., in Frye’s typology of modes, she avoids the ironic). Setting this bar means prohibiting readers from assuming a certain aloofness vis-à-vis her characters—an aesthetic choice that prevents Robinson from adopting a Brechtian vision of social critique. Social critique assumes different form in her novels. Located in the accumulative movement of multiple retellings of single sequence of events, Robinson’s critique requires the kind of vision a reader acquires only after seeing from more than one perspective, a generous vision each novel moves toward disclosing in its own right. Only then do the social factors impinging on her characters’ emotional lives begin to stand out. Without distancing effect readerly care remains an element throughout narration. The question then becomes, Who do we, as readers, care about? Robinson reveals how unjust the ordering of that care can be, at times.

If Robinson’s novels seem remarkable, it may be partly because she has demonstrated how little a realistic novel need rely on a cynical view of humanity to mount a bracing critique against

present social orders.²⁰⁶ The comparison with Halpern's reading of *Maggie* throws into relief the spirit in which *and* for which Robinson chooses intimacy and identification: not to promote a naïve pie-in-the-sky view of humanity but to inspire a workable form of fellow feeling, a generous perspective that reasonably promotes democratic relation. In *When I Was a Child I Read Books* (2012), Robinson claims fiction's power as resting in its "capacity for imaginative love, or sympathy, or identification," where community entails "very largely [...] imaginative love for people we don't know or whom we know very slightly" (Robinson, "Imagination and Community" 21).²⁰⁷ Recognizing the sentimental structure of Robinson's "imaginative love" (what many have called fellow feeling) provides us, as critics, with a greater ability to trace the contours of her novels' democratic spirit and to identify the stylistic choices within them that forward fellow feeling.

Whereas modernists valorized emotional autonomy, Robinson chronicles our abiding beholdenness to one another. Robinson shows how emotional freedom is illusory, and yet she does not allow the self to dissolve within a group. Striking this unconventional balance, between acknowledging emotional connection to others and rejecting absorption into group identity, necessitates the role of judgment in forming communal relations and also in reading literary character. In her novels, Robinson positions readers alongside her characters, inviting identification with their suffering thus barring cynical judgment of their lives. Robinson's

²⁰⁶ In this regard, Robinson returns contemporary readers to an older tradition represented by Charles Dickens, George Eliot, and William Dean Howells.

²⁰⁷ See also Elizabeth Ellis who draws Robinson's invocation of imaginative love in relation to sympathetic identification. Ellis's main argument places Robinson's novels *Gilead* (2004) and *Home* (2008) as "work[ing] with, and not against, the strand of sentimental writing associated with abolitionists such as Harriet Beecher Stowe and Lydia Maria Child" (176). Robinson's novels expose sentimentalism's unfinished business in terms of race but it also forwards "sympathetic identification" as an important solution. It presents a different view of religious experience and communities against a reading of them as "anti-intellectual, insular, and disengaged from social critique" (E. Ellis 177).

characters speak from the heart as well when they partake in sincere conversation and aspire to noble actions—even if they sometimes fall short. So far this sounds like the sentimental novel. In this model of reader identification, Robinson turns her back on twentieth century modernist aesthetics. Trained literary critics, accustomed to reading against the grain of literary prose, might find her works peculiar. Robinson does not invite readers to gain a judgmental edge on her characters even when she is finding fault with them, as she has occasion to do.²⁰⁸ In this, her literary aesthetic models a social attitude that counters the norm. This aesthetic positioning and the attitude it fosters make up the democratic ethos of her prose—an ethos driven by, as she emphasizes, a religious worldview. According to Robinson, we are all obligated to serve one another and we are all sinners. Critical acknowledgment of this authorial stance provides a way of accounting for the ethic of inclusivity and care valued by many in her novels. If Robinson veers away from sentimentalism, it is in the way she locates wrongdoing inside us all. Her entire writerly ethos actively impedes and prohibits the formation of any group mentality and the kind of judgment that issues from such identifications. In this regard, Robinson's participation in sentimental form removes a large part of what many find distasteful about it—a certain insularity and holier-than-thouness. However, her democratic aesthetic undoubtedly claims a common heritage in the sentimental tradition of intimacy and identification.

In a move I regard as unequivocally political, Robinson invites readers to consider the states of mind they choose to cultivate. Robinson does so by taking her novels as the opportunity

²⁰⁸ An example of Robinson's style of authorial judgment comes early in the exposition of *Home* when she characterizes Robert Boughton's lifestyle in relation to a poor neighbor, whom his son Luke, back from college, jokingly calls Mr. Trotsky. Atheists and squatters on Rev. Boughton's land, his own disgruntled attitude towards them, their farming land he would not have, causes his children to adopt less than kind attitudes toward their neighbors as well (trampling and ruining their alfalfa crop) (*Home* 8-13). The episode opens the novel by humanizing a pious family. Read alongside Robinson's regard for the Homestead Act, it becomes a way of bringing home the politics of Christian charity, of making them uncomfortably relevant.

to dramatize the struggle inherent in such a task. I will consider two examples of this: one that re-envisions thought as an arduous task in meaning-making action and another that shows a character breaking out of an old pattern of thought and therefore liberated into new possibilities for action. The first example occurs near the close of *Lila*. Just when a reader anticipates entering the emotional cocoon of dénouement, the narrative begins describing Lila's struggle to quiet her fluttering mind. Near childbirth, in love with and married to the father of the child she is carrying, Lila's mind still strays in its imaginings:

She still actually thought like that, when she let her thoughts sink down to where they rested. She had never taken a dime that wasn't hers or hurt a living soul, to speak of. But that's what her heart was like sometimes, secret and bitter and scared. She had stolen the preacher's child, and she laughed to think of it. Making him learn his verses and say his prayers would be like a joke, when they were off by themselves, getting by as they could.

(*Lila* 254)

Lila's editorial framing of her thoughts actually precedes the sentences that reveal their content. Robinson achieves an arresting in its realism in this ordering, which heightens the portrayal of Lila's suffering under the taboo of her thoughts while, at the same time, registering the sublime threat those thoughts carry. Lila rallies her own moral judgment and sense of dignity in the phrase "never having taken a dime" as insurance against the thought of stealing her own child away from the respectable life as a preacher's son. Despite loving her husband, Lila continues to struggle to fit into that respectable life. "Lila is, of course, a waif and she is self-created," Robinson shares, in an interview conducted after the novel's publication. She continues, "And Ames sees her as being beautiful, and he's right. I suppose it's very democratic in the sense that it is taken up with

imagining somebody who has virtually no access to anything that, as we sometimes assume, would create depth or create richness. But it is still there” (Mariotti and Lane 299).

What kind of depth does Robinson depict in *Lila*? The substantive poetry in Robinson’s image of her thoughts—“thoughts [that] sink down to where they rested”—is spatial. Her description of *Lila*’s mind implies action in thinking. In describing the considerable energy *Lila* expends to elevate her thoughts, the narrative invites the reader to marvel at the effort thinking requires.²⁰⁹ Troubling the division between action and contemplation, Robinson’s sentences mark the distance and disparity, between act “realized” and thought “materialized” (Lamb, “On the Tragedies of Shakespeare,” 291, Arac, *Impure Worlds* 31, 177). This complication is concrete and immediate because it is situational. For *Lila* the threat that she might act on such a thought is live and suffocating against the dearness of her love and her new life. In her lyrical portrait of *Lila*’s predicament, Robinson reveals fantasy, with the mind daydreaming, as something utterly behavior-impinging, as the author’s forceful lyrical ethic implies.

In *Home* the perspective of the anchored caregiver assumes precedence, while the constellation of concerns remains much the same. In subject position and life experience, the character Glory, more than *Lila*, approximates the everyday challenges Robinson’s readers face to think differently. As the narrating consciousness of *Home*, Glory Boughton, having recently returned home herself to care for their ailing father, struggles less with daydreams than with inherited interpretations, principally the family view of her older brother Jack. From her childhood, Glory knows her brother is an alcoholic; from experience, she knows he is a loner and abandoner (In his late teens Jack fathers and abandons a daughter to a poor girl named Annie Wheeler on the

²⁰⁹ In *What are We Doing Here?* Robinson shifts registers to tell the larger American public to guard against a quite different set of thoughts from sinking low, naming specifically the slander she finds on Fox News.

outskirts of town. In *Gilead*, it is disclosed that Jack's daughter dies of infection after getting a cut on her foot.)²¹⁰ *Home* begins with Jack's return to his childhood home after twenty years away. Initially, Glory falls back on the old mental posture of seeing her father as victim of Jack's strangeness.

She felt sorry for her father, happy as he was. It was hard work talking to Jack. So little in his childhood and youth could be mentioned without discomfort, his twenty-year silence was his to speak about if he chose to, but they were prepared to appreciate his discretion if any account of it might have caused more discomfort still. Then there was the question, "Why are you here?" which they could never ask. Glory thought, Why am I here? How cruel it would be to ask me that. (63)

Glory's pity is misplaced. Her discomfort at the elephant in the room, namely why Jack has returned, finally becomes a species of her own pain, of her own situation and therefore, becomes fruitful in moving her to a place of understanding, since she now can identify with the necessity of maintaining certain silences. As Shannon Mariotti might put it, here Glory "recognize[s] [her own] essential instability, foundationlessness" as a means of identifying with her outsider brother Jack (Mariotti 24). But this is a small identification and not enough to overcome the thick emotional atmosphere so conducive to the continuation of habitual perception. Glory is still living in relation to her father, feeling his pain, desire and anxiety, particularly as configured through his relation to Jack.

²¹⁰ This tragic event holds a certain irony, as the narrative earlier discloses that Jack's mother had bought the girl a pair of shoes.

So, when Jack goes out for an evening walk, Glory dutifully assumes and acts on her father's fear that Jack has left, going up to Jack's room to check that his belongings are still in place. Her internal dialogue, at this moment, betrays a familiar pattern:

Of course she did not turn on the light, since he might see it from the road. And of course she heard the front door open as she stood there. She crept down the hall to the bathroom and turned on the water. He came up the stairs and paused in the hallway. Then she heard him flip on the light in his room. The door had been standing ajar, she remembered. And had she left it open? Did he look for signs that someone had come into his room? He did that when they were children. (65)

As an adult now, Glory responds with wondrous amazement at the repetition of this old pattern: "And here he is again, leaving the house for an hour, and by the end of it the old man is too anxious to sit still and she is prowling in his room, intruding on his privacy—when if there was one thing on earth she was eager to concede to him or to anyone it was privacy! It was amazing" (65). Seeing the miraculous and mysterious in the immediate moment is one way out of engrained habit. Taking Jack to be the old Jack, as Glory knows, is a deadening move for their present relationship. Still, the difficulty of avoiding suspicion is formidable, particularly within the family dynamic its long history has set in place.

Nevertheless, Robinson shows what it means to break old habits with new habits of mind. A little later in the evening, with that old suspicion newly settled on top of family interactions, Jack reads aloud the horoscopes in yesterday's newspaper, first his, then Glory's: "Curiosity is not always welcome. Consider self-restraint." Glory's response will allow her to cultivate a disposition toward her brother, seeing him in the moment, a relationship of their own, not determined by parental anxieties or interpretations, and that seeing will allow for the authentic development of

conversation and trust later in the novel, but here is where her choice to start that connection begins, in response to an embarrassing and implicating horoscope:

She felt herself blush hotly and, she knew, visibly. But he looked away from her quickly enough, almost, to make her believe he had not meant to embarrass her. Maybe the horoscope was real after all. She decided it was better to assume it was real, because if she took offense she would be confessing, and seeming to confess to worse by far than she had done, not that there was anything wrong with what she had done. And if she found out it was not real, that he was taunting her, everything would only be harder. That was the decision of the moment, and when she considered it afterward, she was grateful to herself for having made it. (67)

This brother and sister are adept at displaying, relaying and reading the physical signs of sensibility. One can read in gestures a whole culture of politeness in the above exchange. Jack's deference is met with Glory's sensitivity. Glory's emotional sensitivity finds its anchor in her benevolent reasoning, which counsels her to interpret her brother's actions in a way that will ease future interactions. She chooses this demeanor despite her sense of injustice at it all: "She was afraid to be angry, and that made her angry. What right did he have to take over the house this way?" (67) But she needed to continue living in that house and caring for her father. Her sense of responsibility toward family required it. Goodwill opens doors. It relinquishes territory, even when that territory is on one's home turf. It makes allowances that permit human connections to grow. Glory's example adds a vision of social responsibility to Robinson's democratic ethos. Concrete, specific, and executable, Glory's practice of social responsibility becomes radical when we consider the demands it makes on her person to negotiate her own discomfort in an effort to connect.

Glory's behavior in *Home* embodies the promise of family, the all-embracing (and therefore indiscriminate) providing of a love for all its members, however disparate. Familial love this kind, above all, means loyalty in the Shakespearian sense of not altering when alteration finds. Loyalty in this sense does not propagate sameness; rather, it creates connection across differences. In her essay titled "Family," Robinson writes,

Imagine this: some morning we awake to the cultural consensus that a family, however else defined, is a sort of compact of mutual loyalty, organized around the hope of giving rich, human meaning to the lives of its members. [...Families] enjoy each other and make themselves enjoyable. They are kind and receive kindness, they are generous and are sustained and enriched by others' generosity. The antidote to fear, distrust, self-interest is always loyalty. The balm for failure or weakness, or even for disloyalty, is always loyalty. (*Death* 88-89)

Robinson summarizes "the charm and the genius of the institution": "It implies that help and kindness and loyalty are owed where they are perhaps by no means merited" (*Death* 87-88). In Robinson's writing, family is not a euphemism for corralling people under a homogeneous value system but is a difficult, sometimes rewarding practice of reaching across differences in a heterogenous world. Robinson's sense of family assumes its members go on to lead individual lives developing their own lifestyles and points of view that, at times, may strain their connection to one another as adults, even as desire for that connection persists.

Read through the lens of Robinson's essay "Family," *Home* can be seen as a literary project in romanticizing the family without turning the family into a romance. The project responds to a temperament in American society that Robinson characterized as early as 1998 in the following way:

For some time we seem to have been launched on a great campaign to deromanticize everything, even while we are eager to insist that more or less everything that matters is a romance, a tale we tell one another. Family is a narrative of love and comfort which corresponds to nothing in the world but which has formed behavior and expectation—fraudulently, many now argue. (*Death* 90-91).

This passage hinges on one of Robinson's primary insights about the deep interrelation of sentimental and cynical viewpoints. Both viewpoints rely on polarizing characterizations that cause the struggle to be good to recede from an audience's conscious attention. Robinson proposes adopting a more mingled view that fosters our taking responsibility for our own complicity in daily interactions and worldly affairs. Robinson is not giving us a sentimental romance to serve as foundational fiction and save American life. Writing for *The Nation*, Robinson cautions against "[t]he idea of the organic society, united by blood, faith, language, and culture." "[A]ttractive as it may sound," Robinson concedes, this concept "actually tears societies apart, since some intolerable difference can always be found, some old wrong remembered" (*What* 123). Robinson is not in favor of deromanticizing private and public life despite her pejorative use of *romance* above. Robinson identifies the possibility of avoiding romance's simplification of life, such as its stark polarization of good and evil, whether in individuals or groups, while still holding onto a perspective that presumes wonder in life (her form of a romanticizing gaze). Robinson's complex form of romanticizing institutions, such as the family, requires further exploration.

Before proceeding, however, I must delineate what "Family" as an essay is not. It is in no way a means of advancing a right-wing agenda, of prayer in schools, outlawing abortion, or blocking LGBTQ civil rights. Robinson does not suggest that the arts need to be censored or welfare cheats caught and punished. Robinson's essay on the family appeared in 1998, a moment

that represents the waning of the culture wars and Bill Clinton's unsuccessful bid to "recapture the flag of 'family values' away from the Republicans" (May 16). In a significant move, Robinson declines to use the word "family" in the political terms of her moment, that is, as "a code and marker of race and class" (May 9). As Elaine Tyler May explains, this is a moment in which "poor black single mothers, and educated white professional women, are both likely to be blamed for society's ills as a result of their alleged defiance of 'family values'" (9). Robinson does not indulge in lament about the decline in "family values" and the corresponding erosion of the nation (as a picture of white middle class families) that decline presumably represents. Her mindset sharply diverges from this view. "I have read too much history to have any impulse to idealize the past," she proclaims (*What* 38). "Nostalgia falsifies. It encourages the notion that we must once have had the authenticity and fellow feeling supposedly to be derived from a common stock" (*What* 121). In her distinctive invocation of family, Robinson seeks a form of fellow feeling that takes on a more inclusive *and* a more bracing vision.

Robinson's embrace of family as a literary topic has little to do with the private lives of Americans as currently defined by national politics (she does not broach issues of sexual orientation in her essays).²¹¹ Robinson's invocation of family neither prescribes particular gender roles, nor does it restrict the institution to a heterosexual one sanctified by marriage. Many may not know that Robinson's admired Puritans "did not condemn premarital sex or out-of-wedlock

²¹¹ In "'Family Values': The Uses and Abuses of American Family History," Elaine Tyler May illuminatingly contends "that the political concern with private life, rather than reflecting changes in American families, actually reflects changes in American politics" (8).

It is important to note, however, that markers of individual sexuality have been important to claim in the fight to secure basic human rights. Robinson believes that all humans, created by God, are necessarily sacred and owed equality because of this. It seems lovely to think that civil rights should be granted to everyone on the grounds of basic humanity, but it also seems a degree of wishful thinking. History shows Robinson to be the exception rather than the rule: belief in God having provided little guarantee of belief in human equality.

pregnancy (provided the young couple intended to marry)” (May 10). Robinson proposes founding social order and a sense of identity on something other than sexual behaviors. As Glory says in *Home*, “if there was one thing on earth she was eager to concede to him [her brother] or anyone it was privacy!” (65) Robinson’s great favoring of individualism, her fondness for the kind of wilderness that protects social outliers, makes her care not a drat about the typical issues talk of family values raises. Under her concept of family, domestic human relations assume a public quality in the sense that they model what a more graciously lived public life might be (while not shirking depictions of the social challenges and human frailties that impede its expression). Robinson wishes to see the habits of caring that are idealized in the concept of family generalized to public life.

With a moral purpose similar to what fueled Harriet Beecher Stowe’s attack on slavery, Robinson attacks capitalism and austerity as ideology to make room for a dissident (countercultural) image of human nature:

And what about social arrangements that might reward uneconomic choices, that would tend to shield the hapless and the feckless from the consequences of their own errors and deficiencies? By virtue of the totalism of this model of reality, they are everybody’s business, everybody’s problem. The fact that some upstanding producer/consumer somewhere is permitting her own power of rational choice to be diminished when she acts on a sentimental loyalty to her ne’er-do-well cousin or her beleaguered fellow citizens becomes, in these terms, not only foolish but actually wrong. Simple faiths tend to be driven to distraction by anomalies, and to bring an especially acerbic moralism to bear on whatever their belief systems cannot account for. If *Homo sapiens sapiens* is also *Homo economicus*, why all these deviations from the norm? if self-interest disciplines

choice, why is society at every scale shot through with arrangements that seem to inhibit or defeat self-interest? One possible explanation might be that these arrangements actually describe human nature, mingled thing that it is. For this reason they are surely more to be credited as information on the subject than any abstract theory. But no. There is instead the urge, driven by righteousness and indignation, to conform reality to theory. (*When* 151-152)

Robinson offers her ethic of family life as antidote, asking it to be the shoe in the gears of an American political economy transfixed by the ideology of capitalism.

Above all, then, Robinson's essay about family is an essay about American political economy. Family relations, she reminds us, are not run on a cut-throat business model, and our citizenry and government would do well to follow suit. There was a time in our history when the family itself was protected from market whims:

If an average household today produces more than twice as much labor in hours as an average household did twenty-five years ago, and receives only a fraction more in real income, then obviously the value of labor has fallen—even while the productivity of labor in the same period has risen sharply. So, male and female, we sell ourselves cheap, with the result that work can demand always more of our time, and our families can claim always less of it. This is clearly a radical transformation of the culture, which has come about without anyone's advocating it, without consensus, without any identifiable constituency. (*Death* 92)

Again, Robinson begins her attack against the status quo on the mental plane, on what rises to the level of our country's consciousness. To revisit the question, how should a society care for its people and who is responsible for providing that care? Robinson offers that society should care for

its people by protecting the institution of the family, and she offers the family as the unit through which American citizens have historically rallied for economic reform. In looking to Moses as a model of economic behavior (*When I Was a Child* expounds “the absolute biblical imperative of respectful generosity toward the poor and the stranger”), Robinson steps outside of the liberal-conservative debate—“is it the responsibility of society to take care of the family, or is it the responsibility of the family to take care of the society?”—to declare the relationship to be reciprocal, to suggest that responsibility must be shared between family and government (Robinson 124; May 10). Robinson’s rationale for this stance shares with her opponents the same appeal to authority, even if their readings diverge: “My own sense of the text [the Bible], based on more than cursory reading, is that the sin most insistently called abhorrent to God is the failure of generosity, the neglect of widow and orphan, the oppression of strangers and the poor, the defrauding of the laborer.” Speaking of those on the right “eager to call themselves Christians,” Robinson quips, “I would draw their attention to the New Testament, *passim*” (*Death* 102). Under these delightfully charming terms, Robinson rejects the notion that Christian family values have anything to do with fiscal conservatism.

Robinson’s attempt to escape from the limiting confines of romance allows her to offer an alternative to the twentieth century political rhetoric of “family values,” whether as euphemism for the merits of the heterosexual nuclear family or as a race and class-coded point of disparagement (family as responsible for society’s ills). In Robinson, I hear a different inflection of family that could invigorate a liberal vision if it did not seem to duck out of feminist politics:

It seems very plausible to me that our ceasing to romanticize the family has precipitated, as much as it has reflected, the weakening of the family. I am sure it is no accident that the qualities of patience and respect and loyalty and generosity which would make family

sustainable are held in very low regard among us, some of them even doubling as neuroses such as dependency and lack of assertiveness. I think we have not solved the problem of living well, and that we are not on the way to solving it. (*Death* 88)

Robinson remains surprisingly circumspect about how her vision squares with any consideration of feminist politics. One wonders how her idealized picture of virtue above might figure in current conversations about emotional labor, the hidden and uncompensated tasks of household management that disproportionately fall on women. *Home*'s portrait of Glory refrains from explicitly gendering her domestic trials, presenting the exercise of such virtues as a universal human challenge.

An important question becomes to what extent Robinson's ethic of domesticity lets her off the hook. Her portraits of domesticity, after all, appear to bypass much of the more material considerations that make household management such a live issue in contemporary society.²¹² Sylvie's form of keeping house, in Robinson's first novel, refuses most of the tasks that fall under "household management." Sylvie's spirit recalls the vision Henry David Thoreau discovered at

²¹² See for example, Gemma Hartley's book *Fed Up: Emotional Labor, Women, and the Way Forward* (2018). The argument first gained traction a year earlier in a viral article published by *Harper's Bazaar*, the import of which is captured on Hartley's website: "Launching a heated national conversation with her viral article "Women Aren't Nags; We're Just Fed Up"—viewed over two billion times—journalist Gemma Hartley gave voice to the frustration and anger of countless women putting in the hidden, underappreciated, and absolutely draining mental work that consists of keeping everyone in their lives comfortable and happy. Bringing long overdue awareness to the daunting reality of emotional labor in our lives, Hartley defines the largely invisible but demanding, time-consuming, and exhausting "worry work" that falls disproportionately and unfairly on all women—no matter their economic class or level of education."

One might say that grievance is not a category of experience Robinson values, that the more one cares about grievance, the less one cares about her. And yet, Robinson champions progressive reform, reform that is often fueled by grievance. To understand this contradictory stance, one needs to apprehend how Robinson's position rests on a religious foundation, namely the presumption to believe the best of people and find the best in situations. While this attitude can lead to complacency—a point *Quicksand* seems to intimate in its final setting in rural Alabama—it can also lead to virtue. Robinson's investment in this religious ethic, which some dismiss as an all-too rosy outlook, lies behind her aloofness regarding grievance.

Walden. In “Economy,” *Walden*’s opening chapter, Thoreau warns readers not to be “crushed and smothered under [labor’s] load” (3). Look alertly, urges Thoreau: look with “clearer eyes” through the “smoke of opinion,” only then may one discern “the true necessities and means of life” (3, 6-7). Shannon Mariotti views Robinson as proposing a similar life practice. Mariotti understands Robinson as opening a path, a new way to reconceive homelessness: “We can be homeless—recognize and appreciate our essential instability, foundationless—while still housekeeping, while still within the space of the home” (24).

Yet it is a fact that patience, respect, loyalty, and generosity are virtues that can expose a person to dangerous vulnerabilities in patriarchal society. Robinson prefers to offer a representation that presents an alternative model. Part of the attraction of the Gilead novels is that they create a space where the practice of such virtues need not put a person in danger or at a disadvantage, a space where such virtues need not be particularly gendered. The trilogy begins with Reverend Ames, whose sensibilities are exquisitely attuned to just this kind of temperament, a model of the sentimental man. *Home* details the many ways Jack lovingly partakes in housekeeping, having, all the while (the reader later finds), his own family’s eventual homecoming to Gilead in mind.

Robinson’s sentimental return to the family structure is not based on the particulars of gender identification. Whether justly or not, it brushes aside the scorekeeping logic that underpins what seems to me to be a rather important grievance, the socially unaccounted for labor of household management. Robinson chiefly intends to lay claim to the cultural ethic the family as institution implies:

It implies that help and kindness and loyalty are owed where they are perhaps by no means merited. Owed, that is, even to ourselves. It implies that we are in some few

circumstances excused from the degrading need to judge others' claims on us, excused from the struggle to keep our thumb off the scales of reciprocity. (88)

Capacious in its inclusivity, Robinson adds that such a definition “allows for families of circumstance and affinity as well as kinship, and it allows also for the existence of people who are incapable of family, though they may have parents and siblings and spouses and children” (87). In “Family,” Robinson defines the word as signifying “those toward whom one feels loyalty and obligation.” In her novels, Robinson offers the Stones, the Ames, the Boughtons, Dahls, and Doane’s family, not as private displays of wholesome family values but as models in civic action, as people attempting to practice the kind of openhandedness and generosity Robinson recommends to everyone.

Read together Robinson’s essays and novels become a social project with political purpose that forwards a return to the family unit as the site on which to lobby for economic reform at work and in domestic life:

It was because the family as we have known it in this country over the last three-quarters of a century was the goal and product of reform that a radiance of idealization hung over it, and that it was so long and so confidently invoked as a common value, as a thing deserving and also requiring political and economic protection. (95)

Robinson refrains from addressing why civil rights activists in the late 1960s and early 1970s worked to question family’s normative power, thereby dimming a portion of its old radiance. The omission of this history (or even more strongly put, Robinson’s failure to engage it in her essays) needs to be addressed in more direct terms if her project is to have more widespread viability.

Otherwise, I find the project promising.²¹³ Robinson stands unique in asking both that the family produce good citizens (a demand often voiced by conservatives) and that the government protect the family unit (through programs liberals traditionally support).²¹⁴ Bipartisan politics in America have typically polarized these two functions, conservatives claiming the family for the former, liberals, mostly for the latter. Robinson's imagination moves beyond those limits.

As spokesperson for greater government protection of families Robinson begins to resemble Harriet Beecher Stowe. Consider how Robinson historicizes the old reform notion of one wage earner per household:

Children of working age, that is, as young as five, were spared no hardship. The British documented these horrors quite meticulously for generations, and one may read all anyone could care to read about the coffles of children driven weeping through morning darkness to the factories; children lying down to sleep in the roads because they were too exhausted to walk home at night; children dismembered by machines they were obliged to repair while the machines ran; children in factory dormitories sleeping by hundreds, turn and turn about, in beds that were never empty until some epidemic swept through and emptied them, and brought hundreds of new children, orphans and so-called child paupers, to work away their brief lives. There is nothing to wonder at, that the ideal of mother and children at home, and father adequately paid to keep them from need, was a thing warmly desired, and that for generations social reform was intended to secure this

²¹³ Robinson misses an opportunity to highlight the common project that exists between her position and the position of those that question family's normativizing power. To offer one example, Kirsten Swinth's recent study *Feminism's Forgotten Fight* (2018) challenges our collective amnesia about second-wave feminism. Swinth argues that the movement was invested in more than sexual liberation, that it fought for child care and paid family leave as well.

²¹⁴ For more on Robinson's feelings about citizenship, see the transcript of President Obama's November 2015 interview of Robinson published in *The New York Review of Books*.

object. (94)

Robinson embraces the pathos of child labor history to stir outrage and rally support. This is undoubtedly a writer invoking a sentimental politics for the present, though one wonders at the many decades of equal pay activism sidestepped in the image of “mother and children at home” (without, of course, putting aside the goal of better maternity leaves). Robinson’s literary depictions of family, though less overt in their appeals than the passage above, nonetheless veer near inspiring in readers similar sentiments toward progressive social reform.

For Robinson neither home nor housekeeping as a concept represents a separate sphere. As Robinson shows, the practice of housekeeping raises all sorts of affinities between it and the rest of life. The status of a household can come under threat, by society and by the sheriff who hold the right to delegate custody, as it does in *Housekeeping*. Care can fall under threat, as it does in each of the worlds Robinson has written into being. *Gilead* takes as its model of care a father writing a long letter to his son so that he might care for him beyond the grave, while *Home* models what it means to dispense care in the present to family members in need. *Lila* is as much about expressions of care in a newly forming family as it is about the kinds of care an itinerant family, often in dire straits, can display to one another. Caring, for Robinson, is entirely bound up in need, a natural part of the human condition, and privation, that part that indicts the social system for the damage it wreaks on many forgotten lives. Robinson’s depiction of this privation in *Lila* contains dimensions of social critique. In drawing most of her scenarios within family relations, Robinson makes need and care more immediate and readable than they traditionally are in sentimental stories that have social critique in mind. Yet what about that tradition of depicting care dispensed to strangers? Before turning to Robinson’s depiction of such encounters, let me give an overview of

how, in the remainder of the chapter, I will explore Robinson's *topos* of family in relation to how sentimental her politics might be said to be.

In the words of *Time* magazine, Marilynne Robinson "makes her readers want to be more thoughtful people" (Begley). When defined as her countercultural staging of the states of mind we might do well to cultivate, Robinson's literary project brings her closer to the sentimental tradition than the critical conversation around her work thus far has allowed. Can the countercultural and sentimental be bedfellows? Adamant critic of the sentimental, Ann Douglas claims, "We induce people to alter partly by urging them to think, and to think from a different perspective than the one they normally adopt" (166). Robinson does this, but she seems to do it without entirely overturning the cart. In her autobiographical essay "When I Was a Child," Robinson illuminates her perennial theme: "at a certain level housekeeping is a regime of small kindnesses, which, taken together, make the world salubrious, savory, and warm. I think of the acts of comfort offered and received within a household as precisely sentimental" (93). Robinson defends "social arrangements that might reward uneconomic choices," like "act[ing] on a sentimental loyalty to a ne'er-do-well cousin" (*When* 151-152). This chapter works toward discerning the cultural heritage and literary structure behind Robinson's democratic ethos by considering her relation to sentimental form, particularly her employment of picturesque description (*tableau*) to romanticize the family. Embracing the galvanizing energy of the outsider allows Robinson to reinvigorate common themes of sentimental texts. The figure of the outsider serves as a mediating figure within Robinson's religious worldview, giving crucial inflection to her ethic of care. For example, the presence of outsider figures such as Jack and Lila allow her novels to thematize the difficulty of accepting charity and to transform the sentimental practice of extending care, where "care is best understood to be relational, not hierarchical" (Zamalin and Skinner 110).

In the Gilead trilogy, Robinson engages the sentimental as a residual cultural form that continues to shape American life. *Gilead*, *Home*, and *Lila*, each in their own way, perform important cultural work at the site of family values. In doing so, they take up the mantle of sentimental form, undertaking its vision of liberty, equality, and fraternity and forwarding its mission—to disclose, for our fuller realization, what utter, unbounded value a human life holds.²¹⁵ The wheelhouse of sentimentalism has always rested in defining what it means to live in community. Robinson depicts how rewarding such a life can be. She also shows how easily we fall short in attempting to enter it. Robinson places her characters, many of whom identify as Christians, in uncomfortable situations. She poses unorthodox dilemmas that require Christian charity, though extending it will likely prove awkward or inconvenient in the conventional moral sense.²¹⁶ In this way, Robinson presents fresh exemplification of the ways we miss connecting to one another, inviting us to see the sentimental scene anew. Working within the sentimental literary tradition of tableau, the Gilead novels stand apart from mainstream political invocations of family. Whereas conservative appeals to family often tend to aggregate likeminded people, Robinson introduces family as a space where difference prevails within bonds of love and loyalty. Thus, the Gilead novels participate in the sentimental novel's tradition of expanding sympathetic identification. Robinson's retellings of plot incidents work not only to expand the kind of people for whom we feel sympathy. They also increase the sum of people with whom we sympathize in

²¹⁵ In *Hard-Boiled Sentimentality: The Secret History of American Crime Stories* (2008), Leonard Cassuto makes a similar claim for crime fiction, reading the genre as a significant cultural successor to the sentimental novel. Crime fiction, he argues, performs important cultural work at the site of family values. While the Gilead novels elude the category of genre fiction, they can be read as taking up a similar position in relation to the sentimental.

²¹⁶ Exemplars in charity, Jack and Lila prove the exceptions. Lila and Jack are not beholden to the conventions that rule others in the novels, nor are they practicing Christians (though Lila does convert, her sensibility evades the complacent Christian righteousness Robinson targets). See Zamalin and Skinner for an excellent reading of Jack as a model in moral conduct.

a given scenario, showing how those who persecute have often been persecuted themselves. Although corrective, Robinson's engagement of sentimental tradition is ultimately realized in the spirit of affirmation and continuity.²¹⁷

Robinson carries out her relation to Biblical tradition in much the same corrective spirit. Not one for otherworldly aesthetics, Robinson identifies Jesus with the "kind of worldliness" that "entails the conferring of material benefit over and above mere equity" (*When* 72). Robinson illustrates time and again what an impoverished standard impartiality proves, showing how giving everyone his due may not be giving everyone enough. As Hamlet tells Polonius, he would do well to treat others not how he supposes they deserve to be treated but "much better." "Use every man after his desert," cries Hamlet, "and who shall 'scape whipping?" (*Hamlet* II.ii.488-489) Or, as Goethe once said (and Viktor Frankl often repeated), "If we take people as they are, we make them worse. If we treat them as if they were what they ought to be, we help them to become what they are capable of becoming" (Frankl 8). Sometimes mercy is required, and mercy in Robinson's fiction rarely confines itself to orthodox channels. As a foundational structure of the Gilead trilogy, the prodigal son parable introduces her sense of equity as a tricky and uneven enterprise. What vision of equity, after all, does the parable depict when the wandering, wayward son receives lavish welcome from his father while the faithful, patient son jealously looks on? The good son, the loyal son, in this case—though struggling to be loyal to his lost brother—represents the impoverished view of mere equity, while the father's example invites the audience to see what vision of human flourishing greater generosity might foster.²¹⁸

²¹⁷ Robinson possesses, as Ann Douglas puts it in a quite different context, "the corrective bite provided by a sense of historicity" (168).

²¹⁸ In *Gilead*, the reader learns how Reverend Ames struggles as the good son does, jealous at times, but ever faithful.

Operating within the logic of yet another Christian parable, the parable of the Good Samaritan, Robinson picks outsiders, such as the earnest nonbeliever Jack and the only recently converted drifter Lila, as exemplars of mercy. Her choice of outsiders aligns her work with the countercultural thrust of Christian teachings. Like much realist narrative, Robinson's narratives move among the poor and lowly, rather than the wealthy and powerful. Reading Robinson's Gilead novels together reveals the town's shortcomings, its need to cultivate a more embracing, wider definition of family if racially or class marked subjects like Della and Lila are to be accepted and included. Reverend Ames and Jack offer examples of this acceptance and inclusion in their actions toward their respective wives, Lila and Della. Jack and Lila offer other instances: Jack in how he cares for his own father without condoning his bigotry and Lila in the care she extends to a stranger. Robinson submits that Christians have forgotten that in addition to loving "thy neighbor as thyself," one must also "love the stranger as thyself." The Gilead novels trace the demand and challenge to love without reconciling the tension in such loyalties, loyalties both to those intimate others we call family members and to those others in need whom we meet as strangers. This tension proves productive; as reading the Gilead novels together reveals, the fortitude of character required to remain loyal to each group is much the same, just as the disposition we must cultivate to persist in loving each is much the same. The Gilead novels oppose current cultural hierarchies of human worth to submit that each member of a society matters, that no one is to be ignored, put away, or forgotten, never mind the rules and regulations that say to do it.

5.1 ENCOUNTERING THE STRANGER IN *LILA*

No one can read the books of Moses with any care without understanding that law can be a means of grace. Certainly this law is one spirit with the Son of Man who says, “I was hungry and you fed me. I was naked and you clothed me.” This kind of worldliness entails the conferring of material benefit over and above mere equity. It means the recognition of and respect for both the intimacy of God’s compassion and the very tangible forms in which it finds expression. Cranky old Leviticus gave us—gave Christ—not only ‘Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself’ but also the rather forgotten ‘Thou shalt love the stranger as thyself,’ two verses that appear to be merged in the Parable of the Good Samaritan. –Robinson, “Open Thy Hand Wide” *When I Was a Child I Read Books* (72)

Reading Robinson’s stern invocation of scripture alongside her fiction brings to view what at first seems an anomaly—in the town of Gilead, strangers appear to be a rarity. This is significant because it means that Moses’ law and, for that matter, Christ’s are difficult to practice in Robinson’s fictional town.²¹⁹ This predicament of the receding possibility of encounter with strangers—and I submit that it *is* a predicament, if you are a Christian—is not a far cry from the predicament many Americans find themselves in in many places in the contemporary United States, where encounters with strangers are few, and so, too, it seems, are opportunities to love them as ourselves.²²⁰ As Robinson’s readers, we must wonder what loving the stranger as oneself exactly entails. I contend that a part of that answer might be found at the center of *Lila*’s narrative in an episode Robinson seems to offer as a meditation on “the very tangible form” this might take. That episode unfolds in the narrative present of the novel when Lila is married, pregnant, and living in town with Reverend Ames (144-169).

²¹⁹ *Gilead*, of course, raises the specter of this type spiritual quietism in the storyline of Ames’s grandfather.

²²⁰ I particularly have in mind here the structuring of real estate to wall certain kinds of people out. See, for example, Bill Bishop’s *The Big Sort* (2008) or Richard Rothstein’s *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America* (2017).

One bright morning on the cusp of winter, Lila decides to walk out to the shack on the outskirts of town where she first squatted upon her arrival to Gilead. There she hopes to retrieve around forty-five dollars in earnings from the odd jobs she took during that time. With the money, she plans to buy Reverend Ames a gift, but she finds the money missing from its hiding place and soon thereafter comes upon a runaway boy in need of help. Lila provides that help to him in the form of conversation, cheese and crackers, and the gift of her savings which he has taken (she decides he needs the money much more than she does). Upon her departure, Lila notices how cold the weather has grown, so she turns back to give him her coat as well, then walks back to town through an increasingly bitter wind. Once in town, Lila seeks shelter in the church where she waits for the shaking to leave her body. Relief washes over her when she feels the baby move again. The price of Lila's charity come close to being too dear. Lila's disappearance—which is how Reverend Ames experiences her whole day's ministry to the dirty, hungry runaway—provokes anxieties akin to those Mary and Joseph feel when they lose their twelve-year-old son during their annual pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Lila does not, however, tell Reverend Ames or Reverend Boughton that she must be about her Father's affairs (Luke 2: 49). She does not frame human connection in such terms. That she does not is a refreshing and important part of Robinson's fiction.

Lila brings encounters with strangers into the horizon of the narrative exactly twice, at least in a manner the narrative treats with any extended significance.²²¹ This second episode continues to move the experience of fellowship and ministry outside the bounds of recognizably Christian

²²¹ I do not count Lila's first encounter with Reverend Ames as an encounter with a stranger because Ames feels an immediate and startling form of kinship with Lila upon first beholding her. Here is how he tells Lila about that moment: "That first day you walked into the church, that rainy Sunday, I felt as though I recognized you somehow. It was a remarkable experience. It was" (166-167). Their first meeting, as Robinson records it, is one of recognition (85, 167-168). Indeed, much of the drama of the narrative revolves around his need to continually affirm this initial perception in his movement to trust in Lila and build a similar kind of trust in her.

action.²²² Narrated as a flashback, this encounter appears much later in the novel and fills in the circumstances under which Lila first arrived to Gilead. A young stenographer wanting company through the night on her drive back to Iowa picks Lila up at a bus stop in St. Louis. Though this encounter, as narrated, is considerably shorter than Lila's encounter with the runaway, it nonetheless serves as an important foil to the episode (212-217, 144-154). In this second scenario, Lila is the stranger with her own store of troubles that impels her to run away from St. Louis. But in the seven- or eight-hour car ride, Lila's need goes unacknowledged and unmet, as the woman, a strict adherent to the Nazarene church, considers bringing Lila to Jesus and thinks better of it (215-216). "I might be making excuses here," the woman says, "Lord forgive me if I am. But you strike me as a woman with a lot of bitterness in her soul. I don't mean any offense. I might just make things worse" (216).

Counterpoints for one another, these two scenes, when read together, provide an account of what fulfilling Moses' law means for everyday life. "I don't much care what happens," Lila utters, as her first line of dialogue on the ride. Lila is despairing, near suicidal, and the woman feels awkward about posing a follow up question to such a comment, uncomfortable with traversing the different world of experience Lila represents. Conversely, when Lila encounters the runaway, she offers human connection and care—but not without difficulties, as illustrated in Reverend Ames' response to her disappearance. Just as Lila and the runaway's encounter is wholly presented through dialogue, so too is Lila's encounter with the Nazarene woman. In neither

²²² It is curious, given Robinson's penchant for citing scripture, that those who exhibit the most admirable form of care invoked by scripture are also often the least readably Christian. This is perhaps not so odd when we consider how this representational logic conforms to the Good Samaritan parable. Robinson's characters Jack and Lila come to mind—an alcoholic and an orphan. As people who have lived close to hardship themselves, Jack and Lila recognize need when they see it, and this gift of recognition opens the greater form of relational care.

instance, in other words, is the scenario treated as a traditional sentimental novel might treat such an encounter: there is no move to tableau and little feel-good sentiments offered for the reader's pleasure. In other words, we are not in the neighborhood of Harriet Beecher Stowe, where Senator Bird and his wife movingly offer their deceased son's clothing to the runaway slave Eliza Harris for her own little boy. Yet Robinson, like Stowe, defines charity not as coming out of the surplus of one's life but requiring a dear part of it.²²³ Treating the stranger as thyself, in other words, is not doing what one finds convenient.

²²³ Joanne Dobson reminds readers that Stowe wrote in "a cultural and historical context where all too often children *did* die, were snatched incomprehensibly from the arms of helpless families—as Harriet Beecher Stowe knew only too painfully" (273; emphasis in the original).

Beyond the archetypal example from Stowe, Robinson offers extended commentary on what donating old clothes means in more common contexts. *Lila*, for example, shows how offering old clothes means exposing a person to the humiliation of wearing a blouse that is identifiably someone else's, because in a small town people notice things like that. Before these two encounters with strangers arise in the text, charity is thematically earmarked by a small vignette on this theme in the novel's exposition. When Lila is just a newcomer to Gilead, the reader learns that going into town to find work means sacrificing a certain measure of dignifying anonymity. One wears one's poverty, Robinson reminds us through Lila's thoughts upon being offered second hand clothes:

That morning Mrs. Graham had some clothes for her, a skirt and two blouses that she said her daughter had left when she moved to Des Moines. They'd just been hanging in the closet. Lila might as well have them if she could use them. Lila thought, This is the very worst part of being broke. Everybody can see how broke you are. It seems like this whole town is making a project of knowing every damn thing I don't have. If I left here, I could wear these things and nobody would give it a thought. If I stay, I'm walking around in somebody else's old clothes, somebody's charity. Mrs. Graham was watching her face, a little pleased with herself, and regretful, and embarrassed. [...] She should have said thank you, she knew it, but she never asked anybody for anything except work, and if they gave her something else they did it for their own reasons. She wasn't beholden to them, because being beholden was the one thing she could not stand. She wouldn't even look at the clothes, though she knew Mrs. Graham hoped she would. So they must be all right she thought. Nothing too wore out anyway. And then she did Mrs. Graham's ironing, thinking about those clothes and how she would probably wear them to church, since that would feel better, at least, than wearing the same old dress. Even if the preacher noticed, and that made her feel beholden to him, and they all knew it. (40)

Taking Lila's feelings into account dulls any feel-good sensation Mrs. Graham wishes to get out of her gesture. Early in *Lila* Robinson broaches the question of charity in order to raise issues about the form of relation charity draws the giver and receiver into and about the degree of honesty that exists within such exchanges. In truly accounting for Lila's person, that is, her dignity, Robinson opens the possibility of a critique, showing how charity often reproduces the same hierarchal relations that have moved the giver to give in the first place. Focalizing the scene through Lila derails any sentiments one might attach to the scene in favor of a focus on fundamentals: "There are women who take pride in how kind they are and just at every chance, their eyes all shining with it so you can't help but notice. You keep clear of them if you can,

In very tangible ways, then, Robinson complicates the staple forms of charitable giving that populate sentimental novels. She does this for two primary reasons: first, because she is committed to showing the charitable transaction, whether it fails or takes, through the recipient's perspective; and second, because she is invested in showing the practical parameters required in loving the stranger as thyself, that is, in delineating the ways in which relational care requires that the giver know something about the lived experience and circumstances out of which the person in need comes. These two stipulations structure the representations of charity the Gilead novels offer, so, as representations, they become more indicting than mollifying, demanding something more than what often passes as Christian charity. As I will enumerate below, this portrait of charity acquires fuller meaning within the Gilead novels as a whole, when we consider how the novels work to relocate the sentimental gaze in much more proximate, and therefore demandingly tangible everyday relations, for intimacy, as Robinson seems to contend, is as important a factor in ministering to a sibling as to a stranger.

but they do come in handy. Sometimes you want a bowl of soup" (220). The last wry remark shears down charity to its instantiating condition: people living in need. Lila's effect in the Christian-named town of Gilead is leveling.

This effect persists in her encounter with Reverend Ames. Lila summarizes a sermon of his thusly: "when you did a good thing, it should seem to come from God, not from you. It should not feel to other people like your goodness, and it should not feel that way to you, either. Any good thing is less good the more any human being lays claim to it" (32). Under Lila's logic and from her social position, this shifting of ownership mystifies how charity acts to structure actual human relations. Lila interprets Ames's religious belief in the context of her shame: "That's why he can't look at me. [...] Ever since that morning I went to his house and he could see well enough I was on hard times, he's hardly said a word to me" (32). Ames is, of course, bashful, not because he finds an encounter with her poverty discomfiting but because he cares for Lila and feels awkward in this care, given his old age. Still, Robinson manages a soft critique of his brand of charity. Lila continues, "Well, that's all fine, except it don't seem honest. I spose he wants me to think it's God been putting money in my pocket, when it's just him. It might even be his money they been paying me with. Church money" (33). Without departing from her depictions of admirable belief in Rev. Ames or her own adherence to Christianity, Robinson shows how placing God between the giver and recipient can confound charitable transactions and their very human motivations. She does this to achieve a more ennobling representation of grace where care is relational, rather than hierarchal, neither party feels indebted to the other—a state of reciprocity, which, by the way, Robinson shows Ames and Lila beautifully achieving.

Intimacy turns out to be a requirement because charity that truly minister to a person's being begins with mutual recognition. Robinson frames Lila's encounter with the Nazarene woman in a few telling ways that defines its thematic significance. Just before Lila's choice to bus out of town, we learn that part of her way of coping with her severe isolation entails going to the cinema "to see people living" (210). She wonders at the crumpled clothing of Dorian Gray in the film adaptation, about why "[w]hen that man goes off into the poor part of the city, he turns evil and ends up looking like he's been sleeping in *his* clothes" (211). A few pages later, sitting beside the woman who has offered her a ride out of town, Lila characterizes herself as "the kind of woman who might keep a knife in her garter. Might sleep in her clothes" (214). The Nazarene woman, by contrast, is "tidy [...] with her hair in a knot [...] wearing a starchy white blouse she must have spent an hour ironing, it was so perfect" (212). Through this earlier lens, their encounter becomes a study in the problem the poor pose for a person like the starchy clean stenographer, and a statement about how often the poor are rendered wholly other.

When Lila finally decides to flee St. Louis, she is suffering from severe isolation—the kind of depravation lack of human connection wreaks on consciousness. The triggering event happens on the street when she is walking away from yet another cleaning shift. Her hair tied up in a rag, Lila sees Mack on the street, the one man she had developed feelings for from her old life at a brothel in the city. Upon spotting her, Mack laughs and whispers a mean joke that even his fellow workman wants no part of. There is no recognition, only deep humiliation. Afterwards Lila remembers, "He only teased her so Missy would be jealous. But she felt the rush of blood in her damn cheeks and even that damn sting in her eyes. And walking on away from him was like walking into a strong wind, or walking upstream in a river, and she hoped and hoped he couldn't see how hard it was for her, if he happened to be watching" (210). Passing Mack in the street does

not qualify as an encounter. Mack does not even know her real name. If he makes her feel worthless, he also helps her realize something: “in that minute she knew that if a man she ought to hate said one kind word to her, there was no telling what she might do. He’d forgotten he ever saw her, and she was up in her room with the window shade pulled down, stuffing everything she had into her suitcase” (211).

In this frame of mind, Lila finds a young woman in a car rolling down the window and offering her a ride. A preoccupied and a nervous driver, the woman possesses little in demeanor that suggests she will be a good listener. But more importantly, not much in her background prepares her to receive Lila. Robinson makes this divide amusingly clear in her account of what passes unsaid between them. As a come to Jesus story, the episode is comical. Its comedy also defines the limits of fellow feeling. Sitting beside a woman who cannot go to the cinema and apologizes for almost swearing by saying *dang*, Lila finds herself at a loss. She offers, “I didn’t even know there was such a thing as practically swearing,” only to hear, “In my church there is. Nazarene. We’re pretty strict.” Robinson adds, “This is exactly why Lila kept to herself”—a line that feels utterly contemporary in pinpointing the sentiments that characterize the occasional interactions Americans have with strangers of different ideological persuasions, not to mention the scene’s more overt allusion to exchanges between the Christian right and liberal left in American politics today (215). Twice Lila laughs at the situation, as a way of coping with its awkwardness:

Lila could feel her wondering, and she almost said, I was working in a whorehouse because the woman who stole me when I was a child got blood all over my clothes when she came to my room after she killed my father in a knife fight. I’ve got her knife here in my garter.

I was meaning to steal a child for myself, but I missed the chance and I couldn’t stand the

disappointment, so I got a job cleaning in a hotel. You can't say dang or go to the movies, and look who you got sitting next to you hour after hour. Look who you been offering half of your spam sandwich. She was laughing and the woman glanced at her. So she said, "You can try bringing me to Jesus if you want to. Might pass the time."

The woman was quiet for a while. The windshield wipers were groaning and the rain was pounding the glass. She said, "I'd better not. I'd better be trying to see the road." She said, "You've got to come to it in the right frame of mind. Otherwise it's just talking for the sake of talk. Passing the time. I might be making excuses here. Lord forgive me if I am. But you strike me as a woman with a lot of bitterness in her soul. I don't mean any offense I might just make things worse."

Lila said, "I doubt you could do that." (215)

Here again, the woman avoids asking into the circumstances that could move Lila to make such a statement. Robinson's humorous presentation of their exchange does not preclude readerly identification with the woman. Her hesitation to inquire into Lila's circumstances feels understandable, thoroughly relatable even.

Recognizing what an affront her own biography poses to polite conversation, Lila laughs a second time at the thoughts she feels she cannot share with her driver:

I'm good at chopping weeds. I can change sheets well enough. I was bad at whoring. Lila didn't say anything, but she almost did. *Why would she do that? The woman didn't mean any harm.* She wasn't going to put her out beside the road for anything she said. If she hitched up her skirt to show her the knife, that might be different. She thought, I'm crazy, and laughed. She thought, I've got to stay away from people. (217)

Through all the dialogue that passes unsaid between the two on the ride, Lila appears the saner, stronger person. Adopting such a lighthearted perspective, even if it is perched on the edge of despair, enables Lila to maintain an attitude of gratitude toward her benefactor, even if her recognition of the humor winds up further distancing the two women. She clearly sees that a kindness has been extended to her and extends kindness in return. “There’s nothing the matter with your tires,” Lila assures the woman at one tense moment during their trip. Robinson adds, “Lila thought the woman could use a little comforting. It was kind of her to pick her up, even if she had her own reasons” (214). Of all the episodes one encounters in the Gilead novels, this one comes closest to conveying a tone of irony. Still, the careful reader can hardly place this woman in the category of villain. This woman, who identifies herself as a stenographer, has left St. Louis for an indefinite period. Presumably, she has quit her job so that she might care for her sick mother. In this respect, the woman shares much in situation with *Home*’s narrator, Glory, another single career woman who makes the hard choice to return to a small town to look after a sick parent. Robinson places the nobility of that choice alongside this other encounter with a stranger. She also chooses to record this episode as a flashback from the space of Lila’s settled, satisfying life. This ordering does much to take the acrimony out of their dialogue. Lila’s own response to the woman also curbs the irony in favor of imparting a more dominant impression about the actual conditions that hinder human connection, that qualify or exempt us from identifying with strangers in need. A study in fellow feeling’s obverse, their dialogue offers an account of some of the ways we as humans miss opportunities for fuller connection with each other. The episode’s relatively late placement also enables the reader to make sense of it in relation to Lila’s encounter with the runaway, an episode that shows Lila recognizing and meeting every opportunity to administer care and connection to a suffering other.

This is not to say that the reader does not find in Lila's ministry to the dirty, hungry, cold runaway a straightforward story of aid. Lila's actions unfold in a context of multiple loyalties that bring their own set of tensions to her good works. First, Lila acts as a pregnant woman. She knows she must protect her child. So, upon walking to the shack, the reader encounters a rather startling line of reasoning when Lila decides her best choice was to throw a rock at the window: "She knew it wasn't smart to look in the door. You can get in a set-to so fast you don't even know what happened. Nobody harder to deal with than a thief, once he decides you're trying to steal from him. She had this baby now to think about" (144). Second, Lila has her husband to think about. She knows her visit would concern him, so she plans to say she has gone to the river to watch pelicans. One of the townsfolk, spying her direction, ducks into the church office to report on her whereabouts. This news alarms Reverend Ames, a state of alarm that causes the whole episode to turn on the primary tension threading through the novel—the worry and fear that Lila might leave him. Lila's trip to the shack turns out to take much longer than she expects. Nearly freezing to death on her way back into town, Lila ducks into church to wait out the shivering and misses her search party, Rev. Boughton "doing forty" as Rev. Ames sits in the car beside himself with anxiety. Lila's extension of care to a stranger, in other words, comes at a cost to the person who is closest to her.

But the episode also throws that closeness into question, for Lila thinks, "That boy out at the cabin, he knew her. Married? To a preacher? Sounds like you making that up. That his child you got there? Meaning no harm, knowing no better. It seemed almost as if she had lied to the preacher when she said she didn't know that boy" (169). Lila's conversation with the runaway throws the doubleness of her life into perspective, namely how her long acquaintance with hardship makes relating to her husband a challenge and how, conversely, that period grants her a certain

facility in relating to the boy: “It seemed almost as if she had lied to the preacher when she said she didn’t know that boy. He had been at the edge of her sight all those years, orphaned, his whole life just that terrible little ember of pride” (169). Knowing this about the child means being able to offer cheese and crackers in a way that will not injure that pride. Lila’s is a facility that the two Reverends lack. In the values of the novel, this lack is a fault because forming relationships across such differences, as *Lila* attests, is the whole point. This represents a substantial departure from prevailing understandings of sentimental experience as highly emotive and, ultimately, self-indulgent. Instead, Robinson pushes readers to ponder what living with adversity does to a person, to consider the world viewed from “living to get by.”

Through Lila’s narratorial voice, Robinson defines this kind of vision in concrete terms: “She’d never thought before how strange a cornfield can look so late in the year, all the stalks dead where they stand. The country had always just been work waiting to be done” (144). Lifted out of a life governed by hunger, free now to see in a manner more akin to her husband’s perception, Lila begins to perceive the land, not in terms of labor but landscape:

Now she saw the dim shine of sunlight on the leaves, and how the stalks were all bent one way, the tops of them. The wind had bent them and then left them rigid, with their old tattered leaves hanging off them. But it was as if they had all heard one sound and they knew what it meant, or were afraid they did, and every one of them still with waiting. (144)

Reminiscent of Reverend Ames’s manner of perceiving in *Gilead* while still retaining her distance from it, Lila’s vision of a cornfield recognizes the posture of attentiveness fashioned under adversity, even as she dismisses it. “It don’t mean nothing” could be wiping aside the pain and the fear as much as the philosophical presumption to see in such a way. The bent stalks, left rigid,

signal a kind of emotional responsivity she finds difficult to risk. At a moment when Reverend Ames reveals his deep attachment to her, Lila thinks, “She couldn’t talk to him the way he was talking to her” (168-169). In staying and living alongside her husband, Lila chooses risk. In this, she resembles Robinson’s other main characters in the Gilead trilogy. More than a simple risk of ego, Ames, Glory, and Lila risk by loving, conscious that at any moment the loss of those most dear may occur. Although Lila keeps her fears to herself, she daily faces them, anticipating an eventual split with Ames. At one point she asks and answers herself, “Why did she talk to him that way? So that she could say when it ended she always knew it would” (*Lila* 143).

In disclosing Lila’s thoughts, the novel places readers in a privileged position, for much of her experience dwells in things she finds difficult to impart. Laura Tanner, in her reading of Reverend Ames’ narration of *Gilead*, terms this kind of knowing “embodied perception.” On multiple levels, focalizing the narrative through Lila, also registers the perception of the body with an important difference. Her voice distinguishes between two different modes of perception: between the cornstalks as meditation on existence, on the hard form existence has taken in her life, and cornstalks as work to be done. This distinction between modes of perception, perceiving in order to get by and perceiving in order to contemplate the meaning of existence, prefaces her encounter with the runaway. Robinson even instills this distinction within her plan to disguise her outing to the shack as an occasion to birdwatch: “There was a wide place in the river *where people went* to look at them, so that’s what she’d say if anyone asked her where she was going. She’d seen those birds all her life and never had a name for them, because they had nothing to do with getting by. [...] It was the old man who told her what they were called” (143). “[W]here people went” draws a distinction between the former Lila and the people with the luxury of time on their hands, birdwatchers able to know the name *pelican*.

Lila's ministry to the runaway places her back in the space where getting by is of the highest necessity. Chilled to the bone, she enters her husband's office, only to find him not there. Here is how Robinson depicts her thoughts in that moment of disappointment: "She did wish she could at least find a way to tell him how hard it was, the ache you feel walking out of a cold day into a warm room. And here she was angry at him for being somewhere else, almost crying about it" (159). Lila knows the actual conditions a boy would meet during a night spent trying to sleep in such cold. The foundation of her charity and her ability to extend fellow feeling to the runaway, emerges out of her own experience of homelessness. Beyond Lila's individual experience with the kind of adversity this stranger meets, Robinson places her practice of charity within a family heritage of charity she has known in Doll: "Winter nights Doll would pull her against her, and her arm would be around her, and Lila would only feel warmer for the cold that was everywhere else in the world. She was probably thinking of this when she gave that boy her coat, tucked him in" (160). A flashback to Lila's younger years works to draw parallels between her and the boy in even more explicit terms, and to honor Doll and the ethic of care she manages to impart to Lila. In Doll's spirit, Lila extends the boy her sympathy and learns about his situation, his fear that he might have killed his father after losing his temper and hitting him with a log: "I think I killed him. If I didn't, he would have killed me, soon as he woke up. So I just took off" (149). Under Lila's steady, sincere presence, the reader sees not a murderer but a neglected child fleeing an abusive father. Lila offers that he cannot be sure he is a murderer. She holds out hope that a return home might prove him otherwise. The whole episode draws *Lila* into relation with *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884), whose story the runaway suggests. Where Twain stirs suspicion and prompts ironic reading through Huck's first-person account, Robinson conveys assurance through her third-person portrayal of Lila. Through her, Robinson confidently advises the reader to exercise

caution and some restraint in judging the runaway. One might even say this allusion to Huck's story encourages charitable reading, even as it works to discourage us from dismissing the runaway's situation. Through remarkably different paths, both authors fashion morally complex fictional worlds. Twain opens his novel with a prohibition against deep reading practices: "persons attempting to find a moral in [this narrative] will be banished." Robinson writes to deter reductive readings and simple (one might even say crude) moral conclusions. Refusing to relinquish demand and difficulty, Robinson nevertheless works to prescribe a certain attitude in her reader. Though we might acknowledge it less often, Twain's prohibition works in a parallel sense. As for Lila's circle, finding out if the runaway boy killed his father never becomes the focus in ministering to him.

Through the runaway boy, Robinson moves the story away from a stark "Thou shalt not kill" to a quandary involving many a Gilead neighbor's daily life: for whom are we supposed to feel pity? The narrative explicitly raises the question of who deserves charitable aid in Reverend Ames' exasperation at being called the sickbeds of people who have never counted themselves a part of his congregation. Weary of his vocational ministry in such moments, his short-temper moves him to ask the family, "If you're not Christian people, then what am I doing here?" (159) A few pages later, the conversation Lila has with her husband about her day's charitable works does not supply a straightforward answer, even as it raises the question. Consider the loving restraint Rev. Ames exercises over his quite understandable exasperation at Lila's choices:

"And I give him that coat. The use of it. Just for the night. I never thought you'd be out there."

He nodded. "That was very generous."

"Well, I didn't know it would turn so cold."

“I’m sure he was glad to have it. The use of it. So you walked home in the cold without a coat.”

“I felt sorry for him. A boy like that. He was so miserable he wasn’t even sleeping nights. He thought it was because he’d killed somebody, but I thought it might be that he just wasn’t comfortable. Partly, anyway.”

“Well,” he said. “He’d killed somebody.”

“He thought he probably did. Sounded to me like he did and he didn’t want to be sure of it. It was just his pa. I mean, he wasn’t out looking for somebody to kill. He lost his temper, I guess.”

He laughed. “That happens.” (163)

The dialogue makes Lila’s allegiance appear outlandish by everyday standards, even if the novel, in sum, submits that care should be extended to thieves and murderers. Here, Robinson also presents the agony of a husband at learning about the risk his pregnant wife had taken. In the face of Lila’s authentic concern, Reverend Ames finds it in him to concede, “Maybe we could have talked to him if we hadn’t brought so much dread into the situation” (163).

By contrast, Ames’s best friend Reverend Boughton is less interested in seeing the worth in Lila’s concern. He views the extra clothes they eventually offer the boy as “aiding and abetting” a criminal (165). The layering of perspectives around an act of charitable giving strengthens the picture of what loving the stranger as oneself means in actuality; through these perspectives, Robinson registers the inconvenience, pain, and risk one would hazard in committing to such an action. Bypassing all these reservations, Robinson makes charity a matter of ministering to the material needs of a person but doing so in a manner that places the minister’s self on the line: risk turn out to be a leveler and unifier. She makes Lila’s choice to administer such care a condition

upon which her husband recognizes, once again, the worth of his wife, and Lila acts in response to her own form of recognition: “That boy out at the shack, he was just an ugly, dirty, lonely cuss, half scared to death. And I was thinking he could’ve been any child that had nobody to take him up and see to him” (168). Her act of caring for a child foreshadows the care she will give to her and Reverend Ames’s child. Her words here do as much to dispel Reverend Ames worry that Lila is not satisfied with him as they do to reveal her being. Hearing them moves Reverend Ames to reaffirm the first recognition he experienced upon seeing Lila in the doorway of his church: “He looked at her. Then he said softly, ‘I *did* know you. I *do* know you,’ and his eyes filled with tears” (168).

Robinson structures Lila’s ministry to this poor boy as the story of two moments of recognition, Lila’s of the boy and Reverend Ames’ of Lila. The novel also records the boy’s perception of Lila, but his perception plays into Lila’s insecurities and shame. According to the novel, Lila’s worth is not to be undercut. As Reverend Ames tells her, “That first day you walked into the church, that rainy Sunday, I felt as though I recognized you somehow. It was a remarkable experience. It was” (166-167). This recognition, ultimately ennobling beyond measure and price, is the recognition of one who is poor and lowly. Similarly, Lila’s recognition of the boy in need, her ability to convey such recognition to her husband opens him, is indeed the condition that allows him, to recognize his wife again, to see that she is not just giving her coat (which he had given her) to an old acquaintance, or worse, a former or current paramour. Lila breaks down in the moment of deciding whether or not to report the boy to the sheriff. “I’m not much for talking to a sheriff,” she says. A reader can recognize in her continued words how ripe with parallels to her own life, and Doll’s, the scenario becomes: “If some law catches him, for sure they will. But he’ll need that money to get home. He don’t have a decent pair of shoes” (164). Lila’s experience of being a part

of a family in constant need opens her to the runaway, makes him a part of her family. Robinson seems to be saying here that there should be something deeply familial, entirely intimate, even in the ministry one provides to a stranger. The stranger Lila encounters entrusts his deepest worries to her care. Taken into his confidence, Lila greets his disclosure with equanimity. Uninterested in getting close to a dramatic situation, Lila proves sincere in all her gestures. She is not reaching out to the boy under any feeling of social obligation. These, I submit, are the terms of care *Lila* models and entreats us to adopt toward one another. In a grouping of novels primarily about families, *Lila* presents two encounters with strangers to reveal how parallel the call to care for a loved one and a stranger can be, how the same demeanor and character required to be successful in offering relational care to an absolute other is required in offering care to a brother.

5.2 GLORY'S GAZE: SENTIMENTAL TABLEAU IN *HOME*

Through *Glory*, Robinson shows what it might mean to romanticize the family once again, to reimagine loyalty, dignity, honor, courage, love, and virtue outside the structure of the romance. *Home* tells the story of Jack Boughton's return to his childhood home after a twenty-year absence, as seen through the eyes of his youngest sister. Hungover, disheveled and unshaven, Jack brings his quiet deference home at the age of forty-three. No one knows he is hoping to find a home for his wife and son there. Jack hopes to find in Iowa an escape from the anti-miscegenation laws of the South, laws that in the 1950s setting of the novel place his wife Della and his son Robert in grave danger. This is a knowledge Glory will earn over the course of the novel through her efforts to reach out to her troubled brother. That effort will require her to struggle against a long family history of seeing Jack a certain way, to struggle against the suspicion that he has been drinking,

and to fight away worry that he might leave all over again. Glory's work comes in the form of wiping the slate clean, of meeting her brother in the present, rather than in the past. She must cultivate a disposition that will outwit old habits and fend off the intrusions of thinking poorly about a person. Glory has to rally this psychic energy while battenning down heartache of her own.

Educated, single and in her late thirties, Glory has returned home after working thirteen years as a high school English teacher, after breaking with her fiancé of many years (a married man who swindled her out of much of her savings). Home to care for her ailing father, Glory wonders what has become of her life. She wonders this with the kind of quiet desperation that makes a person struggle for composure. "Lord give me patience," she prays while knowing,

The right prayer would have been, Lord, my brother treats me like a hostile stranger, my father seems to have put me aside, I feel I have no place here in what I thought would be my refuge, I am miserable and bitter at heart, and old fears are rising up in me so that everything I do makes everything worse. But it cost her tears to think her situation might actually be that desolate, so she prayed again for patience, for tact, for understanding—for every virtue that might keep her safe from conflicts that would be sure to leave her wounded, every virtue that might at least help her preserve an appearance of dignity, for heaven's sake. (69)

Through Glory, Robinson reveals love as conflicted, mingled emotion. Robinson writes that as Glory "considered the prayer she was not yet disconsolate enough to put into words, the unwelcome realization came to her that she loved Jack and yearned for his approval" (69). Robinson portrays this love as genuine. She presents it as above critique, and indeed it earns its right to be above critique, because, as Robinson shows, it is the kind of love that moves Glory to undertake the hard work of relating to another, the sort of work that requires one risk vulnerability

and love without assurance of return or reward. In an essay Robinson writes, “my subject is hope, the theological virtue, which I would distinguish very sharply from what I have called optimism. Hope implies a felt lack, an absence, a yearning” (*What* 225). Glory’s act of loving Jack realizes this meaning, and it is not sentimental.²²⁴

Indeed, such a portrait of familial love stands against what is commonly portrayed in sentimental representations as a rather simplified form of acceptance, as acceptance mostly in good times. In her essays, Robinson looks back to Victorian estimations of “mourning, melancholy, regret, and loneliness” as “high sentiments,” of the habit of that period, not always acted upon, to find “wholesome and stabilizing” offshoots in “grave or fearful experience.” This familial practice of grief and consolation, Robinson contends, may be an “even truer bond among people than any kind of proximity” (*When* 89). Robinson uses proximity here in contrast with *loneliness*. Frequently finding virtue in the state of being alone, Robinson elevates it above warm familial relation (even as she sets loneliness within family relations in the passage I have quoted). “[W]hen I see a man or a woman alone,” Robinson explains, “he or she looks mysterious to me, which is only to say that for a moment I see another human being clearly” (*When* 89). Here seeing a person at a distance from the perceiving self preserves that person’s singularity. While Robinson here connects loneliness to “that famous individualism associated with Western and American myth,” my own reading of her novels sees that connection more fruitfully born out in relation to Emmanuel Levinas’s work on relation to the other as resisting the self’s comprehension or appropriation

²²⁴ Robinson’s definition of hope, her means of distinguishing it, is taken from the story of the prodigal son, which she subsequently cites. Jack, of course, is also cast as the prodigal son. Though the traditional analogy would liken Reverend Boughton to God, *Home* is Glory’s story and it seems to me to reveal her, even more than her father, as the hopeful one.

(89).²²⁵ Robinson's vision is useful socially not only for its gripping way of valuing singularity but also for its determination in defining the ways that singularity can persist in family relations, as Jack's story surely attests.

A passage from the essay "Family" in *Death of Adam* hints that Robinson may have had the idea of Jack's story in her mind a few years before *Home*'s publication:

Imagine that someone failed and disgraced came back to his family, and they grieved with him, and took his sadness upon themselves, and sat down together to ponder the deep mysteries of human life. This is more human and beautiful, I propose, even if it yields no dulling of pain, no patching of injuries. Perhaps it is the calling of some families to console, because intractable grief is visited upon them. And perhaps measures of the success of families that exclude this work from consideration, or even see it as failure, are very foolish and misleading. (*Death* 90)

Critics of sentimentalism often frame familial love as among the easiest to express and give by implicit comparison with the efforts we make to extend care to strangers.²²⁶ Robinson takes *Home* as an occasion to dispel this myth. A stranger, by definition, is someone who has not (yet) harmed us. Who among us, on the other hand, has never been harmed by a family member? Robinson reminds us that family more often means learning how to live with those who have harmed us. Her moving family portraits stir readers to aspire to a practice of loving that moves one beyond comfort, to care about and invest in loves however hard won.

²²⁵ See especially Diane Perpich's discussion of Levinas in chapter one and two of *The Ethics of Emmanuel Levinas*. Levinas's conception of transcendence within the immanence of being corresponds well to Robinson's earthly spirituality, which resists casting virtue in terms of otherworldly presence.

²²⁶ Or aliens on national soil, as Robinson reminds us, referencing Leviticus. See "Open Thy Hands Wide" in *When I Was a Child* (72).

The narrative aspect that displays Robinson's closeness to the sentimental literary tradition is the presence of tableau in her novels. *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* describes tableau as "[a] 'picture' formed by living persons caught in static attitudes" (Baldick 331). In sentimental narration, tableau often stages a victim in distress or a family at home, scenes, in other words, that "summon conventional, stock emotional postures to elicit predictable, stock emotional responses from readers" (465-6). A novelistic borrowing from melodrama, *tableau* also describes "the standard nineteenth-century theatrical device for ending a scene" (Frick 190). In locating amazement in the everyday, tableau in Robinson finds its power at a distance from the more melodramatic fare of traditional tableau, such as the death bed scene. Reverend Ames writes a long letter to his son in *Gilead*, not on his deathbed but thinking about it. *Home* shows its narrator caring for an ailing father near death and caring for a brother after a failed suicide attempt. In *Lila*, the worry that Rev. Ames will soon die hovers over the plot. Robinson's insistence on ordinary life brings her away from melodrama, yet her manner of revering life's preciousness allows her to harness the emotional intensity of that genre, while insisting on the everydayness of the ethical situations she narrates. Tableau operates within this emotional frequency. In narrative, tableau stops the action for pictorial effect. Such an effect pinpoints and heightens the value of a moment and assigns it a fixed significance. Writing about "the sentimental novel's conventional tearful scenes," Anne Patricia Williams focuses critical attention on "the actual methods of literary description in the sentimental tableau, or what [she] calls 'frozen pathos.'" As a wordless scene, tableau conveys the sentimental sense that intense emotion exists beyond what words can capture.²²⁷

²²⁷ "Laura Mulvey has gone so far as to call melodrama 'the genre of mise-en-scène, site of emotions that cannot be expressed in so many words'" ("Notes on Sirk and Melodrama" 1996: 29).

It may seem strange to identify such an eccentric writer (one who values wilderness and loner characters) with such a conventionalizing style, even more, to identify a literary practice of tableau—the art of freezing life and fixing significance to it—with what I’m calling Robinson’s ambition of changing her audience’s habits of mind. Robinson’s message, however, rests on the notion that thought must be anchored in a set of consciously held values. I understand tableau in Robinson as marking the beginning of conscious thinking, as a first step in identifying ultimate values, which her frozen pictures are meant to mark. These frozen images are presented as her characters’ creations, a form of poesis, arising from their habits of mind. Her characters then go on to model how their visual meditation on reverential images moves them to adhere to such ultimate values within the flux of narrative action.

In a move that allows for more self-conscious commentary on the spectator role, Robinson draws attention to her narrator’s occupation of that role. Through her characterization of Glory, Robinson provides critical commentary about the manner of viewing tableau. The danger in sentimental fiction is always that the spectator becomes unthinking, that the pleasure it affords an audience does not answer to the ethical practice it is also trying to encourage. Robinson shows her narrators gaining a central point of orientation from tableau vision. Unlike with typical sentimental tableau, which finds its subject at a distance from a spectator’s immediate experience, Robinson’s character-spectators make their immediate relations the subject of sentimental tableau. Creating an imagination that operates in such immediate terms, sentimentalizing near relations—rather than the typical parameters of a sentimental imagination that takes strangers in need, not one’s own family members—means not taking the sentimental imagination as a given. It is, rather, something Robinson’s characters must work on. In the mundane, sometimes grueling hassles of daily life, we don’t always want to look on our familiars sentimentally. The truly progressive subject of

sentimental imagination is not easily fitted to its form. By making the everyday the subject of tableau, Robinson presents *tableau* as a form of reverential meditation that calls a character struggling with life's demands back to ultimate concerns. By locating the sentimental imagination in much more proximate terms, Robinson curbs the history of tableau away from spectacle and toward substance.²²⁸ Inserting tableau into this context means that Robinson is asking something new of it as an aesthetic practice. She is asking it to act as a means for her characters to gather their bearings, by identifying ultimate values in life and taking up a practice of reverentially looking upon such values. All this happens in the space of description. Once dialogue and action in the plot resume, Robinson's narrators resume their struggles to remain loyal to the values their tableau enshrines. The dynamism of Robinson's narratives requires tableau's static starting point. It is important to note, then, that in her fiction tableau is often revisited by the characters that first frame them, and that the values the tableau isolates, though fixed initially and esteemed finally, are aspirational. In this sense, Robinson's use of *tableau* follows the form as critic Martin Meisel defines it, as "the poet[ic] rendering of temporal extension, what [Matthew Arnold] calls 'life's movement'" (39). The staging of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* highlights the complex function of tableau across media. For example, Ben Brewster and Lea Jacobs distinguish theatrical productions of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* from its narrative origins as follows:

The true tableaux in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, however, did not depend upon the sheer spectacle of the plantation, auction, or riverboat scenes, i.e. they did not have an essentially descriptive function. Rather, they served to sum up a specific narrative point in pictorial form. As Martin Meisel has argued, the tableau represents a moment of

²²⁸ Robinson's novels do not risk losing substance for spectacle, nor do they risk becoming "mere picture[s]," as happened in some stage adaptations of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (Frick 129).

suspended action, a moment chosen so that the grouping of figures epitomizes the forces arrayed in conflict. It arrests the flow of the narrative so as to produce a heightened sense of its significance. (41)

As with Stowe, Robinson's visual compositions act to extend the storyline.²²⁹ As forms of description they highlight the arrangement of figures, often dwelling on their conflictual postures and thus the dramatic or tragic elements of the plot. Tableau thus provides a crucial narrative technology for invoking and imagining abstract ideas in prose.

Again, it is useful to revisit the aspirational structure of Robinson's conception of family (as delineated in her essay "Family") mainly because what is aspirational in cultural aesthetics might also reveal itself as what becomes conventional. In this sense, Robinson can be seen as arguing for a return to the convention of family as a platform for social reform. Consider how she defines contemporary family within a history of average household labor production. Our present, she claims, has seen a historic drop in the financial compensation households receive for their labor: "the value of labor has fallen—even while the productivity of labor in the same period has risen sharply." She then adds a certain pathos to the observation that bears out the human meaning underlying economic fact: "So, male and female, we sell ourselves cheap, with the result that work

²²⁹ Robinson's religiosity also places her within the tradition of sentimental writing, a body of work that succeeded in popularizing (if not nearly secularizing) domestic and religious iconography to galvanize energies toward progressive political reform. This is particularly the case for evangelical reform period of nineteenth century, a tradition Robinson identifies with in her writing on Lane Theological Seminary, established in 1829 in Cincinnati, Ohio, the school asked Harriet Beecher Stowe's father Lyman Beecher to serve as its president in 1832. Most readers of Robinson would not imagine drawing her into comparison with Harriet Beecher Stowe, despite her own tendency to draw herself into connection with her through an admiration of America's history of evangelical reform. In *What Are We Doing Here* Robinson writes about the American Puritan tradition advanced by Emily Dickinson's grandfather along with the Beechers and Harriet Stowe's husband Calvin Stowe through their work at Lane Theological Seminary, all of whom "were involved with abolition and the Underground Railroad." "This," Robinson adds, "provided the material for Stowe's famous novel" (*What* 174-175).

can demand always more of our time, and our families can claim always less of it.” Finally, she frames this shift in terms of what it indicates about the habits of mind in the society that has seen this change: “This is clearly a radical transformation of the culture, which has come about without anyone’s advocating it, without consensus, without any identifiable constituency” (92). She does not address how the changing status of women might have complicated our ability to remain faithful to the concept of family and family life. Without addressing that impact, Robinson frames the loss of family as a platform for social reform in the following terms:

It was because the family as we have known it in this country over the last three-quarters of a century was the goal and product of reform that *a radiance of idealization* hung over it, and that it was so long and so confidently invoked as *a common value, as a thing deserving and also requiring political and economic protection*. This has had many important consequences for policy and law. Yet for some reason we are convinced at the moment that the ways of our economy should be identical with the laws of the market, and therefore we depart resolutely from *norms and customs* that controlled economic behavior among us through our long history of increasing prosperity. (95)

Robinson identifies a process of valuation above (1) in the practice of idealizing, (2) in invoking (what is idealized) common values, and (3) in identifying subjects deserving and requiring political and economic protection. In sum, Robinson invokes tradition, in the form of norms and customs, as a means of anchoring ultimate values in a society. In cultural sphere, tableau enacts this process. In Gramscian terms Robinson would surely not adopt herself, this process might be said to form the organic ideology of a civil society, that is, the moral and intellectual practices that shape class structure.

As Maureen Harkin argues, sentimental fiction, like Henry Mackenzie's *The Man of Feeling* (1771), "provides, in its appeals to common humanity and tableaux of sympathetic communion, a code of ethics based on sensibility to compensate for the erosion of traditional notions of social responsibility" (317-8). Robinson can be seen as stepping into this kind of logic in claiming family as a cultural construct that represents one of the best models for relations of "duty and loyalty," for a kind of giving of "help and kindness" to group members where none is "owed [and] are perhaps by no means merited" (*Death* 88). Like Mackenzie, Robinson might also be seen to take up literary art "as a form of social practice and critique," namely as a means of strengthening the idea of family (Harkin 336; *Death* 88). As Harkin notes, however, instituting such a project proved a struggle: "The novel as Mackenzie conceived it could not justify its own stake in the regulation of social life, providing images of sympathy for victims and a principled resistance but no effective opposition to the ills it spends so much time noting" (Harkin 336). The futility of the sentimental aesthetic was, as Harkin records, a live issue for its earliest practitioners:

In his later essay, "On Novel-Writing," for *The Lounger*," Mackenzie "identif[ies] the danger of novels in their substitution of 'visionary impulses ... in place of real duties'" ["On Novel-Writing." *The Lounger* 20 (18 June 1785), in *Works* (note 16), 5: 183]. [...] Yet *The Man of Feeling* does not resolve simply into a failed strategy for constructing appropriate social models; its representations of distress produce an evident pleasure as well as an impulse to social critique. The novel's tendency to indulge at length in what it acknowledges is futile opposition, tears and complaints, indicates that these sympathetic tableaux are a source of aesthetic pleasure rather than of ethical practice. (Harkin 336-337)

Robinson reclaims sympathy's usefulness but requires we reorient our relationship to it. Outspoken about how we might, as a society, sharpen our ethical practices, Robinson suggests we locate viewer identification not with the victim but with the villain. In this way, she redeems the social usefulness of sentimental aesthetics, but takes away, to a considerable degree, its escapist pleasure. (In this respect she moves sentimental aesthetics closer to the aesthetics of the sublime.) Robinson's characterization of Glory in *Home* performs a similar reworking of sentimental aesthetics.

Tableau focuses attention on the conventionality of emotional expression. Conventional markers, in Robinson's hands, however, become aspirational markers of individual and communal values. Robinson maintains the tradition of sentimental *tableau* in highlighting life's fleeting and precious nature and even the sentimental message it imparts—namely that the best choice lies in loving those near to us, far outweighing earthly concerns for wealth and status. Adhering to these elements within sentimental tradition, Robinson reworks the form as a social practice of critique, weakening charges against it as an inadequate ethical practice, on its manner of reducing “complexities and ambiguities ... to a simple, satisfying formula” (Slotkin 466). Robinson lifts tableau out of its association “with forms of mindless mass entertainment that flatten the complexities of experience, rob human situations of their psychological depth and moral significance, and present a travesty of life that excites the instincts while playing on the worst prejudices of a credulous audience” (Tompkins 96). Robinson does this by invoking tableau as a life preserver within the action of the narrative, asking it to impart crucial “explanation...[and] moral resolution” for a character (Douglas 180). Robinson's characters encounter a tableau vision often when at a breaking point. Poised in the text as a counterbalance to struggle, tableau comes to rescue the main character facing a most difficult, if mundane, moment in his or her life, whether

that is Rev. Ames reckoning with his own mortality or Glory facing exasperation as a caregiver. Contextualized in such a way, tableau in the Gilead trilogy overturns the longstanding structural contradictions of the form that demand passion from the characters in the tableau but reason and distance from its spectators.²³⁰ Robinson makes a character in her novel a beholder of a tableau in which other characters participate, just as the reader is beholding the tableau made by Robinson. By fictionalizing a beholder, Robinson escapes a scenario where art might get preachy. Situated in the context of life struggles, Robinson's tableau moves the character-spectator of the scene to reinvest in struggle over and over again, rallying fidelity to the control and discipline its moving vision inspires.

While in *Gilead* Reverend Ames has a tendency to view moments as tableau, I focus on Glory's tendency toward tableau-vision in *Home* because of her marked sentimental tendencies in the narrative, her penchant for tears and her gender, which raises unique challenges and vulnerabilities. More than in *Gilead*, in which the narrator Rev. Ames also displays a penchant for tableau vision, *Home* shows Robinson as aware of and responsive to the critical history behind *tableau* art. According to the Tate Britain, the art term *tableau* signifies any "painting or photograph in which characters are arranged for picturesque or dramatic effect and appear absorbed and completely unaware of the existence of the viewer." As a form of composition, *tableau* marks the sentimentalist's *entrée* into the delights of viewing scenes of distress with impunity: "The term was first used in the eighteenth century by French philosopher Denis Diderot to describe paintings with this type of composition. Tableau paintings were natural and true to life, and had the effect of walling off the observer from the drama taking place, transfixing the viewer

²³⁰ For a more specific discussion of the traditional roles of control and passion in tableau, see chapter two of Jennifer Vanderheyden's *The Function of the Dream and the Body in Diderot's Work*.

like never before” (Tate). Tableau as melodramatic spectacle, life made meaningful by death’s threat, finds its counterbalance in the content and dialogue, that is, the context within which the tableau is set. The spectator’s relation to the scene here matters. If one is close to the context, the ethical demand of an image heightens. Robinson works to make the ethical demand greater by increasing the fictionalization in the visual transaction of the beholder. The meaning of sentimental texts remains constant: life is dear and choosing to love within it is primarily what matters, certainly beyond material concerns and status. Sentimental narrative’s message appears equalizing, which is why it summons fellow feeling. Such a sentiment, and its underlying message of egalitarian human connection, is not accessed through education and reason, though it is structured through it. To be moved into seeing the moral vision of sentimental literature, an audience must think through emotions without becoming fully enthralled. That kind of connection, sentimental narrative offers, eases the inevitable suffering that comes with existence. Moving away from a focus on the self to identify how we are connected to others alleviates suffering. As a force, this movement, and the recognition it brings, is ephemeral, a weak appeal to our better natures. As a sentiment, it fizzles into futility, dissipates after the moment of pleasurable entertainment passes, if it is not anchored in something more. But even weak forces count in the larger scheme of good actions taken. Robinson democratically reveres experience, in a Whitman sense, as guiding and instructive through a “radical uniqueness” where each individual is concerned (*When* xiii).²³¹ Here

²³¹ In *What Are We Doing Here?* Robinson locates this fidelity to individual experience in a larger American tradition, naming Melville, Dickinson, Emerson, Whitman, and Thoreau as writers who “see through all convenient or dismissive categories to the actual, the vital and essential. In every case their protagonist is the perceiver. The beauty they achieve has the character of acuity rather than refinement. *It equalizes*. The absence of shrines and rituals and processions [in America as opposed to] in England and Europe reflected, as absence, a sense of immanence that gave theological meaning to anything in itself in the moment of perception—a buzzing fly, a blade of grass. The exalted mind could understand the ordinary as visionary, *given discipline and desire*” (295, emphasis added). Here the form of fellow feeling Robinson evokes as

is what Robinson knows: when sentimental narration gains an ethical edge in impacting its audience, it works by proximity, stirring sentiments in connection to the everyday experience and context of its spectators. In novelistic terms, this wisdom requires Robinson to filter the spectating experience of sentimental tableau through each novel's central consciousness and it is in her character Glory, above all, that Robinson theorizes, most pointedly, that position.

In *Home*, Glory acts as this kind of proximate beholder, and while she can gaze upon her family unnoticed, the narrative has already established in a moment of recent dramatic intensity, her uneasiness at feeling herself to be a snoop. Robinson introduces this departure from the earlier visual logic of tableau, as in, for example, how Diderot makes the absent interlocutor structurally important to the tableau's meaning but still a protected unnoticed observer (Caplan 16). In *Home*, in other words, the privacy of Glory's view is slightly strained. In what is surely an invitation to readers to reflect on fictional forms and reading practices, Robinson presents Glory as utterly a product of the sentimental tradition while also being conscious enough of her own formation to resist it:

[A]t thirty-eight she was still wary of country songs and human interest stories. She was wary indeed of certain thoughts, certain memories, because her father could not bear her unhappiness. His face fell when he saw any sign of it. So she did not permit herself to brood, strong as the urge was sometimes. It would make him miserable. (16)

This detail reminds the reader of sentimentality's continued currency beyond the 1950s plot setting. It also alerts us to a certain emotional censorship at home, a unidimensional capacity in Rev. Boughton that is surely to some degree oppressive to his daughter, whether she acknowledges

equalizing requires a secondary motion—that of *discipline and desire*. This form, added to the skeletal elements of sentimental narration, is what I am identifying here as anchoring, in an ethical sense.

it or not. Robinson's essays shed light on her disapproval of this fatherly overbearing. Robinson achieves a complex portrait of sentimentality because she treats emotional expression in all its contextual complexity: the situation created by a certain family history and a certain cultural history mediating a particular predicament in the present (the challenge of caring for an ailing parent and a troubled brother).

Another part of the novel's early exposition discloses this about its focalizing character: "She wept easily. This did not mean that she felt things more deeply than others did. It certainly did not mean that she was fragile or sentimental or ready to bring that sodden leverage to bear on the slights that came with being the baby of the family" (14). Robinson champions Glory's toughness and resilience, her ability to maintain emotional equilibrium and refrain from emotional manipulation. This is as much a characterization of the central consciousness, a foreshadowing of her virtuous action, as it is a defense of a literary vision. Robinson is defending her vision against the traditional charges brought to a sentimentalist's door. Understanding the uniqueness of Robinson's literary vision does not mean saving her by declaring her a realist but working out what her proximity to sentimental form implies.

"When she was four," Robinson tells us, "she had wept for three days over the death of a dog in a radio play. Every time she teared up a little, her brothers and sisters remembered how she had sobbed over Heidi and Bambi and Babes in the Woods. Which they read to her dozens of times" (15). Tales of orphans and death met too soon bring Glory to tears. *Babes in the Woods*, since its publication in the late nineteenth-century, has been a popular subject of pantomime—a literary taste that foreshadows Glory's way of perceiving her world in the present of the novel. Tableau borrows the nineteenth-century stage convention of closing an act on a frozen scene.²³²

²³² Here I borrow John Frick's description of tableaux as "frozen scenes" (190).

Presented in narrative form, tableau stops diegesis; plot action halts for description of a scene, typically one witnessed by a character in the novel. The suggestion, though prose persists, is that words fail the writer when attempting to capture intense emotion. Giving the narrative over to description, the author turns to theatrical gestures and the arrangement of human bodies to assume the burden of expressivity. Anne Patricia Williams describes the literary technique as “sentimental ekphrasis”: “The sentimental tableau infuses that single moment with emotional significance by using the signifiers of contemporary culture” (478). It is not a tendency that goes uncriticized in *Home*.²³³ Robinson presents good and inferior versions of tableau vision. In doing so, she invites us to contemplate what postures and actions each vision prompts in the viewer.

Here is the context leading up to Glory’s tableau vision: Glory bakes pies by hand in preparation for Jack’s return, but her brother takes longer than his letter predicts, and she finally has to feed her pies, on the brink of rotting, to the neighbors’ dogs. When Jack finally arrives,

²³³ When brother and sister have gained one another’s confidences, Jack and Glory have a conversation that shows how the sentimentalizing vision of tableau can go terribly wrong. At this moment, Glory has just told Jack how she met her conman-beau: “It’s because I met, you know, the man I didn’t marry, at a choir rehearsal. He was passing in the street, he said, and he heard the music, and it took him back to the sweetest memories of his childhood” (120-121). Here the tableau scene is as oral as it is visual. While Glory is a part of the scene rather than its witness, she is equally vulnerable to its cultural rhetoric. Jack interprets her disparaging conclusion that her beau was indeed “looking for a vulnerable woman”: “You know, by vulnerable I suppose I really meant—religious. Yes. Pious girls have tender hearts. They believe sad stories. So I have heard. All to their credit, of course. And they usually lead sheltered lives. Little real knowledge of the world. They are brought up to think someone ought to love them for that sort of thing, their virtue and so on. And they are ready to believe anyone who tells them about, you know, his angel mother, and how the thought of her piety has been a beacon shining through the darkest storms of life. So I have been told” (121). Jack adds, “If I had a daughter, I wouldn’t let her go anywhere near a choir rehearsal” (122). Glory describes how she first met her beau to her brother: “He was passing in the street, he said, and he heard the music, and it took him back to the sweetest moments of his childhood. He hoped we would not mind if he stood very quietly and listened for a while.” “Why, what a cad.” I could have warned you. That one phrase would have given him away” (121). The whole passage reads as a critique of the cult of domesticity, a nineteenth century characterization of the role of women as occupying the domestic sphere in the separate spheres’ doctrine. This ideology idealizes women at the same time that it restricted them to the domestic realm. Women were seen as more pious than their male counterparts; purer in heart, mind and body; and meant to be submissive to men.

Glory must fall back on a cold supper of sliced ham and macaroni salad, left on the porch the day before by one of her father's old parishioners. At the dinner table, she suffers under the thick atmosphere of conversations that cannot be broached, skirting around histories and unknown motivations of the present. Glory feels sorry for her father and sorry for herself. Yet she loves Jack and looks upon him with unmistakable, if also somewhat judgmental, tenderness. As the dinner scene comes to a close, the narrative prepares the reader for the ensuing tableau by highlighting Jack's gestures, which assume a muted form of theatricality, fitting to the form.

As Anne Williams explains, "the eighteenth-century practice of gestural acting is central to the visual culture of emotion. In contemporary works on acting, wordless gesture was touted as the best way to express passion" (A. Williams 471). In this, it echoes ancient models found in *The Odyssey* and *The Aeneid*, where shades of Ajax and Dido turn away in silent reproach from the protagonists, who have wronged them. Robinson's descriptive elements recall a similar passion, evoking the passion captured by Rembrandt's *Return of the Prodigal Son*, among others, when she describes the returned son at his father's feet:

When his father began to weary with the effort of talk—"Yes, yes," he said, "yes"—Jack cleared away the dishes and then he said, "Sir," and took his father's arm and helped him up from the table, a thing the old man never let Glory do, and he took him to the chair in his room where he napped. He helped him out of his jacket and opened his collar and loosened his tie. Then he knelt and removed his shoes. "That old quilt—" his father said, and Jack took it from the foot of the bed and spread it over him. The manner of his doing all these things, things she had done every day for months, suggested courtesy rather than kindness, as if it were a tribute to his father's age rather than a concession to it. *And she could see how* her father was soothed by these attentions, as if pain were an appetite for

comforting of just this kind.

She did her best. [...]

That courtesy was his shield and concealment. It was his courage. [...]

When Jack helped his father from his chair, it was with that same courtesy, *and she could see that* his father's pleasure was partly in the surprise of recognition, as of an old promise kept, an old debt remembered. [...]

While Jack settled his father for his nap, *Glory stood in the hall, watching. It was beautiful to see*, the old man making not one sound of discomfort, soothed by the gracefulness of Jack's attention, tucked in like a weary child" (63-65)

Comprising its own paragraph before the line break, the final short sentence, "She did her best," becomes remarkable within the full movement toward tableau.²³⁴ As a reminder that reestablishes

²³⁴ To identify the atypicality of Robinson's use of tableau, it is useful to contrast it to *mise-en-scène* as it functions in cinema. Consider how John Gibbs characterizes *mise-en-scène* as it functions to heighten audience awareness in film: "When Mulvey writes about the *mise-en-scène* working to undercut the narrative level of the film, she is in part referring to another way of thinking about visual style, particularly in melodrama, where critics have argued that the *mise-en-scène* can create a 'distanciation effect' similar to those advocated by Bertolt Brecht in his writing on theater. The *verfremdungseffekt* (which used to be translated as 'alienation effect' but is now more usually referred to as 'distanciation') refers to those elements of Brechtian theatrical practice which, rather than involving the audience in the emotional experience of the characters, instead encourage the spectator to become aware of the social forces that shape their behavior. As Brecht writes in 'The Street Scene': 'What is involved here is, briefly, a technique of taking the human social incidents to be portrayed and labeling them as something striking, something that calls for explanation, is not to be taken for granted, not just natural. The object of this 'effect' is to allow the spectator to criticize constructively from a social point of view. (1964, 125).' Often, though not exclusively, such moments of distanciation will be reflexive. That is, the play (or film) will draw attention to its own construction, so that there is no danger of the spectator being drawn unthinkingly into the action. Instead, an actor might step out of character and talk to the audience directly" (Gibbs 75-76).

Robinson differs from Brecht in approaching audience awareness outside of this either-or equation. Robinson's aesthetic vision requires the necessary presence of both her readers' emotional involvement in the experiences of her characters and their awareness of the social forces impinging on those experiences. Differing from Brecht, Robinson finds the two are essentially entwined. For Robinson, particularly for the essayist Robinson who rails against truths produced under cynicism, a particular emotional temperament while immersed in fiction allows for a fuller apprehension of truth. In her prose, Robinson also pursue the "not to be taken for granted," but her writing refuses to reveal social forces at the expense of its characters (they are not, for example, shown to be living in bad faith). Social forces are more often shown as robbing a character of dignity.

the boundary of Glory's vision, the final sentence underscores her gaze as both relational and comparative; in a move that draws parallels to the older brother of the prodigal son, Glory weighs her caregiving efforts against her brother's. With its description of Jack kneeling at his father's feet, the passage also draws on the significance of humility in the scene before the Passion, when Jesus washes his disciples' feet before the last supper (although, it seems to me, Jack's courtesy softens the humility). The reversal of hierarchies persists into the tableau.

Although brief in description, structure and theme distinguish the moment as framed, with one character serving as witness and the others in posture and expression suggesting emotional intensity that moves them beyond the reach of words: "While Jack settled his father for his nap, Glory stood in the hall, watching. It was beautiful to see, the old man making not one sound of discomfort, soothed by the gracefulness of Jack's attention, tucked in like a weary child" (64-65). "[M]aking not one sound of discomfort" does not mean there was no protest of discomfort to be made, but that he would not make it with this child. With Glory he might have, and that is implied in our gazing at this scene through her eyes. Her admiration and love at this scene bring her to a place where she feels something more than tolerance for her father's favoritism toward this child.

A flood of acceptance and peace surges through Glory's gaze, resembling the energy found in Virginia Woolf. This ekphrastic tendency in Woolf produces what Kathryn Stelmach identifies as "framed epiphanic moments," as prose showcase the transformative energy encapsulated in tableau. Robinson's tableau also produces epiphanic moments important for their transformative force in her characters' lives. Robinson diverges from Woolf in her choice to move beyond this vision's strong link with the feminine gaze, or what Stelmach defines as "the extravagant generosity of [Woolf's] female characters." Robinson would have this virtue transcend the sexes, and does so when she offers the male gaze equal access to it. Her first narrator of the trilogy, Reverend Ames

in *Gilead* arguably shows an even greater tendency toward this epiphanic tableau vision than Glory—though he is, by profession and vocation, committed to seeing meaning in things in a way Glory and Lila are not.²³⁵ I focus on Glory here because the act of seeing the world as tableau matters more, in the sense of risking more, when located in the body of a woman.

Analyzing the sentimental gaze in a female character like Glory allows me to consider the benefits and costs of such a gaze in terms of gender. Glory's social position both in her family and in society forces Robinson to contend with thornier questions than she had with Rev. Ames. Let me first discuss the benefits of such a gaze. To herald its virtue, we might see, with Stelmach, that the "moments of being" Virginia Woolf achieves "reveal the evanescent wonder inherent in seeing life as cyclical [...] rather than sequen[tial]" (Stelmach 306). Cyclical time invites complex exposition beyond the teleology of tallying wrongs, proposing a more relevant and dynamic vision of family relations. As Robinson writes, "[Family] implies that we are in some few circumstances excused from the degrading need to judge others' claims on us, excused from the struggle to keep our thumb off the scales of reciprocity" (*Death* 88).

Robinson enacts this to powerful effect in Lila. At the beginning of their courtship when love is still a conversation with an imagined other in one's head, when acts still have the air of mystery, not yet settled into known intention, Lila tends the grave of Ames's first wife, making the roses bloom and looks after the potato plants in his garden. Finding her among the plants, "picking beetles off [leaves] and dropping them in a tin can," Reverend Ames begins a conversation that illuminates the tender dignity human relations can assume when moved beyond systems of exchange:

²³⁵ For a reference to Robinson's use of tableau in *Gilead* see Laura Tanner's "'Looking Back from the Grave': Sensory Perception and the Anticipation of Absence in Marilynne Robinson's *Gilead*."

He said, “You have done so much. It looks wonderful. I would like to give you something for it.” He had his wallet in one hand, his hat in the other.

She said, “I owe you a kindness.”

“No,” he said. “No. You certainly don’t owe me anything”

“I best decide that,” she said. (33)

The mild offense embodied in Reverend Ames’s wallet, the awkwardness of its presence in his one hand, becomes palpable against Lila’s ethic of foundationless generosity. Not yet courting, the two are negotiating their movement into a more familial kind of love, and Lila’s ethic of generosity enables this movement. As Erin Penner perceives,

Lila lingers at gravesites and wonders about unborn children in order to better invest, imaginatively and sympathetically, in life. Her fledgling religious convictions enable her to conceive of an afterlife in which she could converse with the dead and the unborn; such imagined interactions foster a sympathetic impulse that is carried into her relationships with the living. (278)

This is the kind of cyclical vision Robinson’s reliance on tableau achieves. It places her in literary conversation with Woolf, and arguably intensifies and expands the feminist aesthetic embodied in the literary technique. Located in *Glory*, such a gaze (that turns one’s world into sentimental tableau) becomes a more challenging virtue to negotiate because a twenty-first century reading present demands such feminist issues be broached.

Within this context, it is highly significant that Robinson chooses to repeat the tableau of *Glory* gazing upon her brother helping their father. It also matters that *Glory* can continue to envision her brother tending their father as tableau even after her continued struggle to connect with him and alleviate her father’s anxiety about him:

Their father called, “Could one of you children come and give me a little help?”

“I’ll go,” Jack said. She put away the checkerboard, and then she looked down the hall, and there was Jack, kneeling to unlace the old man’s shoes. And his father regarding him with such sad tenderness that she wished she could will herself out of existence, herself and every word she had ever said. (80)

In *Glory*, Robinson does not shirk from illustrating the precarity of a woman’s position in society or in the home. She instead chooses to dramatize (without remarking on) how much more notable it becomes when a man takes up the same tasks a woman has traditionally performed (notably, though, this fact does not provoke sarcasm or black humor).²³⁶ Yet *Glory*’s desire for self-erasure here is not presented as wholly negative. She is not dismissible as neurotic. As the narrative will later show, her selfless action, her adherence to “qualities of patience and respect and loyalty and generosity” come to fruition. They do not lead to “neuroses such as dependency and lack of assertiveness” (*Death* 88).

When Robinson writes about *Glory*’s response to being caught up in her father’s worry that Jack has left and her own embarrassment at having been caught snooping in his room, she honors the emotional complexity of *Glory*’s tempered response: “She was afraid to be angry, and that

²³⁶ The fierce humor of the underdog is not something Robinson often resorts to, mainly because her philosophy requires her to abstain from the spirit of this kind of humor. Such abstention, however, means Robinson is limited in the way she could broach the topic of emotional labor, of the unequal share of women in household management. Such humor can cut through certain realities with startling clarity. Consider the scenario related by the poet Robin Beth Schaer: “My friend & her husband lived in an apartment that had a soap dispenser installed on the edge of the kitchen sink. When they moved out after two years, he marveled to her: ‘it’s amazing how that dispenser never ran out of soap in all this time.’ Women’s work is truly invisible” (@robinschaer 22 March 2019). The powerfully illustrative tweet works by making the husband the butt of the joke. This kind of humor serves an important function. It also provides a useful illustration of a form of positioning Robinson’s fiction forbears. Robinson chooses not to make any character bear the brunt of a joke. She abstains from mockery and ridicule that may be used to illuminate one character at the expense of another. This abstention from belittlement illustrates the bounds of Robinson’s humane and Christian, or, as I say, democratic style.

made her angry” (67). Glory’s anger at Jack for making her uncomfortable in her own home, for having ousted her from role of caregiver prefaces her tableau vision in *Home*. This is significant because traditionally tableau “depict[s] reconciliation, the family again made whole.” As Jay Caplan characterizes the tradition, “tableaux express a desire for reconciliation, a desire to make up for what the family has lost” (Caplan 22). Robinson turns this tradition inside out by depicting Glory’s desire for distance, to leave her father to Jack’s care, as an equal desire. Here are the emotional contours of Glory’s mind before she gazes on the moving frozen scene of Jack caring for her father:

What right did he have to take over the house this way? Granting he had as much claim to it as she did, the only difference being that she had spent some months caring for the house and her father before he arrived. Now he seemed inclined to help with the old man, too, and he did it well, and as if something were communicated in it that made it more a gracious ceremony than the acting out of duty or obligation. A tacit agreement had formed between the two men that Jack would help his father with the bathing and changing that had been the uneasiest part of her caring for him, and that was a great relief, since he had been reluctant to accept the attention he needed. The fact was that she had taken comfort from the thought that her duty was plain and that a sense of obligation was becoming in anyone and so on. But things were better with Jack in the house. (67-68)

It matters that Glory must contend here with the feeling that a boys’ club has taken her position of significance away. Alongside this image, there is also the record of relief experienced when household duties are shared, when a man of the house does his part. It matters, as well, that through all this Glory’s own mind remains reasonable. In this respect, Robinson draws Glory away from the sentimental tradition.

Taken as a whole, Robinson writes Glory into a complex family dynamic: Jack's alcoholism demands her tender attentiveness (to give someone a chance rather than fall back on judgments about behavior), Reverend Boughton's old age requires another kind of care, while the family history between them contorts normal interactions (a psychologist might classify the dynamic as enmeshed).²³⁷ Through Glory's memories, the reader learns she has taken on her parents' worry about Jack and that worry, on her young shoulders, has colored and impeded the normal relationship they might have had as siblings. In the narrative present, she also takes on her father's worries about Jack and that leads her to violate Jack's privacy by snooping in his room, something that goes against her own sense of dignity. In addition, her personal situation compounds her feelings of discomfort and sharpens her pain at being displaced. Nonetheless, Glory, gazes down the hallway at her older brother caring for her ailing father and thinks, "It was beautiful to see" (64). In *Home*, the narrative develops and dwells on Glory's manner of seeing. Imagistic and religious, her vision lends strength to and fosters the kind of action she takes in the novel. As an exercise in seeing, the sentimental tableau holds tender pleasure and melancholic pain together. On the edge of this image, the mundane frustrations, fears, and disappointments threaten to crash in, and do crash in to pierce Glory's romantic vision with sharp realism. As a technique appearing early in *Home* the sentimental tableau sets a certain way of seeing in motion, allowing it to expand and enlarge the textual quality of the novel into a complex mediation on how perception colors experience. As descriptive passage, tableau manages to put a shape on perception. Tableau slows down the experience of narrative action and, in so doing, holds the potential to broaden our notions of action itself. In lingering over and framing a character's

²³⁷ Psychologists use enmeshment to describe family relations in which healthy personal boundaries are not maintained. Enmeshed relations happen when one or more members of family frequently absorbs another's emotional state.

perception, Robinson's tableau invites readers to linger, explore, and even identify, the ways perception not only shapes behavior but, ultimately, impacts future action. While Glory's tableau vision offers some respite from familial tension, it roots her in the reality of that tension by recalling what she truly values in family life. Beholding her father and Jack in a poignant moment allows her to stand outside her reality and her ego, but also reinvest in that reality with a renewed, motivational vision. This vision is in some sense sacrificial, in that it requires Glory to step outside herself. As the novel goes on to show, however, Glory is emboldened for having such a vision; this may be seen as a self-constituting ethic.

Glory's tableau vision enters the scenario of family tension as a weak form of deliverance. In this respect, it exemplifies what Andrew Stout calls Robinson's "sacramental imagination," "a vision that invites the reader to see the divine in the common" (571-572).²³⁸ The capacity to find in the difficult and mundane irritations of daily interactions, a scene of tenderness (one that recalls a person to ultimate concerns, as Paul Tillich might say), helps Glory to soldier on, to see that she loves Jack despite—and through—all the irritations his arrival causes. Her sacramental imagination, manifest as tableau vision, offers a nonjudgmental way of seeing that guides her heart into cherishing family ties, not solely as a "spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" but as a rooted practice of loyalty upon which she has "thought long and deeply" (Wordsworth).²³⁹

²³⁸ This aesthetic is unusual in a Protestant writer, as Stout points out, the sacramental imagination "is often viewed as the exclusive province of the Catholic mind" (571). Susan Petit identifies Robinson with Flannery O'Connor in this respect. Stout and Petit do not consider the Anglican priest and metaphysical poet George Herbert, who offers a non-Catholic example of devotional lyricism. Viewed from another tradition, Robinson's sacramental imagination brings her close to Whitman's conception of the sublime (see David Brendan's "The Sublime Self: Whitman's Sense of the Sublime in *Song of Myself*"). Yet Robinson's sublime manages to be fearsome, not the warm humanistic sublime found in Kant.

²³⁹ A full apprehension of Robinson's aesthetics requires a critic to recognize the ties between sentimentalism and romanticism. The word *sentimental* entered the English language in mid-1700s, around half a century earlier than the text that began the romantic period, William Wordsworth's *Lyrical Ballads* (1798). The interconnectedness of the two schools goes some way in explaining the confusion that follows

Ultimately anchoring, her tableau vision helps her to adhere to her deeper loyalties through the difficulties that each day brings. Robinson honors these difficulties by presenting them as more than surface irritations, by recording the very real inequalities of gender division in the household and the very real difficulties of living with a person struggling with alcoholism. The novel's tendency toward sentimental tableau extends beyond solely Glory's vision, as I show below, and in each instance, such a vision is set against and within sharply realistic contexts of family struggle. In the Gilead trilogy, tableau acts to romanticize human relations within a context of undisputable struggle. Tableau tempers a viewer's feelings but does not fundamentally transform them. Retaining registers of love and exasperation in equal measure, Robinson's realist texts punctuated by sentimental tableau model a practice of family loyalty that identifies imagination (the poetic contours of perception, consciously attended to) as an important element in a template for social reform, particularly imagination oriented toward a known and conscious body of values. Such values inspire a reverential demeanor toward who and what the viewer values.

Valuing family, as Robinson does, does not mean rejecting individuality. "Qualities consistent with the flourishing of the individual," as Robinson well knows, "can be highly inconsistent with the flourishing of the group." In her essays, Robinson wishes to see her country foster a healthy form of individualism. She calls the United States "a culture that never was a melting pot but a place of tolerance breeding diversity that allows for social flourishing (as opposed to corrosive differences)" (*Death* 105). Robinson's story of the Boughtons affirms her way of

Wordsworth's definition of poetry. Addressing this, Mary Ruefle writes, "the everlasting pity is, his definition is always quoted out of context. Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" [...] ends with a comma, not a period, and following that comma Wordsworth warns of the dangers of sentimentality unbound by reason: "and though this be true," he continues, "poems to which any value can be attached were never produced on any variety of subjects but by a man, who being possessed of more than usual organic sensibility, has also thought long and deeply." Wordsworth implies here that this "spontaneous overflow" is, in fact, tempered by in-depth analysis" ("Lexical").

storying her country, even if some of that history seems somewhat idealized.²⁴⁰ As *Home* shows, Glory's family ethic protects the integrity of Jack's person, and, to a great extent, allows him to maintain his loner and outsider status. As a unit, family, at least in this instance, proves that it can protect singularities. To her credit, Robinson's warm pictures of family are not homogenizing nor do they turn viewers away from the hard realities that make the work of relating difficult. In this respect, Robinson contends with the considerable imaginative energy required for re-romanticizing the family. For family, as she claims, is one of the best models for "duty and loyalty," for the kind of giving to its members, both of "help and kindness," where none is "owed [and] are perhaps by no means merited" (*Death* 88). Robinson's novels implicitly ask what it would mean to turn this practice of family into a wider political practice of inclusivity. Glory's habit of seeing in the manner of tableau motivates a particular kind of action and ethic of care that she practices with Jack, and, as the narrative reveals, it is a practice that helps her see the connection Della and Jack share (how much she can extend the ethic of care to Della herself, treating her like a sister, is questionable given the final scenario of their meeting in the novel).

Again, *Home* turns to tableau to deliver the final emotional shock of novel. In Robinson's practice, the complexity of the narrative moment always exceeds and enhances the tableau. The small ways Jack has tended his childhood home, restoring the garden to productivity, clearing the overgrown vine from the porch, become remarkable at the novel's close. The emotional force in the reader's dawning realization that when Jack stepped out, he was searching for work to do, trying to secure a job so that he could sustain his family in Gilead. Della comes to Gilead a

²⁴⁰ See for example, a recent review of *What Are We Doing Here?* where Sarah Churchwell points out that Robinson "does not reflect on that fact that...Jefferson, Washington, and Madison...were slave-owners, too." Robinson, with good intentions, focuses on the abolitionist tradition in American history, and when she writes about Jefferson, identifies him with his better legacy.

heartbreaking two days after Jack has left for God knows where. But Jack's conversation with Della is there, in the homestead he tended, visible for her to read. All the work he had done toward upkeep, toward homemaking comes to light under Della's gaze:

[Della] looked past [Glory] at the orderly garden, at the clothesline, and again at the porch with its pot of petunias on the step. Her eyes softened. It was as if a message had been left for her, something sad and humorous and lovely in its intimacy. Glory could imagine that Jack might have drawn them a map of the place, orchard and pasture and shed. Maybe there were stories attached to every commonplace thing, other stories than she had heard, than any of them had heard. (320-321)

All Jack's attentions return to the reader here in the realization that his actions and thoughts have been with his wife all along, bent on preparing a home for her. Those attentions, then, cohere into a moving act of love that becomes *Home's* final scene and tableau. The emotional tenor of this moment is truly exquisite, due largely to the impact of learning what has been concealed throughout the narrative, that all of Jack's work around the house have been motivated by love for his family.

That love, intriguingly, reinvests Glory's worn-in sense of her home with an unknown meaning, one the narrative here only gestures to in Della's gaze. The promise of *Home*, which comes to a less cathartic moment of fellow feeling than sentimental texts proffer, dwells in this wider meaning of home hinted at but not traversed in Della's gaze. This is not a shortcoming of the novel but a realistic record of a history that remains implicating in the present. Jack's ethic of homemaking, though incomplete, stands out as the most admirable at the novel's end. That it is incomplete only serves to underscore the precarity of human connection, to show the great demand life makes on us and exertion it requires to aim at such connection. Robinson's faithful depiction

of such precarity lends her novels their fierce realism and grants her sentimental tableau its redeeming ethic. In Robinson's novels, tableau succeeds in showing us that "the most admirable values of society [...] are also usually the most fragile, the least certain" (Zamalin and Skinner 93). As Alex Zamalin and Daniel Skinner point out, this is a truth Robinson well knows. It is also, to a great degree, the truth of sentimental narration. *Home*, offers a picture of love in practice, of a love whose fragility is also its strength, being, as it is, "always compounded with hope" (*What* 225-6). Before leaving the topic of tableau in Robinson's novelistic aesthetic, I will consider how this sentimental technique shapes the dramatically different image of family Robinson offers in *Lila*.

5.3 THE LONG TIMELINE OF SYMPATHETIC RESPONSE, OR THE NEED FOR MANY RETELLINGS OF AN EVENT

Doll and Lila form their own family, self-contained of necessity. They are not, in many ways, full-fledged members of Doane's family. Early in *Lila* the reader learns about "the nights they spent bedded down beyond the light of Doane's fire," about "the days walking behind Doane's people, at a distance, as if they only happened to be going along on the same road" (13-14). Robinson places Lila's outsider, even outcast, status beyond dispute. As an unwanted member of an unwanted gang of migrant workers, Lila evinces what fellow feeling unhomed means for human expression. "But if you're just a stranger to everybody on earth," she tells no one, "then that's what

you are and there's no end to it. You don't know the words to say" (79).²⁴¹ Unstoried, except to the reader, much of Lila's history exists in this lonely place of unutterance, for "Lila would never tell anyone about that time. She knew it would sound very sad, and it wasn't, not really" (4). Protecting her silences means protecting the family she has known: "she and Doll had a secret between them. ... So Lila couldn't think of breathing a word, even now. Stealing a child, when Doll had come to her like an angel in the wilderness" (30). But falling in love with Rev. Ames means the opening of a conversation, and the challenge of that scenario emphasizes the inadequacy of storytelling to the immediate moment, the need to tell and retell over time—a requirement that necessitates something more than kindness and trust. The timeline of telling, Robinson offers, is also a timeline of commitment followed by security: "They'd had their wedding by then, but she wasn't married to him yet, so she still thought sometimes, Why should he care? What is it to him? That was loneliness. When you're scalded, touch hurts, it makes no difference if it's kindly meant. Now he could comfort her with a look. And what would she do without him. What would she do?" (253).

Rev. Ames's comprehension of the delicacy of storytelling's relation to human reality facilitates his relation to Lila as much as it prepares the reader for *Lila's* distinctive narrative ethic, where truths exchanged always means stories exchanged:

She said, "I liked that story."

He looked away from her and laughed. "It *is* a story, isn't it?" I've never really thought of

²⁴¹ David Ulin offers a lovely encapsulation of *Lila* in his review that, in my reading, also categorizes it as a drama about and a study in what creates fellow feeling: "The basic action of the novel is simple: Lila, newly married and pregnant with Ames' baby, has to decide whether she will stay or go." And he also captures well the novel's Lila's basic conflict: "'I just don't go around trusting people. Don't see the need,' she says to Ames, right before she tells him, 'You ought to marry me'—a moment that deftly captures the conflict at the center of both character and novel, the desire to belong and the competing certainty that in a world so unpredictable, belonging is beyond our control."

it that way. And I suppose the next time I tell it, it will be a better story. Maybe a little less true. I might not tell it again. I hope I won't. You're right not to talk. It's a sort of higher honesty, I think. Once you start talking, there's no telling what you'll say."

She said, "I wouldn't know about that." (30)

In naming what Rev. Ames has just related a story, Lila knocks some of the truth out of it, but this act makes the narrative truer, not less so. The narrative moves toward a higher truth in acknowledging the ways meaning is relational rather than hierarchal. Lila's comment brings them onto the same plane. The exchange also signals the extent to which Robinson's novels partake in the sentimental notion that words interfere with honest expression.²⁴² Robinson's novels embrace this sentimental generic premise even as they deny that truth can be conveyed immediately upon viewing a scene. In Robinson, tableau does not rest on revelation, seeking solely our passive receptivity to its vision. Rather, it presses us into the active meaning-making process, inviting us to consciously idealize the shock of recognition we experience upon suddenly beholding a beautiful moment. In this sense, Robinson's tableau harnesses the Wordsworthian romantic practice of first being receptive to experience and afterwards reflecting upon it. Fully embedded in lived reality, Robinson's sentimental tableau summons family history as well as a body of cultural expressions into service. Her tableau externalizes—in the sense of substantiating—what and whom one values, what and whom one wishes to accord reverence. When the viewer takes up

²⁴² See Faye Halpern's *Sentimental Readers*, chapter two, for an argument about how sentimental texts "deny their own textuality" to address "the problem of disingenuous eloquence." For sentimental texts, Halpern asserts, tears are the most honest conveyers of truth, then voice, and only finally words (xix). When Rev. Ames tells Lila about seeing that she tended the grave of his deceased wife and child, he remarks, "I can't tell you what I felt when I saw that. I don't think there's a name for it" (225). Rev. Ames's loss of language here conveys the intensity of how Lila's being moves him. This is not to say that words do not serve a crucial role in Robinson's vision. As *Lila* makes clear, learning the word *existence* enhances a person's understanding (113).

reverence as an exacting practice, reverence avoids becoming entombed or static. One practices reverence in real life, embedded in a context that frequently makes the call to honor others difficult, as many of Robinson's scenes attest.

Contextual density results from returning to the same story until multiple retellings compound and complicate the meaning any reader can draw from it. In *Lila*, the narrative continually revisits episodes from Lila's past whose brute facts escape lived reality, whose brute facts require a lifespan of living alongside until humane meaning can develop around them (if at all): Doll's kidnapping of her when she was a toddler, her family's abandonment of her at a church, Doll's plan to marry her to a widower, and Doane burning her cherished shawl.²⁴³ These episodes are forced into the light of understanding under the condition of Lila falling in love with Rev. Ames. Love, as Robinson defines it, is entering into a lifelong conversation with another: "She had a habit now of putting questions to him in her mind" (34). Lila's love story with Reverend Ames begins with her wish to share her thoughts with him, but "only some of them, the ones she would like to show him" (45). Lila could not, for example, say that Doll had kidnapped her as a small child, that she had subsequently abandoned her during the dust storms, or tried to marry her off to a widower, without betraying a large part of herself and a large part of the care she knew under Doll. As Robinson's first narrator in *Housekeeping* (1981) well knows, "Fact explains nothing. On the contrary, it is fact that requires explanation" (217).¹ Fact, in other words, requires human meaning, and human meaning has a way of unfolding on its own time. We require stories, might be another way to phrase Robinson's perennial point. "To tell a story," as Martin Meisel notes, "requires time, and time itself is what a story represents, as a change of state in material or

²⁴³ A little like Janie at the beginning of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Lila is given to a widower. But the marriage doesn't materialize, as Doll says, "after looking at her for a moment, mildly and sadly," "If there was just something about you" (115).

psychological reality” (38). *Lila* invites readers back to this original meaning of narrative—that if we submit to the time required to tell a story, it will change us. By characterizing Lila as much by what she cannot share as what she can, Robinson underscores the necessity of time for acquiring substantive meaning.²⁴⁴ Stories necessarily recur in *Lila* and their recurrence makes meaning more humane. The reader learns to see that the first and even second versions of a story fall short in capturing the full panorama of a person’s life and intentions, particularly when that conversation crosses experiential divides marked by socioeconomic differences, especially in the case of Lila meeting Rev. Ames. Within the particular story of Lila’s girlhood, Robinson shows her readers that there is not one way to understand how she was abandoned at a small-town church, a heartbreaking return to orphanhood whose sorrows compound through the perspectives that lead to that circumstance.

In Lila and Doll’s last interaction, Lila suffers a final abandonment when Doll does not acknowledge Lila as her own. The memory of this moment causes Lila pain, in part because it is hers and hers alone to understand, until she begins to talk to Rev. Ames. Under the condition of sharing her pain, new obstacles for relating its truth emerge: “She wished she could ask the old man about it all, but she’d have to tell him the whole story or he wouldn’t understand. And what would he understand if she did tell him? That Doll was wild when she was cornered, like some old badger. Nothing the least bit Christian about her when she was cornered” (138). Here is the story of Doll Lila finally offers Ames, full of protective guardedness that shows her awareness of how his version of Christian morality misses giving her caregiver a certain form of justice:

²⁴⁴ When she does share with Rev. Ames a part of her heartbreaking background, the time when Doll tries to marry her to a widower, the aftermath proves the difficulty of disclosure. Rev. Ames interprets the information as a veiled message about her wish to leave him, after which Lila has to correct him and later says, “I just now come near scaring myself to death” (120).,

The woman who took care of me, she called herself Doll. You know, like something a child would play with. I never knew no other name for her. A teacher gave me Dahl for a last name, but that was just a mistake. Doll used a knife on somebody, cut him. I believe she regretted it on account of the trouble it caused her. She was sort of looking over her shoulder all the time I knew her. It wasn't so much the law that caught her. She ended up having to do it again, cut somebody. Nothing else to say. She was good to me. (126)

Couched in necessity, Lila's defense of Doll cuts off the possibility of any further conversation: "Nothing else to say." Her defense ends by invoking familial loyalty. Doll's life, because of its adversity, becomes justified on grounds that it is above Christian morality and legal objection. Doll, who is not Lila's biological mother, nonetheless evidences a form of caregiving Robinson reveres: "She cared for a child. Yes, she stole it—away from death, probably. Away from loneliness. And she brought it up to be a fairly decent woman who wasn't afraid of a day's work. The way they used to laugh together! It was better than anything" (121). Robinson's narratives achieve an image of value that is profoundly human. Beyond any measure of material belongings or notion of social acceptability, human connection and human dignity are exalted.

Indeed, the entire motivation behind each episode's retelling might be said to be the further grasping after the dignity of all involved, as each retelling discloses different aspects of each story and captures different persons' relation to it and the contexts out of which their motivations arose. *Lila's* recurring stories increase the richness of human reality. This richer reality revitalizes, and in an important sense, rescues Robinson's sentimental tableau, tempering the amount of comfort it ultimately can provide, turning its effect into one of realism, sliding the aesthetic from the sentimental to the sublime in showing Robinson's most fully realized ideal of family to be built upon the story of an orphan—and a thief. This choice of stock characters, so to speak, models the

valuation of persons, where the last is first and the first is last, found in the New Testament. There is a powerfully biblical logic in Robinson beginning her Gilead novels with a widow and ending them with an orphan and a thief.

Robinson's thief is Doane, a poor, white migrant worker, kindred to Steinbeck's characters in *Grapes of Wrath*. If Jack's story illustrates the caginess of some forms of human meaning (across differences of exposure, experience, and class), Doane's illustrates another. Not quite a stepfather to Lila, Doane is, nonetheless, the person who imparts the meaning of family to her. The group leader of a gang of itinerant workers, Doane keeps everyone fed and decides where the group will travel next in search of work. His ability to do this rests largely on his reputation and the good that reputation does for his whole group: "They all said Doane had a good name, he was a fair-minded man, and if you hired him you could trust him to give you a day's work. Of course it wasn't just Doane. There was Arthur with his two boys, and Em and her daughter Mellie, and there was Marcelle. She was Doane's wife. They were a married couple" (10). Respectability and integrity typify Doane's meaningful existence. The story of the loss of that integrity, his turn to cruelty, is complicated, and compassionately told.

Robinson presents this story as it impacts the special regard Doane reserves for his wife Marcelle: "When he started turning mean, Doane began calling her *Marcelle* in a way that let you know it wasn't her real name" (75). Doane and Marcelle's love had been witnessed, particularly under Lila and Mellie's watchful eyes, but had also gained the admiration of the whole group. The scene of their love conforms to Anne Williams' classification of sentimental tableau as possessing two distinguishing features: (1) "theatricality, that is, its use of theatrical and other conventions, and its ekphrastic use of detail in its attempt to represent the graphic scene" and (2) fixity, "the

insistence that such significance be allowed to the scene, a demand created through the tableau's disruption of the narrative and [...] its status as 'witnessed'" (A. Williams 481).

They did all think [Marcelle] was pretty. They felt a little pleasure and a little envy at the way Doane favored her. He would take her arm to help her though a muddy place in the road. Once, he bought her ribbons at a carnival and tied one in her hair and one in a bow around her neck, and wound one around her wrist and one around her ankle, kneeling right on the ground to do it and setting her foot on his bent knee. Doll said, "They're married people." Lila had no particular notion of what the word "married" meant, except that there was an endless, pleasant joke between them that excluded everybody else and that all the rest of them were welcome to admire. (75)

This tableau relies on Doane's loving and theatrical gestures of tying a ribbon around his beloved. As a witnessed tribute, the action elevates familial relation to a special place in Lila's memory. The preciousness of the distinction is emphasized by Marcelle's little box of cosmetics: "Lila and Mellie loved to watch when she opened the little box [...]. She almost never opened it, it was so precious" (75). Rarity and scarcity elevate expressions of human caring. As Williams identifies, "The tableau, in freezing the moment, demands to be interpreted or understood in itself. Within the tableau is its meaning, for what is *in* the tableau in that moment is all that there is" (480-481). In the harsh reality Lila and her fellow migrant workers live, tableau logic, as a boundary-making technology, helps to protect the scarce beauty life provides them. In Lila's life of scarcity, the ability to achieve fixity provides a welcome stabilizing effect. Tableau provides fixity in Jeffrey Kittay's memorable formulation: "Rather than action putting description 'in its place,' it is action

that is taken from its dis-place and put, one might say nailed, in its place. [...] The tableau draws a frame around the act, to ask that meaning be ascribed to it." (239).²⁴⁵

Tableau fixes meaning to a scene. Or, as Michael Riffaterre claims, "Its primary purpose is not to offer a representation, but to dictate an interpretation" (125). In the case of Doane, Robinson supplies her interpretation thusly:

After that, Doane seemed almost angry at Marcelle because there wasn't much he could spare her. Still, he looked for her and he stood beside her, even when he had no word to say. There are things people need, and the things people don't need. That might not be true. Maybe they don't need existence. If you took that away, everything else would go with it. So if you don't need to exist, then there is no reason to think about other things you don't need as if they didn't matter. You don't need somebody standing beside you. You don't, but you do. Take away every pleasure—but you couldn't, because there can be pleasure in a sip of water. A thought. There was no reason for Doane to tie a ribbon on Marcelle's wrist, and that was why she laughed when he did it, and loved him for it. Why they all loved them both. (75-76)

Here Robinson presents the love of Marcelle and Doane as a sustaining force for the whole group. Moving quickly from any sentimental association connected to a lover's ribbon, this passage drives home social critique in pinpointing the foundation of Doane's love for Marcelle. For Doane, as Robinson shows, needs to feel the dignity of being able to provide for Marcelle. His ability to love her requires he feel his own self-worth, a term that requires a certain economic situation, something that he loses during the depression.

²⁴⁵ Kittay also identifies how parallel tableau logic is to Christian imagery: "It is action that has become asyndetic act, like the stages of the passion of Christ, the representation of any of which (as when depicted on a stained-glass window) can singly and independently show his martyrdom" (239).

This reminiscence funnels into Lila's understanding of her feelings for Reverend Ames and her experience of him. The tableau and its fixed meaning preface the love letter John gives Lila. Robinson's aesthetic, her incorporation of sentimental tableau, means that philosophically, Lila's union with Rev. Ames builds its meaning on the union of Doane and Marcelle. The message in Rev. Ames's letter reflects a wisdom Lila knows, in part, through her life under Doane: "there is no safety. And there is no choice, either, because it is in the nature of the child to walk" (76). Again, the tableau finds its meaning within the fierce realism of the context within which it is inserted; a scenario of lack and precarity transforms the aesthetic into something wholly sustaining within lives that need such sustaining.

The political appeal in Robinson's Gilead novels reaches its full realization in her practice of tableau. Love requires dignity, which is, in part, Robinson insists, the responsibility of the community to supply. In the dire situation in which he finds himself, Doane resorts to stealing and, in doing so, loses his pride. Robinson's story of love underscores the need for a person to have good work to do (and to receive life-sustaining compensation for it). At the end of the novel, under Lila's much strengthened discerning voice, the narrative revisits Doane's story once more. Like the tableau of Jack kneeling at his father's feet in *Home*, the tableau between Doane and Marcelle recurs, and its recurrence represents a characteristic trait of Robinson's technique. Robinson departs from tableau's characteristic frozenness, offering a meaning which remains only temporarily fixed. The repetition of the image, in an important philosophical sense, thickens the tableau's original meaning. The image gains complexity because it is re-storied. This time, in Lila's newly strengthened voice: "It couldn't be fair to punish people for trying to get by, people who were good by their own lights, when it took all the courage they had to be good. Doane tying that ribbon around Marcelle's ankle. If that wasn't good or bad, it was something she was glad to

have seen” (260). A page before the novel’s close, the narrative goes over, once again, its earlier tableau, underscoring the revitalizing energy in tableau seeing—and this form of seeing seems to develop into a somewhat secular vision in Lila, whose strengthened voice finds religious classifications of good and bad lacking in some vital sense.²⁴⁶

The repetition of stories in Robinson’s novels make a case on an allegorical scale for the need for us, as a society, to shake up the ways we define virtue. And she shows the reader the parameters of that scale such a shakeup would require. The reader first encounters Doane through Lila’s eyes. We know him as Lila’s abandoner. Later, in the stability of a relationship with Rev. Ames, Lila’s mind offers this new perspective on Doane: “Lila was so sure he had wanted to make an orphan of her that *only years later* did she think he might have been a kind man” (110, emphasis added). This perspective affords a person a considerable degree of latitude, so that his existence and identity can transcend economic circumstances. It shows an individual taking on more meaning than any one person’s experience of him could capture. In the slow unfolding of the many perspectives that partake in a story, Robinson extends sympathy to perpetrator and victim alike. For Lila, one perpetrator is Doane. The first story of Lila’s abandonment at a church during the dust storms is told through her eyes:

Once, Doll went off by herself for a few days, after things started getting bad. When they were looking anywhere for work they must have wandered into a place Doll knew from before, and she had gone off on some business of her own and left Lila behind with the others. She’d never done that, not once. Lila had never spent an hour out of sight of her, except the time she spent at school, and then she hated to leave her and couldn’t wait to

²⁴⁶ Wyatt Mason offers a good clarification of how Robinson “documents ... Lila’s mind changes, not owing to the efforts of some external force but out of a righteous need of her own (“The Revelations of Marilynne Robinson,” *The New York Times* Oct. 1, 2014).

get back to her, just to touch her. Doll was always busy with one hand and hugging her against her apron with the other. That time she left Doane's camp she didn't tell any of them where she was going, but she did say she would be back as quick as she could. Lila had never really noticed before that the others didn't talk to her much. She was always with Doll. Once, Marcelle called them the cow with her calf, and Doane smiled. That was after Tammany, when feelings were sore and even Mellie wouldn't have much to do with her. Lila just kept very quiet and helped with whatever she could. By the second day she already felt them hardening against her, and by the third day nobody looked at her, but they looked at each other. There was something they all understood and she should understand, too. On the fourth day, early in the morning, Doane said to her, Come along, and Arthur was with him and Mellie, and they walked down the road into some no-name town, right straight to the church. Doane said, Lila, now you sit on them steps and somebody will come along in a while. You stay there. Mellie don't need to stay. You mind and you'll be all right. Hear me, Lila? She remembered Mellie peering at her the way she did when Lila had gotten a swat or a bee sting, curious to see if she would cry. She remembered them walking away, Arthur and Doane talking between themselves and Mellie tagging along after, and nobody looking back. (51-52)

The preparation of and ultimate betrayal of Lila hinges on the group's refusal to make eye contact with her, a figurative way of evoking the ethical significance of face to face relation with the Other, specifically the alterity of the stranger—the orphan, the widow, the hungry—that Emmanuel Levinas describes in *Totality and Infinity*. Irreducible to the "I" who perceives the stranger, the Other puts the perceiver in question, makes the perceiver feel responsible for the Other to the point of feeling a demand that exceeds what that perceiver can meet (52-53). Robinson

lyrically alludes to this relation, wryly commenting on the asymmetrical nature of it by considering the perspective of the perceived, who, truth be told, is a little put out by the whole transaction:

If you think about a human face, it can be something you don't want to look at, so sad or so hard or so kind. It can be something you want to hide, because it pretty well shows where you've been and what you can expect. And anybody at all can see it, but you can't. It just floats there in front of you. It might as well be your soul, for all you can do to protect it. (82)

A few pages later, Robinson anchors her musing in a realism that brings the philosophy even more down to earth in Lila and Rev. Ames' interaction:

"Then I saw you that morning. I saw your face."

"Don't talk like that. I know about my face."

"I suspect you don't. You don't know how I see it." (85)

Here is Rev. Ames claiming the worth and dignity of Lila's soul and the beauty in her person, and that reclamation forms the beginning of a response to the abandonments she experienced and a soothing of it.

If the first telling of Lila's abandonment registers the numbness under which Lila experiences the event, the second moves to provide explanation. As family goes, Doll and Doane are Lila's two closest caregivers. Lila draws their actions into comparison. Doll says, "I done it because I wasn't finding no way to look after you." Lila reasons, "If Doane had ever bothered to explain, he'd have said the same thing. They were just figuring out where to leave her. For her own good." Still Lila remembers, "[A]fter that she couldn't love Doll like she did all those years. For a while she couldn't." The betrayal leaves her with one governing narrative, "Can't trust nobody" (69). The second retelling of Lila's abandonment also record the angry scene of its

aftermath, that is, in a sense, a familial clash when Doll returns to camp. “Flame roared up and embers flew” Doll first action is to toss a skillet into the fire and scream at Doane, “How could you do that! ... Leave my child sitting on the steps of some church! I might never a found her!” (69). Doane’s reply conveys no measure of angry return, but his actions convey a violence of their own. Lila recollects how he pulled the shawl holding Doll’s bedroll together, the one she had used to wrap Lila in, and “dangled it over the fire, and the flames climbed right up it toward his hand. So that was gone” (70). Lila’s final sentence conveys the forced detachment she has had to foster to keep the sting of pain at bay. Only later does the reader learn that Lila wistfully imagines the shawl as an alternative object to the knife Doll bequeathed her as her sole inheritance; implied in the shawl is an inheritance founded on care-giving rather than defense. Here the ekphrastic tendency of prose comes back, to assign precious meaning only in the second retelling of Lila’s abandonment:

She was sorry there was nothing left of that shawl. It would have been a different thing entirely to tell the old man Doll had left that to her. When Doane held it over the fire it burned so fast it was like a magic trick. It was gone before the heat could touch his hand. It was so worn then, threads that stayed together somehow, you could see right through it. Gray with enough pink here and there to show where the roses used to be. He didn’t know what it was, why they kept it. It was useless, except for the use they made of it, remembering together. There wasn’t much that felt worse than losing that shawl. *There is no speech nor language; their voice is not heard.* That’s true about things. It’s true about people. It’s just true. (134)

Here is a moment where the episodic recursivity transitions into sentimental tableau, yet the effect here is not wholly sentimental. Here, and only in this third retelling, does pain become the

overriding message: “There wasn’t much that felt worse than losing that shawl.” Consider how the quotation from Psalm 19:3 in italics signals the fixed interpretation Lila assigns this tableau, a tableau that could be easily rendered in illustration, as many of the scenes in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* were. But here the meaning is not sentimental (where intensity of emotion defies being captured in words) as much as sublime, identifying a terrifying reality that finds its most eloquent expression in silence, or for Robinson, a divinity that traverses national languages in its universal reach, as in the biblical notion of speaking in tongues.

The story of Lila’s abandonment becomes the story of Doane’s change of temperament, for the narrative explains each event as a product of the dust storms and the new kind of unbearable adversity it brought. “Doane said he had seen hard times, but this just did beat all.” Here the narrative archives the moment Doane turns to meanness, “when he began to sort of hate Marcelle.” Again, it is specified according to the hunger these times brought, a time of boiling milkweed for nourishment. Marcelle “had gone out into a bottomy field where she knew there would be nettles, and somebody else had already gathered them all. Doane told her she was ugly when she cried and he didn’t want to look at her. That was when Doll went off on her own and was gone for four days” (109). Doane’s response to such dire economic circumstances moves him out of his position of integrity:

A time came when Doane couldn’t figure a way to keep them fed. His good name meant nothing because along these new roads he was just one more dirty, weary man with dirty, weary women and children straggling after him. He couldn’t very well keep his pride when he couldn’t even ask for work without seeming to ask for pity. Those years of saying, if he had to, Be fair to me and I’ll be fair to you, and being twice as careful to live up to his side of the deal as he was to make sure the other fellow lived up to his, all that

was gone, and still they trailed him, trusting him because they always had. They got work once pulling the tassels off corn, miserable work at best, out in the field with all the dust and heat and the grasshoppers getting on you and the itchiness of the silk and the edges of the corn leaves rasping against you. But by that time they almost weren't up to it. They went so slow they didn't finish the rows they were supposed to do, even though they worked until dark, till they could hardly lift their arms. And then they weren't paid but half what had been agreed on, because they didn't finish. Mellie cursed and cried where the man could hear and Doane slapped her. That was the first time he ever did any such thing. What does it matter if some ignorant man nobody would even notice loses the pride he has been so careful of all his life? if somebody said to him, No work here, mister—that's just how it was, no harm intended. But it was also a great voice they heard everywhere, saying, Now, those half-grown children will be hungry and you'll have the same of it and there's nothing you can do but wish at least you didn't have to look at them. And he did seem to begin hating the sight of them. But they were bitterly loyal to him for the insult he suffered because his pride had been their pride for so many years.

(110-111)

This passage surely fixes interpretation on an episode. Through Lila's own ruminations, Robinson is telling us how compassionately we are to think of Doane and his choices:

How could it be that none of it mattered? It was most of what happened. But if it did matter, how could the world go on the way it did when there were so many people living the same and worse? Poor was nothing, tired and hungry were nothing. But people only trying to get by, and no respect for them at all, even the wind soiling them. No matter how proud and hard they were, the wind making their faces run with tears. That was

existence, and why didn't it roar and wrench itself apart like the storm it must be, if so much of existence is all that bitterness and fear? Even now, thinking of the man who called himself her husband, what if he turned away from her? It would be nothing. What if the child was no child? There would be an evening and a morning. The quiet of the world was terrible to her, like mockery. She had hoped to put an end to these thoughts, but they returned to her, and she returned to them. (112)

At this point in Lila's settled life, she is haunted by the sorrow she finds for the people in her past. The tension of lifestyles, her current state of safety and the adversity she and her family knew, move the narrative away from a soft sentimental wash of forgiveness for all. Little conciliation can be found in Lila's thought that "The quiet of the world was terrible...like mockery."

To read with the grain of the narrative, we are to be moved by his plight and find a crushing sorrow in its consequences:

Doane was nothing but an ignorant little thief, his clothes all filthy with his own blood. The judge said, "I guess the dog got the better of you, fella. Looks like he took a pretty good bite. You got anything to say for yourself?" And what could he say? It was all the pride he had left just to say nothing. Doll had her pride, too, ugly as she was. She cared for a child. Yes, she stole it—away from death, probably. Away from loneliness. And she brought it up to be a fairly decent woman who wasn't afraid of a day's work. The way they used to laugh together! It was better than anything. (121)

Near the novel's close Lila once more revisits the scene of her abandonment:

Now here she was again, worrying over people who were long past help. You can't even pray for someone to have his pride back when every possible thing has happened to take it away from him. She thought, Everything went bad everywhere and pride like his must

have just drifted off the earth, more or less, as quiet as mist in the morning, and people were sad and hard who never were before. Looking into each other's faces, their hearts sinking. If she ever took to praying it would be for that time and all those people who must have wondered what had become of them, what they had done to find themselves without so much as a good night's rest to comfort them. She would call down calm on every one of them, on the worst and the bitterest ones first of all. Doane and Arthur walking away; Mellie, too, never looking back, leaving her an orphan on the step of a church. Without the bitterness none of that would have happened. (234-235)

In this final return to the dust bowl trials, easily read as an allegorical marker for trials of other sorts, Lila exhibits the magnanimous care for humanity that sentimental narratives at their best leave an audience feeling. That care directs itself at the bitter, a far cry from the virtuous victims in need that often occupy sentimental depictions. Lila's people are the people not quite up to tableau, the ones whose pain goes unnoticed, whose dignity drifts away "quiet as mist in the morning." What is there to be said for Robinson's choice to make Doane one of the novel's key objects of pity? *Lila* invites readers into sympathetic identification with Doane, a poor white male, who acts, from time to time, as head of a family of migrant workers. Insofar as *Lila* parallels sentimental narration it retains a degree of its representational optics in extending care to certain subjects over others. The emotional appeal of Doane's story finds its strength at the end of the narrative, only after Lila has found a certain measure of comfort, the necessary perceptual space to see feelingly from Doane's perspective.

I agree with Erin Penner that in *Lila* "Robinson demonstrates the social and political benefits of literary conversation" (Penner 278). While Penner's illuminating example identifies how Robinson brings *Lila* into conversation with William Faulkner, in particular the *Bundren*

family from *As I Lay Dying* (1930), I focus on the social and political benefits of a more general (but also rather Faulknerian) aspect of Robinson's storytelling: her choice to layer retellings of a story so that an event can be seen from multiple perspectives. Robinson differs from Faulkner in achieving this through a reflective consciousness rather than a collective one, as Faulkner does in "A Rose for Emily." Robinson's choice to focalize her story through a singular reflective consciousness proves powerful because it demonstrates that, given time and a change in circumstance, a person can achieve a more expansive view of events—even of the most painful kind. Robinson attests to the need to revisit storylines to disclose a more fully human meaning, particularly if one is to understand subjects who live on the margins. Specifically, I see the recursive nature of Robinson's sentimental tableau finding a vital and grounding complement in her narrative's cyclical return to certain stories, namely those episodes in her central characters' pasts that require retelling for a fuller truth to unfold. The two movements, visual and textual, work in relation to each other, modifying the meaning each offers. Robinson shows her characters' reliance on tableau to tame "felt experience" by cultivating more ethically oriented dispositions and habits of thought (Allen 190). All the Gilead novels revisit episodes in a character's past to grant new dimensions and perspectives, and *Lila* realizes the democratic import of this practice most fully.

In claiming that Marilynne Robinson productively rather than antagonistically takes up the project of sentimental narration, I challenge the prevailing conversation around her work. It makes sense that this conversation has not considered her work sentimental; her elegant style and complex characterizations lead us away from such an association.²⁴⁷ Yet, there is much to be gained in

²⁴⁷ Elizabeth Ellis and Rachel Griffis offer the most direct arguments against reading Robinson as sentimental. Ellis argues that *Gilead* and *Home* "revise the 'home as haven' trope by interrogating its limits" (187). Briallen Hopper who writes an admiring critique of the racial politics in the Gilead trilogy

exploring her work's sentimental elements. The context of sentiment offers a way to account for the strength of her political appeal, which offers a more democratic and liberal alternative to the family values that one presently finds in American politics. In identifying Robinson's extensive writing with some of the work of sentimentalism from past traditions, I hope to strengthen the sense of her social and literary contribution to our present.

A sentimental politics for the twenty-first century matters for democracy. And as a novelist the former president of the United States chose to interview, Marilynne Robinson matters for her powerful way of figuring one vision of sentimental politics in action. Analyzing her vision of social reform as a literary critic has required that I plot the coordinates of Robinson's unique version of sentimental identification, namely her way of locating the sentimental gaze in more proximate relations that more immediately impinge upon the viewer's realm of action. Her novels do not offer distant suffering or even distant looking but a way of returning the beholder to immediate circles of care and commitment, whether those encounters be with family or strangers.

Analyzing Robinson's vision of reform also required that I considered how her characters model states of mind. Robinson dramatizes thoughts as active and, therefore, as requiring cultivation. That cultivation assumes two planes, a visual one, as I have analyzed under the concept of tableau, and a textual one, as I have identified in Robinson's use of multiple retellings. Yet Robinson has a way of downplaying the importance of words. Over an image of a pelican soaring about an Iowa river, Lila thinks, "She'd seen those birds all her life and never had a name for them, because they had nothing to do with getting by" (143). There is a certain inclusivity and

veers near identifying Robinson's sentimental liberalism but omits using the term *sentimental* in her writing. Hopper points out an anachronism in the historical reference to black suffering in the Montgomery bus boycott during the Civil Rights Movement in *Home*, a mistake that links *Home* to the kind of narrative error that Steven Weisenburger identifies in novels that have social projects. Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* serves as Weisenburger's primary illustration.

fairmindedness in not only acknowledging but detailing the lack certain economic policies have imposed on the people who suffer under them. It is also significant, however, that Robinson has the same character who stands for those who have less words at their disposal also think, “if she had more words she might understand things better” (113). “I had to learn that word ‘existence,’” Lila tells Ames. “You was talking about it all the time. It took me a while to figure out what you even meant by it” (113). As universal a thing as thinking about existence is, Robinson here also reveals how figured by access and class that privilege is. In according the possession and use of certain words for the privilege that it is, Robinson does not shift away from words in favor of a solely visual presentation that stuns the beholder. Like Harriet Beecher Stowe’s Uncle Tom, Lila’s literacy is largely self-taught. What does it mean to have certain kinds of words and their concepts at one’s disposal? Robinson captures an important demand when Lila says, “You should be teaching me.” And yet, it is Lila—like Tom—who ultimately serves as exemplar and teacher. More than the Boughtons or even Reverend Ames, Lila connects to the runaway boy, to model a form of fellowship that extends care to a stranger on absolutely relational, non-hierarchical, terms.

Robinson’s narrators attest that inadequacy of perception dogs us all. As Ames tells his son in *Gilead*, “It all means more than I can tell you. So you must not judge what I know by what I find words for” (114). By redirecting the reader’s attention to the limitations of Reverend Ames’s narrative voice, Robinson prepares the reader to recognize the limitations in all stories.²⁴⁸ For a fuller truth to emerge, the writer, just like the viewer, must in some manner erase himself, must acknowledge the inadequacy of one person’s vision in favor of a more expansive democratic one. To reach a more democratic vision requires this form of selflessness from us all, and this

²⁴⁸ Here I echo Judith Dundas’s argument about Shakespeare in her article “To See Feelingly”: “By redirecting our attention to the limitations of all the senses, however, Shakespeare prepares us also to recognize the limitations of every form of expression” (56).

selflessness, for Robinson, finds nowhere more perfect a model than within family life. As reading Robinson's novels and essays in relationship indicates, her cultural project romanticizes the family once again. While this project is importantly visual, it is not solely a visual one. Robinson embeds her project's visuality within a thoroughly textual praxis, which requires a viewer transcend ego as well as brute fact to undergo the recursive process of revisiting (narrative) reality again and again until a more fully human meaning emerges. Reality does not cede meaning of its own accord. Robinson's novels tell stories over and over, accounting for many vantage points, until the dignity of each participant becomes known as a felt experience and living reality. If the story that emerges always seems heartbreaking, it also retains the indispensable ability to soothe the reader through experiences of nearly unbearable loss, just as it attests to life being about more than that loss. For as Ruth from *Housekeeping* knows, "Fact explains nothing. On the contrary, it is fact that requires explanation" (217). Only the practice of storytelling can redeem fact, in its unparalleled ability to give life human meaning.

6.0 CONCLUSION: SOLITUDE, THE SELF AND COMMUNITY

As we have no immediate experience of what other men feel, we can form no idea of the manner in which they are affected, but by conceiving what we ourselves should feel in the like situation.

–Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, I.i (1759)

The challenge of modernity is to live a life without illusions while not becoming disillusioned.

–Antonio Gramsci, Letter from Prison, 19 December 1929

Our unhappiness comes from a single thing, not knowing how to be comfortably alone in a room.

–Blaise Pascal, *Pensées* (1670)

In the most pessimistic prognosis, a robust occurrence of fellowship comes only after catastrophic loss and a protracted period of solitude. Deep fellowship, the kind that binds a free-thinking populace, emerges as a second order feeling: fellow feeling ensues as an incidental though felicitous result of loss endured. “The answer to loss is the soul’s knowledge of itself, pared down and separated, in a way that it must learn to accept,” Robert Ferguson offers (226). As a country, as a world, we have entered such a moment. Time will determine what we are capable of making of it. The authors whose works I scrutinized in the preceding pages place great value in the sympathetic imagination. This act reflects their shared recognition that the sympathetic imagination is an indelible human faculty; that it continues to hold relevance in literary tradition; and ultimately, that invoking it leads to more genuine forms of community.²⁴⁹

²⁴⁹ I say act to capture the sense in which valuing something implies an active practice, in this case, a literary one.

Sentimental studies has gained traction in the past few decades for a reason. The social conditions structuring our contemporary moment bear a striking parallel to those of sentimentalism's founding moment. Moral sense philosophers responded to a dramatic intensification of commercial activity in their time. On the eve of the industrial revolution, writers like Shaftesbury and Smith questioned dominant accounts of human nature and offered new models for asserting human sociality. In the last two decades, we have witnessed a comparable shift in our time. Companies like Google, Amazon, Apple, Facebook, and Microsoft have dramatically transformed the social landscape, shifting human encounters from the once dominant mode of embodied communication (in-person or in-voice) to a qualitatively different disembodied norm—powered by social networking. This transformation has only gained intensity in a time of pandemic and social distancing. We are still in the midst of comprehending what this signifies for the sympathetic imagination and the human relations it brings into being.

Where the industrial revolution remapped physical landscapes, moving rural folk into cities, the tech revolution has remapped mental landscapes, altering the circuits for processing information and organizing protests. Social movements, like Occupy Wall Street and Black Lives Matter, develop and grow through social media. Activists within such movements now use digital platforms to confront systems of inequality. Demands for change now resound on the web as often as they do on the street. Last year in Chile's capital people flooded the streets in one synchronized motion, powered by the civil protest that rippled through the web weeks earlier. Journalists from Santiago to Hong Kong hail "the rallying power of the social media," calling it "a crucial enabler for leaderless movements" (Rachman et al.). Pressing beyond the initial promise of large-scale demonstrations, techno-sociologist Zeynep Tufekci encourages us to consider the differences between widespread participation and organizational depth. Attaining organizational depth,

Tufekci says, requires that people “think together collectively and make hard decisions together, create consensus and innovate, and maybe even more crucially, keep going together through differences” (Tufekci). One might say that the actions that beget effective activism echo the very same actions that produce fellow feeling.

Grassroot efforts like the abolitionist movement and the American Civil Rights Movement represent an older paradigm that channeled sentimental literary form and forged sentimental human relations. Only a century ago, the news arrived in a hard copy, in a format notable for its distinctive beginning and end. Print conventions dictated a certain hierarchy; editors began with what they deemed the most important news stories, relegating minor stories to the last pages. Newsfeeds have dismantled this hierarchy, for good or ill. The personalized daily newsfeed has altered our emotional relationship to world affairs as well. More precisely, it has intensified a longstanding cultural attitude toward distance suffering. *Downton Abbey* captures this attitude well when Maggie Smith proclaims: “One can’t go to pieces at the death of every foreigner. We’d all be in a constant state of collapse whenever we opened a newspaper” (Fellowes 193). Smith as the Dowager Countess of Grantham voices quite a departure from Adam Smith’s call upon the human conscience to draw a line of connection between the pursuit of one’s individual interests and the lives of others.

Newsfeeds have become so anxiety-inducing that some deem it good self-care to limit or avoid the information they contain. Some consume information vicariously, bordering on entertainment. James Baldwin indicted such a posture “as the signal of secret and violent inhumanity” in tagging the sentimentalist’s “arid heart” (14). Typified by quantity over quality, news consumption breeds an insensitivity that expedites sentimentalist response of the kind Baldwin critiqued. Claire Wardle argues that in our century the format of online reporting seeds a

low trust society. Sheer quantity of information dulls attention and challenges fact-checking. “[I]n an era of social media,” Wardle says, “we just look at the headlines and we don’t watch the clip.” Wardle contends that in this context people lean on gut feeling and word of mouth. Wardle’s work documents how online misinformation inflicts greater harm than town gossip, “which would hit the boundary of the village and [...] stop” (Zomorodi).

Social psychologist Adam Alter explains how “[s]topping cues were everywhere in the twentieth century.” “They were baked into everything we did. We opened a newspaper and ultimately reached the end. [...]he way we consume media today is such that there are no stopping cues. The news feed just rolls on, and everything’s bottomless,” argues Alter (Alter). Stopping cues promote the work of inner cultivation while outer image predominates online. The social has territorialized private space and eroded our sense of privacy. Alter proclaims the obvious but it’s an insight often ignored: many social media apps that draw attention are “a little bit hollow and not especially good for well-being” (Zomorodi). Apps lead us to encounter life as something to record or to post rather than to live. Facebook frames this as “sharing,” yet face-to-face interactions holds the potential for more depth. A similar qualitative difference may be observed expressing sympathy online in contrast to in person. How apropos that Adam Smith proposed we imagine our connection to human suffering in terms of losing one’s “little finger.”²⁵⁰ In place of Smith’s notion of sympathy, we now use a finger to click “I feel your pain.”

In *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Smith accords privacy a central role in structuring the kind of sympathy necessary for communal well-being: “As we have no immediate experience of what other men feel, we can form no idea of the manner in which they are affected, but by conceiving what we ourselves should feel in the like situation” (I.i p. 13). Smith seems to imply

²⁵⁰ See my discussion of Smith’s analogy in chapter 3, page 147.

that when we impose our feeling states upon another or presume to know another's private thoughts, we err. His definition works through negation to ensure sympathy assumes a precise form. Sympathy works when we keep appropriate boundaries and grant others their private thoughts. Such boundaries ideally promote inclusion of diverse subjectivities within a community. Lauren Berlant alights on a similar point in identifying how "sentimental attention [...] does not require substantive *likeness* to repair a broken world" (Berlant and Greenwald 86). I propose that historical awareness of sentimental history may lead us to value the privacy of our emotional worlds in a new light.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines *privacy* as "[t]he state or condition of being alone, undisturbed, or free from public attention, as a matter of choice or right; seclusion; freedom from interference or intrusion" ("Privacy"). Privacy signifies our right to our feelings, to our thoughts, and even to our very selves. To highlight the role privacy plays in structuring sympathetic relations, let me recall Orlando Patterson's editorial, cited in my introduction. In this piece published in *The New York Times*, Patterson recommends shifting our focus away from the racist thoughts our neighbors entertain in secret to instead ask that they behave in public in non-racist ways. Private thoughts, *passions* one might call them, are often not the thoughts to which we finally consent. They are not always (or even often) the feelings that ultimately motivate our outward actions. The old model, which regards emotion as an inward state, has the merit of identifying ways in which feelings need to be recognized and named; assented to or rejected; and, to some degree, cultivated. Only in undertaking such work can we act in accord with our best judgment—judgment upon which we have "also thought long and deeply" (Wordsworth, "Preface" 98). We need to challenge the notion that public proclamation of a passing whim denotes authentic liberation. True emotional freedom requires work. In this sense, the poet Audre Lorde's words gain real power: "I feel,

therefore I am” becomes an exercise in self-constitution. Lorde helps make the place of this space of freedom visible. Robinson calls this place *inwardness*.²⁵¹ Legal scholar and literary critic Robert Ferguson analyzes inwardness as an “obsession in American literature” (2). John Ames’s voice in *Gilead* rises from this space. “I don’t know why solitude would be a balm for loneliness,” Ames tells his son, “but that is how it always was for me” (18-19).

Affect theory works to promote a different register of emotional awareness. In breaking away from old accounts of emotion as private experience, affect theory strikes a surprisingly harmonic cord with the present. I suggest embracing the literary-political work of emotion on a different front, the more old-fashioned route of the sentimental. The basic right to compose oneself—to create the emotional landscape of one’s mind—is also a political act. This act orients a person toward a particular reality. Emotional self-composition, however, presupposes certain humane living conditions. When we as a public find it difficult to separate the private from the social, individualism comes under threat. By individualism, I do not mean the popular understanding of it as the freedom to pursue profit unhindered. Robert Ferguson wisely terms this “[a] separating individualism, [which] thrives on leveling tendencies, distrust of authority, suspicion of others, narrow social engagement, and a presentism that loses interest in relationships across time” (4). Ferguson cites Alexis de Tocqueville’s 1835 study *Democracy in America* for its insight on this matter. Tocqueville writes, “Individualism is a mature and calm feeling, which disposes each member of the community to sever himself from the mass of his fellow-creatures; and to draw apart with his family and friends; so that, after he has thus formed a little circle of his own, he willingly leaves society at large to itself.” Social “problems outside of that circle have

²⁵¹ In 2010, Robinson made this polemical point in the very title of her collected lectures, *Absence of Mind: The Dispelling of Inwardness from the Modern Myth of the Self*.

little meaning,” Ferguson points out, “until [disaster] decides to enter it. Decline and misfortune have no moral status unless they happen to be your own” (4).²⁵² The coronavirus pandemic in our time may serve as a disaster of this kind, rousing these circles to wider social precarity.

In that hope, let me persist in naming what makes individualism “a mature and calm feeling,” though it may counter ordinary language to employ individualism in this way. This more productive understanding of individualism signifies the right within a democracy to individuate. Contrary to popular belief and a robust American tradition, being individuated does not equate with independence and self-reliance. As Ferguson writes, “[N]o matter how many assertions of self-reliance one finds in the ideology of American individualism, everyone needs companionship, and no one at any level is ever self-made” (5). In its association with solitude, individualism proves a necessary condition for literary production: writers, like many other artists, “have learned how to be alone in the act of creation” (Ferguson 16). Individualism in this sense might be claimed as a protective right.²⁵³ Tocqueville made an allowance for protecting this sort of individualism, as I’m calling it, in chapter five of *Democracy in America*. Tocqueville identifies the greatest threat to democracy in the United States as “the despotic influence of a majority—or [...] the aggressions of regal power.” We might substitute *corporate* for *regal* to come to a closer characterization of our times, which often feels more oligarchic than democratic. Either way, Tocqueville’s point remains relevant: healthy societies protect their members’ autonomy to frame reality apart from the dominant culture. While Tocqueville was the first to coin “the tyranny of the majority over the

²⁵² Tocqueville foresees individualism’s grim progression in these terms: “individualism, at first, only saps the virtues of public life; but, in the long run, it attacks and destroys all others, and is at length absorbed in downright egotism.”

²⁵³ In *Alone in America*, Robert Ferguson writes about how “solitude is an obsession in American literature”: “The isolated characters in American fiction appeal to us through their inward claims of identity when pitted against the pressures of a surrounding community. They appeal because they indicate how we might talk to ourselves when the pressures come our way” (2).

minority,” twenty-four years later John Stuart Mill incorporated the same concept in *On Liberty* (1859). In his essay “What is Poetry?” Mill locates in lyrical expression the power to fight such tyranny. Mill affirms poetry as the space of “feeling confessing itself to itself, in moments of solitude.” Devoid of solitude, poetry, Mill suggests, is betrayed by a “desire of making an impression on another mind,” and, therefore, rings false (“What” 12-13). *On Liberty* issues from a genuine place of concern, familiar to us still, that social forces may generate “stifling conformity in thought, character, and action” (Macleod).²⁵⁴

The tech revolution has further amplified such concerns. In the digital era, only the government is subject to the fourth amendment. Tech companies store “perfect records of everything you’ve clicked, everything you’ve liked, how long you’ve stayed on a page, [even] when you had to scroll up to reread a section. All of that is captured and they use this to model ways to influence your behavior to actually shape and manipulate the decisions you make as a human being” (Zomorodi). American whistleblower Edward Snowden calls this surveillance capitalism. Antitrust enforcers, consumer protection lawyers, the U.S. Federal Trade Commission, and the European Commission for a Europe Fit for the Digital Age all work at an interface similar to that which earlier moral sense philosophers did—endeavoring to assure healthier forms of human sociality in the face of extraordinary economic change. Professionals working in these areas often note how the general public continues to perceive the Internet as a space of freedom, as a zone apart, despite cyberbullying, disinformation, election interference, hate speech, and monopolistic markets. Claude McKay captures much the same mindset in his depiction of Banana Bottom. A couple generations after emancipation, villagers fail to see how the family who set them

²⁵⁴ The social forces Mill had in mind in imagining instances “when society is itself the tyrant” extended well beyond “political functionaries” (*On Liberty* 4). For a critique of Mill’s liberalism, see David Goldberg’s “Liberalism’s Limits: Carlyle and Mill on ‘The Negro Question.’”

free had monopolized the food supply chain as the village's only grocer and butcher. Illusions about the Internet distract in a similar way, leading us to forget some of the values we once held as fundamental, among them privacy and consent. Consumer choice recedes when only a couple companies produce social messaging apps. "And it's the lack of choice that essentially forces us to give up our privacy," Manoush Zomorodi asserts. Social media users think of privacy as having "something to hide." Actually, Snowden contends, "privacy is something to protect" (Zomorodi). Snowden warns that resigning our right to such protection may have profound social implications. Privacy shields the minority, whether religious, ethnic, or otherwise. Privacy protects the unpopular, the marginal, and even the ostracized.

Historically, sentimental novels have worked to advocate for similar subjects in the imaginative realm. Sentimental novels depict such feeling subjects and the feeling-thoughts that illuminate their differences from wider society, often a society that excludes them in some way. The transformative function of good literature rests in its ability to articulate new ways of being in the world. In creating literary characters as subjects to be known, the authors in this study esteem human uniqueness. They practice *poiesis* at the limits of language, giving form to an array of human subjectivities.²⁵⁵ In *Quicksand*, Nella Larsen fashions a character whose quest for individuation will not be placated. In *Banana Bottom*, Claude McKay puts into the hands of a social pariah the power to bring a population back to its senses. Crazy Bow's piano concert lifts "the emotional fog" of revivalism from the countryside (272). Channeling the spirit of catharsis in

²⁵⁵ Jason Stevens characterizes this relation to language well in describing Ames's letter-writing style in *Gilead*, "his awareness of the aesthetic potential that inheres in speech even when it threatens to fray as communication." While true of *Gilead*, it is also true across Robinson's novels that "words are artifacts," as Stevens claims: "dislocated from 'idiomatic vernacular' and freshly combined, they can be made to reveal and examine the ripples in experience that we so often sense without pausing long enough to behold their extension" (Stevens 2).

Greek tragedy, McKay intimates that the communal act of listening to Crazy Bow's music bestows soundness of judgment. In *Home* and *Lila*, Marilynne Robinson finds her models of goodness, kindness and sympathy in the strange and the heretical. The characters of Jack and Lila stand apart. The outcast Jack and the stranger Lila perceive their worlds in ways antithetical to the Christian worldview of fellow characters, yet they are the ones who emerge as exemplary. Apart from the crowd and far from its norms, the actions of Jack and Lila call others to account. The strangeness of Jack and the eccentricity of Lila prove clarifying. Their presence in Gilead, at times, feels profane, yet this is not a bad thing. Their views present a welcome challenge to settled orthodoxy, while their experiences in the secular world breathe life into a town whose "biblical name [...] means 'hard' or 'barren'" (Ferguson 204). Larsen, McKay, and Robinson teach us that the role of the sympathetic imagination extends beyond the preliminary work of community forming. To sympathize, they propose, means to form diverse communities capable of thinking together and of producing strange and heretical thoughts—thoughts that retain the capacity to profoundly change who we are and even who we count as human.

Finally, these novelists return literary imagination to the hearth, heralding the domestic space as a refuge from dominant culture and as a sanctuary for eccentric subjectivities. The tableau that concludes *Banana Bottom* vividly illustrates this function, where sentimental domesticity (far from championing backward ideologies, such as "A woman's place is in the home") fosters dissenting philosophies. McKay perceives this function of domestic space even as a child:

My mother didn't care very much about what people did and why and how they did it.

She only wanted to help them if they were in trouble. [...] All of us preferred my mother who was so much more elastic and understanding. She was a virtuous woman too. My father ... was a Presbyterian Calvinist. A real black Scotchman. We boys wondered how

his education could have made him that way. He was so entirely different from all our colored neighbors with their cockish-liquor drinking and rowdy singing. [...My mother] always took the children's side in dealings with my father who was strict and stern. (*A Long* 247-248)

McKay recognizes the unconditional support provided by his mother for the development of her children's personalities. The sense of home emerges as both a source of renewal and a safe space for personal expression. Only four years after Virginia Woolf wrote, "a woman must have money and a room of her own," McKay lauds the domestic space as a powerful nurturer of marginal intelligences—the kind of intelligences that may someday become critical agents of change (Woolf 4). By ending *Banana Bottom* with Bitia sitting alone in her parlor, McKay stresses the critical need to break away from society, so that later, and only later, one might sympathize more fully with it.

7.0 EPILOGUE

I am finishing my dissertation under quarantine. The coronavirus pandemic has forced many indoors, where we are, quite literally, taking refuge. In this precarious situation, some homes will not prove refuge enough. In sentimental literary history, the domestic setting signifies potential—a covenant of near-biblical proportion. For authors writing in the sentimental tradition, the hearth represents a place to gather and creatively explore. For American authors within the sentimental tradition, home represents “the pivotal scene of moral value and educational primacy” (Ferguson 10).²⁵⁶ More generally in sentimental tradition, the hearth offers a place for rest, reflection, and companionship. Ideally, in the company of family, we receive support and are renewed. Refreshed, we can go on—much as Jack does in *Home*. We take a break from our worldly obligations to partake in an evening meal. We share our feelings with our life partner across the space of a table. We break bread. In such moments we find and fashion our individuality. In discovering this side of ourselves, we also recognize our apartness, even from the ones we love the most.

In this historical moment, I fear losing loved ones in a way I never have before. Proximity to this kind of loss has a way of altering one’s vision. Tableau in the sentimental novel approximates this vision. American art critic Peter Schjeldahl predicts that “the casualties of the coronavirus will accompany us spectrally” when we are free to roam through museums once more. The loss I have experienced has already begun to follow me in the pages I read and write. In a real

²⁵⁶ Robert Ferguson links this conception of home to the broadly circulated sermon “Christian Nurture” (1847) by American theologian Horace Bushnell (8).

historical sense, our losses within this pandemic bring us closer experientially to the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century readers of sentimental novels, people who daily lived the reality of life's fragility. Literary critic Ann Douglas emphasizes how suffering shaped Harriet Beecher Stowe's life and motivated her: "the loss of a beloved child in the Cincinnati plague of 1849 helped inspire the poignant sense of family loss and grief in *Uncle Tom*" (Douglas, "Introduction" 20). Stowe wrote with the pain of having watched her son Charley suffer and die in infancy. In a letter to her husband Calvin, she writes, "Yet I have just seen him in his death agony, looked on his imploring face when I could not help nor soothe nor do one thing, not one, to mitigate his cruel suffering, do nothing but pray in my anguish that he might die soon" (Hedrick 191). Joan Hedrick, Stowe's biographer, characterizes this tragedy as "one of the most common and profound events of nineteenth-century family life" (191).

COVID-19 is ours, though the disease more often takes the old than the young. We mourn the loss of the wise and experienced among us, rather than the innocent. We find ourselves "convened under a viral thundercloud," Schjeldahl writes. How foreign this reality had become to us! We forget but Schjeldahl reminds us:

Only as the nineteenth century unfolds, with improvements in sanitation and other living conditions (for the rising middle classes, at least), does mortal insecurity wane—barring such episodic ravages as tuberculosis and syphilis, which, like AIDS a century later, could seem to the unaffected to be selective of their victims—and death start to become an inconvenience in the lives of other people. Now, in our world of effective treatments for almost anything, death obtains at the extremes of the statistical and the anecdotal, apart from those we love, of course.

This is no longer the case, and our vision is altered for it. Mortality, Schjeldahl argues, haunts the old masters. It shapes the vision of the human their oil portraits proffer. Schjeldahl provides a reading of Diego Velázquez's "Las Meninas" (1656), a piece of art that appears to him in a new light.

The sentimental novel in this moment appears to me in a new light. The tableau vision I analyze in my final chapter has come to settle on old memories freshly surfaced of a family member recently departed. In *Gilead*, Rev. Ames, weakened from a heart condition, perceives life through its imminent loss. We all are resembling Ames a little these days.²⁵⁷ Life's value sharpens under such delicate conditions. It does not sharpen out of nostalgia or from an impulse to deify the deceased but from a newly apprehended, quickened sense of life's brevity. "We know ourselves through the stories that we truthfully tell about ourselves, separating out the distortions that we sometimes add and that can cause us to lose ourselves," Robert Ferguson writes of Robinson's Rev. Ames. Ames "has given meaning to himself and others through the love that he so accurately tells" (Ferguson 230). Insight of this ilk, guarded well, guides one to see more clearly and pursue more wisely what ultimately matters. Early in the history of the sentimental novel, deathbed scenes regularly provided this clarifying perspective. Literary critic Jonathan Williams identifies how eighteenth-century sentimentalism "allow[ed] a person to bond with any number of other people regardless of whether they have had prior interactions," but, he goes on to argue, sentimentalism is "a discourse about learning how to die" (175, 176). "[D]eath creates fellowship," claims

²⁵⁷ Jason Stevens draws an illuminating analogy between Ames' writing practice and "one of Robinson's esteemed contemporaries, Annie Dillard," who counsels: "Write as if you were dying. At the same time, assume you write for an audience consisting solely of terminal patients. That is, after all the case. What would you begin writing if you knew you would die soon? What could you say to a dying person that would not enrage by its triviality" (Stevens 1-2; Dillard 13). Also see Elizabeth Ellis for a reading of *Gilead* "as a deathbed epistle" (181).

Williams. As a last resort, when other forms of bonding have floundered, death unifies us. On this front, sentimentalism breaks rank. Shedding any alliances it might have held with the status quo, sentimentalism lays claim to moral allegiances that “are incompatible with the conditions of the modern world” (Williams 181).

In literary history, this morality has often assumed Christian form. Robinson carries on the tradition in her Gilead novels but also modifies it. *Lila* ends with an eccentric vision of what heaven must be like. Lila’s musings emerge from an alienated space, uncannily evocative of our own. For Lila, heaven is “that eternity of his” (*his* signifying her husband). Heaven isn’t “something she had known to hope for.” Heaven, Lila supposes, is composed of the people we cannot “bear to be without”—“no matter what they’d been up to in this life.” Lila’s vision goes on to be more inclusive than this, counting those “people no one would miss, who had done no special harm, who just lived and died as well as they could manage” (258). In this guise, her vision recalls earlier invocations of heaven in sentimental novels, in which heaven served “as a model for what the earthly political order should resemble, and [...] as a critique of the modern world” (Williams 182). Jonathan Williams identifies how in Sarah Fielding’s *The Adventures of David Simple* (1744) and Henry Mackenzie’s *The Man of Feeling* (1771), “David’s and Harley’s deathbed utterances express their dreams of a better future.” Neither David nor Harley, however, can “locate these futures in the lived world” (J. Williams 193). Nor, for that matter, it seems, can we. The people whom the coronavirus has claimed are taken away from us with not a moment to linger in love. The virus bars us from uniting in mourning when they are gone. Where do we look for consolation, for the visionary experience that comes out of togetherness? We mourn apart now.

Our moment differs from David’s and Harley’s in another important respect. The scientific advantages of the modern world might have saved us in January. Though there was potential for

preparedness, resources were not mobilized in time to spare some in their hour of need. We face a different problem, arising from different historical conditions than of the sentimental period. Yet in an important respect, sentimental novelists anticipated the current state. That state, Schjeldahl contends, helps him to see Velázquez's "Las Meninas" in a new light. Its meaning appears tragic: dynastic confidence near tottering. Though Schjeldahl has a different historical interlocutor in mind, his words work equally well for my purposes in the reevaluation of the sentimental:

This sort of reevaluation can happen when events disrupt your life's habitual ways and means. You may be taken not only out of yourself—the boon of successful work in every art form, when you're in the mood for it—but out of your time, relocated to a particular past that seems to dispel, in a flash of undeniable reality, everything that you thought you knew. It's not like going back to anything. It's like finding yourself anticipated as an incidental upshot of fully realized, unchanging truths. The impression passes quickly, but it leaves a mark that's indistinguishable from a wound.

Though no one desires such a wound, once inflicted, it delivers a profound awareness of reality. We must hold fast to that vision, as time and strength allow, for we cannot afford to forget that which moves us to live more deliberately.

APPENDIX A CRITICAL ISSUES REGARDING *QUICKSAND*

Positioning myself within Larsen scholarship required deciding how to interpret the readings scholars had made of *Quicksand*'s relation to the tragic mulatta genre, work that, in turn, helped me to articulate my own view on literature and its relation to criticism and theory.

Larsen scholars Judith Berzon, Margot Norris, and Beverly Haviland read *Quicksand*'s protagonist Helga Crane as a tragic mulatta. Other critics tend to read the novel as subverting the genre—an interpretation that both whitewashes the historical strangeness of the text and makes the text doing the subverting more in vogue, more in agreement with the critic's own views, that is, more "like us." That is, subversion carries connotations of rebellion and excitement, while doing little to question the status quo. Deborah McDowell cites the epigraph by Langston Hughes as evidence for reading the novel within the tragic mulatta genre but suggests that female sexuality is the more apt framework with which to read the novel; Debra B. Silverman continues McDowell's reading, arguing the mulatta myth defines the form sexuality assumes in the novel (608). While Claudia Tate identifies a group of critics who read Helga within the tragic mulatta form, her own position develops Arthur P. Davis's critique of Robert Bone, Saunders Redding, and Hugh Gloster for placing too much emphasis on the racial sources of Helga's tragic fate. Tate, nonetheless, does read Helga's fate as tragic. Mary Esteve, as Ngai will later, reads the novel as blocking sympathetic identification. Esteve, however, takes her interpretation one step further than Tate's by denying the text any tragic quality at all. Esteve writes, "Helga Crane becomes a character not with whom to sympathize but to admire – to admire, however, not as a possible role model, but as an impossible marvel" (234). Esteve's conclusion resembles Du Bois's when he proclaimed, "There is no 'happy ending' and yet the theme is not defeatist."

Jeanne Scheper, Cheryl Wall, Anna Brickhouse and Sianne Ngai read Larsen as subverting the tragic mulatta genre. While I disagree with readings that claim Larsen as subverting the tragic mulatta genre, I do find much of Ngai's other arguments compelling, especially her reading of the novel as blocking the necessary identificatory impulse that would allow readers to give Helga a sympathetic reading. In this way, Ngai reads sympathy as "a dynamic central to the genre of sentimental 'mulatta' fiction" while still arguing that it is a feeling from which "Larsen's novel self-consciously departs" (188-189). While I admire and am convinced by Ngai's reading of the text as blocking readerly identification with and sympathy for Helga, I still find it important to attend to the other ways the novel thematizes sympathy as it defines Helga in her social settings and in relation to the benefactors that come in and out of her life. To put it another way, rather than rejecting sympathy, I see Larsen as reworking it by identifying the hazards Helga would expose herself to in opening herself to sympathy's sentimental force field.

Scheper also dismisses the tragic mulatta genre as a form that has lost currency, seeing more promise in modernist forms of mobility:

I see Larsen's use of the Hughes poem not as signaling her intention to write in the genre of the tragic mulatta, but as signaling her intention to write against its easy Manichean logic. The tragic mulatto narrative would suggest that she moves because there is no place for her. But we might revise that assumption by asking whether the tragedy is located in the ideological limitations of her kaleidoscopic surroundings. Movement for Crane is of necessity at times and a chosen destiny at others. She in fact avoids tragedy by continuing to move because, as she discerns, settling and settling down can be tragic for black women. (684)

The problem with Scheper's reading is that it reduces the complexity of the historical genre while valorizing modernist mobility. Wall reads all Larsen's protagonists as "subvert[ing] the convention consistently," and argues, "depicting the tragic mulatto was the surest way for a black woman fiction writer to gain a hearing" (97, 110). While constraints are a reality of creative production, I wonder if understanding aesthetics as limited by necessity in this case is the best way to understand Larsen's craft. Brickhouse sees Helga as a "revisionary protagonist in a performative and highly parodic relation to the archetype [of the tragic mulatta]" (542). In sum, my chief hesitation regarding *Quicksand* criticism as a whole inheres in what I perceive to be a dangerous outshoot of the unconsciously adopted parodic reading.

Moving from what I regard as a reactive posture, I attempt to practice a more earnest form of critique in which I endeavor to acknowledge how writers of other eras are oriented in fundamentally different ways from my own. I attempt to relish the awkwardness of this process. Larsen lived in another world than mine. Her sensibilities and historical horizons are dramatically not mine. I am positioning an older form of criticism against what I term a reactionary criticism, the schools of literary criticism that gained a foothold in the 1970s, that is, the models under which I have been educated and greatly benefited from both as a scholar and a person: poststructuralism, feminism, Marxism, anticolonialism, postcolonialism, queer theory, and critical race theory.²⁵⁸ Since the 1970s, efforts to expand the literary canon either work to recuperate or subvert certain genres and to recover or dismiss certain authors. Within *Quicksand* scholarship, this work of historicizing and contextualizing the novel in relation to the tragic mulatta form seems to participate

²⁵⁸ *Reactionary*, as I employ it above, does not signify a school against "radical political or social reform," quite the contrary ("Reactionary" 1a.). Since the 1970s, literary critical schools have taken a leftward turn in reacting against New Criticism. Scholars practicing in such fields envision their work as championing progressive politics embodied by anti-establishment political movements. Contemporary literary criticism valiantly opposes the dominant political culture of late capitalism.

in a Sisyphean motion, bringing figures and texts in and out of vogue according to the reigning values of the day.

Critic Joseph North characterizes this sort of scholarship as treating literature as “a symptom of, rather than a genuine response to, [...] negative modernity” (45). As an astute reviewer of North indicates, this reduces literature to “a way of understanding rather than influencing society” (Aubry). Insofar as the last few decades of articles on *Quicksand* operate under such a paradigm, they produce presentist styles of critique. My work embraces the New Critical emphasis on ambiguity and irony—an emphasis James Baldwin championed in “Everybody’s Protest Novel.” Baldwin writes, “only within this web of ambiguity, paradox, this hunger, danger, darkness, can we find at once ourselves and the power of revelation which is the business of the novelist, this journey toward a more vast reality which must take precedence over all other claims” (15).²⁵⁹ Engaging such topics is an essential way to maintain fidelity to what critical theory at its best achieves: the mission to cultivate new modes of subjectivity and, ultimately, influence society for the better.

For critics of Larsen’s novels, the tragic mulatta form is not something to wash our hands of. Margo Jefferson raises an interesting point when framing Larsen in relation to her current popularity in women’s literature courses as well as her lingering stigma:

Well, some critics say, isn’t the Tragic Mulatto figure all used up? And what a dated, rarefied subject passing is. But when did questions of dual identity and desires that flout or yearn to flout convention become dated or rarefied? We accept them in the lethally restricted Old New York of Edith Wharton, and in the muted but tortured negotiations

²⁵⁹ I owe this insight to Jonathan Arac who writes in a discussion of *Huckleberry Finn*, “Baldwin names the crucial qualities of human being in the same terms that New Criticism was developing at this time to describe literature: ‘complexity, ... ambiguity, paradox’” (“Uncle” 83).

between Henry James's Americans and Europeans. Larsen was a stern clinician of privilege, not a sentimentalist.

Jefferson's interventions are important for approaching *Quicksand*. Engaging tragic mulatta conventions, it would seem, is not so easily disentangled from diagnosing privilege; and yet, even for Jefferson, sentimentality retains its stigma. It is a stigma owing to our tendency to view emotion as authentic when it feels "personal and interior" and as less legitimate when it is "structured and shared" (Howard 213).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Allardice, Lisa. "Marilynne Robinson: 'Obama was very gentlemanly ... I'd like to get a look at Trump.'" *The Guardian*, 6 July 2018, www.theguardian.com/books/2018/jul/06/marilynne-robinson-interview-barack-obama-donald-trump-writer-theologian.
- Allen, Carolyn. "The Privilege of Loneliness, the Kindness of Home: "Felt Experience" in the Writing of Marilynne Robinson." *This Life, This World: New Essays on Marilynne Robinson's Housekeeping, Gilead, and Home*. Ed. Jason W. Stevens. Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill/Rodopi, 2016. 190-211.
- Als, Hilton. "Richard Avedon and James Baldwin's Joint Examination of American Identity." *The New Yorker*, 6 November 2017, www.newyorker.com/magazine/2017/11/13/richard-avedon-and-james-baldwins-joint-examination-of-american-identity. Accessed 2 February 2020.
- Alter, Adam. "Why Our Screens Make Us Less Happy." *TED*, 14 July 2017, www.ted.com/talks/adam_alter_why_our_screens_make_us_less_happy/transcript#t-413905. Accessed 20 March 2020.
- American Feud: A History of Conservatives and Liberals*. Dir. Richard Riggs Hall. Littlebig Media. 2008. Anderson, Elijah. "The Emerging Philadelphia African American Class Structure." *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 568 (March 2000): 54-77.
- Anon. "George Floyd: What Happened in the Final Moments of His Life." *BBC News Daily*. (30 May 2020): www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-52861726. Accessed 1 June 2020.
- Anon. "Miscegenation? Bah!" Review of *Quicksand*. *Amsterdam News*, 16 May 1928: 16.
- Arac, Jonathan. *Impure Worlds: The Institution of Literature in the Age of the Novel*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2011.
- . "The Politics of *The Scarlet Letter*." *Ideology and Classic American Literature*. Eds. Sacvan Bercovitch and Myra Jehlen. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986. 247-266.
- . "Uncle Tom's Cabin vs. *Huckleberry Finn*: The Historians and the Critics." *boundary 2* 24.2 (Summer 1997): 79-100.
- Ashcroft, Bill. "Globalism, Postcolonialism and African Studies." Eds. David Theo Goldberg and John Solomos. *A Companion to Racial and Ethnic Studies*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2002. 511-520.
- Aubry, Timothy. "The Paradoxical Politics of Literary Criticism." *The New Republic*, 12 October 2017, newrepublic.com/article/145265/paradoxical-politics-literary-criticism. Accessed 4

April 2020.

Babbitt, Irving. *Literature and the American College: Essays in Defense of the Humanities*. 1908. Washington, D. C.: National Humanities Institute, 1986.

---. *The New Laokoon: An Essay on the Confusion of the Arts*. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1910.

---. *Rousseau and Romanticism*. 1919. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1924.

Baldick, Chris. *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*. 3rd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.

Baldwin, James. "Everybody's Protest Novel." 1949. *Notes of a Native Son*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1984. 13-23.

---. "Letter from a Region in My Mind." *The New Yorker*. 17 November 1962, www.newyorker.com/magazine/1962/11/17/letter-from-a-region-in-my-mind. Accessed 30 June 2020.

---. "Nothing Personal." *The Price of the Ticket: Collected Nonfiction, 1948-1985*.

Barr, William. "Remarks to the Law School and the de Nicola Center for Ethics and Culture at the University of Notre Dame." South Bend, Indiana. 11 October 2019. *The United States Department of Justice*, www.justice.gov/opa/speech/attorney-general-william-p-barr-delivers-remarks-law-school-and-de-nicola-center-ethics. Accessed 21 March 2020.

Begley, Sarah. "Marilynne Robinson on What It Means to Be a Christian in Trump's America." *Time*, 1 March 2018, time.com/5180714/marilynne-robinson-being-a-christian-in-trumps-america/. Accessed 12 September 2018.

Bell, Michael. *Sentimentalism, Ethics, and the Culture of Feeling*. New York: Palgrave, 2000.

Berlant, Lauren, ed. *Compassion: The Culture and Politics of an Emotion*. New York: Routledge, 2004.

---. *Cruel Optimism*. Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2011.

---. *The Female Complaint: The Unfinished Business of Sentimentality in American Culture*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2008.

---. "Poor Eliza." *American Literature* 70.3 (Sep. 1998): 635-68.

Berlant, Lauren and Jordan Greenwald. "Affect in the End Times: A Conversation with Lauren Berlant." *Qui Parle: Critical Humanities and Social Sciences* 20.2 (Spring/Summer 2012): 71-89.

Bernstein, J. M. Preface. *Ethics and Images of Pain*. Eds. Asbjørn Grønstad and Henrik Gustafsson. New York: Routledge, 2012. xi-xiv.

- Berzon, Judith R. *Neither White Nor Black: The Mulatto Character in American Fiction*. New York: New York University Press, 1978.
- Bharucha, Rustom. *The Politics of Cultural Practice: Thinking Through Theatre in an Age of Globalization*. London: Wesleyan University Press, 2000.
- Block, Fred. *Postindustrial Possibilities: A Critique of Economic Discourse*. Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1990.
- Block, Sharon. *Rape and Sexual Power in Early America*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006.
- Bone, Robert. *The Negro Novel in America*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1958.
- . Rev. of *Terrible Honesty: Mongrel Manhattan in the 1920s*, by Ann Douglas. *MELUS* 25.3/4 (2000): 278-286.
- Boudreau, Kristin. *Sympathy in American Literature: American Sentiments from Jefferson to the Jameses*. Gainesville, Florida: University Press of Florida, 2002.
- Bourdain, Anthony. *No Reservations*. Season 1, Episode 13. Peru.
- Brennan, Teresa. *The Transmission of Affect*. Ithaca, New York: University of Cornell Press, 2004.
- Brewster, Ben and Lea Jacobs. "The Stage Tableau in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*." *Theatre to Cinema: Stage Pictorialism and the Early Feature Film*. Oxford University Press, 1997. 37-47.
- Brickhouse, Anna. "Nella Larsen and the Intertextual Geography of *Quicksand*." *African American Review* 35.4 (2001): 533-560.
- Brott, Simone. *Architecture for a Free Subjectivity: Deleuze and Guattari at the Horizon of the Real*. Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate, 2011.
- Brown, Vivienne. *Adam Smith's Discourse: Canonicity, Commerce and Conscience*. New York: Routledge, 1994.
- . "Signifying Voices: Reading the 'Adam Smith Problem.'" *Economics and Philosophy* 7.2 (1991): 187-220.
- Byfield, Natalie. "The Legacy of the Central Park Jogger 'Wilding' Case." 27 May 2014. *Huffington Post Blog*, www.huffingtonpost.com/natalie-byfield/the-legacy-of-the-central-b-5398013.html. Accessed 20 May 2017.
- Caplan, Jay. *Framed Narratives: Diderot's Genealogy of the Beholder*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985.
- Carreiro, Amy E. "Ghosts of the Harlem Renaissance: 'Negrotarians' in Richard Wright's *Native Son*," *The Journal of Negro History* 84.3 (1999): 247-259.

- Cassuto, Leonard. *Hard-boiled Sentimentality: The Secret History of American Crime Stories*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2009.
- Chandler, Karen M. "Nella Larsen's Fatal Polarities: Melodrama and Its Limits in *Quicksand*." *CLA Journal*, vol. 42, no. 1, Sept. 1998, pp. 24-47.
- Christian, Barbara. *Black Women Novelists: The Development of a Tradition*. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1980.
- . "Trajectories of Self-Definition: Placing Contemporary Afro-American Women's Fiction." *Conjuring: Black Women, Fiction, and Literary Tradition*. Ed. Marjorie Pryse and Hortense J. Spillers. 233-248. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985.
- Churchwell, Sarah. "Marilynne Robinson's *Lila* – a Great Achievement in US Fiction." *The Guardian* 7 November 2014, www.theguardian.com/books/2014/nov/07/marilynne-robinson-lila-great-achievement-contemporary-us-fiction-gilead. Accessed 12 September 2018.
- . "Marilynne Robinson's New Essay Collection Is Acerbic—and Problematic." *New Statesman*. 10 March 2018, www.newstatesman.com/2018/03/marilynne-robinson-s-new-essay-collection-acerbic-and-problematic. Accessed 12 September 2018.
- Clarke, Chris. *Ethics and Economic Governance: Using Adam Smith to Understand the Global Financial Crisis*. New York: Routledge, 2016.
- Clarke, Eric O. *Virtuous Vice: Homoeroticism and the Public Sphere*. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2000.
- Clemmen, Yves W. A. "Nella Larsen's *Quicksand*: A Narrative of Difference." *CLA Journal* 40.4 (1997): 458-66.
- Coates, Ta-Nehisi. *Between the World and Me*. New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2015. ---. "The Case for Reparations." *The Atlantic* June 2014: 54-71.
- Cohen, Margaret. *The Sentimental Education of the Novel*. 1999. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2002.
- Coleridge, Samuel Taylor. *Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*. Ed. E. L. Griggs. 2 vols. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956.
- Coles, Robert A. and Diane Isaacs. "Primitivism as a Therapeutic Pursuit: Notes Toward a Reassessment of Harlem Renaissance Literature." *The Harlem Renaissance: Revaluations*. Ed. Amritjit Singh, William S. Shiver, and Stanley Brodwin. New York: Garland, 1989. 3-12.
- Collins, Lauren. "Reinventing Grief in an Era of Enforced Isolation." *The New Yorker* (4 May 2020):

www.newyorker.com/magazine/2020/05/11/reinventing-grief-in-an-era-of-enforced-isolation.

"Compassion, n." *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, March 2020, www.oed.com/view/Entry/37475. Accessed 15 March 2020.

"Compulsion." Psychology Glossary. *Alley Dog*. 2020, www.alleydog.com/glossary/definition.php?term=Compulsion. Accessed 21 March 2020.

Connolly, William E. *Neuropolitics: Thinking, Culture, Speed. Theory Out of Bounds* Vol. 23. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2002.

Cooper, Carolyn. "'Only a Nigger Gal!': Race, Gender and the Politics of Education in Claude McKay's *Banana Bottom*." *Caribbean Quarterly* 38.1 (March 1992): 40-54.

Cooper, Wayne. *Claude McKay: Rebel Sojourner in the Harlem Renaissance: A Biography*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1987.

Cooper, Wayne, ed. *The Passion of Claude McKay: Selected Prose and Poetry, 1912-1948*. New York: Schocken Books, 1973.

Coovadia, Imraan. "George Eliot's Realism and Adam Smith." *SEL Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 42.4 (Autumn 2002): 819-835.

Craig, Layne Parish. *When Sex Changed: Birth Control Politics and Literature between the World Wars*. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2013.

Crenshaw, Kimberle. "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color." in *The Legal Response to Violence Against Women*. Ed. Karen J. Maschke. 91-150. First published in *Stanford Law Review*. 43.6 (July 1991): 1241-1299.

Cvetkovich, Ann. "Affect." *Keywords for American Cultural Studies*. Eds. Bruce Burgett and Glenn Hendler. New York: New York University Press, 2014. 13-15.

---. *Depression: A Public Feeling*. Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2012.

Dalleo, Raphael. "Bita Plant as Literary Intellectual: The Anticolonial Public Sphere and *Banana Bottom*." *Journal of West Indian Literature* 17.1 (2008): 54-87.

---. *Caribbean Literature and the Public Sphere*. Charlottesville, Virginia: University of Virginia Press, 2011.

Davis, Arthur P. *From the Dark Tower: Afro-American Writers 1900 to 1960*. Washington: Howard University Press, 1974.

Davis, Sara. "The Red Thing: Fabrics and Fetishism in Nella Larsen's *Quicksand*" *Skin, Culture and Psychoanalysis*. Ed. Shelia L. Cavanagh, Angela Failler and Rachel Alpha Johnston Hurst. London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013.

- Davis, Thadious. *Nella Larsen, Novelist of the Harlem Renaissance: A Woman's Life Unveiled*. Baton Rouge, Louisiana: Louisiana University Press, 1994.
- Dillard, Annie. *The Writing Life*. New York: Harper & Row, 1989.
- Diller, Christopher. "Signifying on Stowe: Ralph Ellison and the Sentimental Rhetoric of Invisible Man." *Modern Language Quarterly* 75.4 (December 2014): 487-509.
- Donlon, Anne. "'A Black Man Replies': Claude McKay's Challenge to the British Left." *Lateral: Journal of the Cultural Studies Association*. 5.1 (Spring 2016): csalateral.org/wp/issue/5-1/claude-mckay-british-left-donlon/. Accessed 12 September 2017.
- Douglas, Ann. *The Feminization of American Culture*. New York: Anchor/Doubleday, 1988.
- . "Introduction: The Art of Controversy." *Uncle Tom's Cabin or, Life among the Lowly*. New York: Penguin, 1981. 7-34.
- . *Terrible Honesty: Mongrel Manhattan in the 1920s*. New York: Knopf, 1977.
- Dreiser, Theodore. *Sister Carrie*. 1900. New York: Penguin, 1981.
- Du Bois, W. E. B. "The Evolution of Negro Leadership," a book review of Booker T. Washington's *Up from Slavery* in *The Dial* (16 July 1901): 53-55.
- . *The Souls of Black Folk*. 1903. New York: Tribeca Books, 2011.
- . "The Talented Tenth." *The Negro Problem: A Series of Articles by Representative American Negroes of Today*. 1903. Contributions by Booker T. Washington, W. E. Burghardt Du Bois, Paul Laurence Dunbar, Charles W. Chestnutt, and others. New York: James Pott and Company. 33-75.
- . "Two Novels: Nella Larsen, *Quicksand* & Claude McKay, *Home to Harlem*." *Crisis* 35 (June 1928): 202.
- Duncan, Pansy. "Once More, With Fredric Jameson." *Cultural Critique* 97 (Fall 2017): 1-23.
- Dundas, Judith. "'To See Feelingly': The Language of the Senses and the Language of the Heart." *Comparative Drama* 19.1 (Spring 1985): 49-57.
- Durkheim, Émile. *The Division of Labor in Society*. Translated by George Simpson. 1933. Glencoe, Illinois: Free Press, 1960.
- Edmondson, Belinda. "The Urban-Rural Dialectic and the Changing Role of Black Women: Jane's Career, Banana Bottom, Minty Alley and Pocomania." *The Routledge Companion to Anglophone Caribbean Literature*. Eds. Michael A. Bucknor and Alison Donnell. New York: Routledge, 2011. 157-164.
- Eiselein, Gregory. *Literature and Humanitarian Reform in the Civil War Era*. Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1996.

- Ellis, Elizabeth A. "Race, Religion and Sentimentalism in Marilynne Robinson's *Gilead* and *Home*." *The Sentimental Mode: Essays in Literature, Film and Television*. Ed. Jennifer A. Williamson, Jennifer Larson, and Ashley Reed. Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, 2014. 175-189.
- Ellis, Markman. *The Politics of Sensibility: Race, Gender and Commerce in the Sentimental Novel*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996.
- Ellison, Ralph. "Remembering Richard Wright." *The Collected Essays of Ralph Ellison*. Ed. John F. Callahan. New York: Modern Library, 2003. 663-679.
- English, Daylanne K. *Unnatural Selections: Eugenics in American Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004.
- Esteve, Mary. "A 'moving mosaic': Harlem, primitivism, and Nella Larsen's *Quicksand*." *Aesthetics and Politics of the Crowd in American Literature*. West Nyack, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003. 152-171.
- Esty, Jed. "Virgins of Empire: The Antidevelopmental Plot in Rhys and Bowen." *Unseasonable Youth: Modernism, Colonialism, and the Fiction of Development*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2012.
- Evans, Dylan. *Emotion: The Science of Sentiment*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.
- Fairyington, Stephanie. "The Sham of Donald Trump's Straight Talk." *The New Republic* (3 May 2018): newrepublic.com/article/148214/sham-donald-trumps-straight-talk. Accessed 20 May 2020.
- Fellowes, Julian. *Downton Abbey Script Book Season 1*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2012.
- Ferguson, Robert A. *Alone in America: The Stories that Matter*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2013.
- Fisher, Philip. *Hard Facts: Setting and Form in the American Novel*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1987.
- Fleischacker, Samuel. "Sympathy in Hume and Smith: A Contrast, Critique, and Reconstruction." *Intersubjectivity and Objectivity in Adam Smith and Edmund Husserl*. Eds. Christel Fricke and Dagfinn Føllesdal. Frankfurt: Verlag, 2012: 273-311.
- . *What is Enlightenment?* New York: Routledge, 2013.
- Fleishman, Jeffrey. "A New 'Birth of a Nation' Dredges up the Complicated, Ugly Legacy of the Groundbreaking 1915 Film." *Los Angeles Times*. Sept. 30, 2016, www.latimes.com/projects/la-ca-mn-birth-nation/. Accessed 20 May 2017.

- Fleissner, Jennifer L. *Women, Compulsion, Modernity: The Moment of American Naturalism*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004.
- Foster, Jay. Rev. of D. D. Raphael's *The Impartial Spectator: Adam Smith's Moral Philosophy*. *Philosophy in Review*. (February 2009): 62-64.
- Frankl, Viktor E. *The Doctor and the Soul: From Psychotherapy to Logotherapy*. 1946. 3rd ed., Translated by Richard and Clara Winston. New York: Vintage Books, 2019.
- Frick, John W. *Uncle Tom's Cabin on the American Stage and Screen*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.
- Frye, Northrop. *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1957.
- Glass, Kathy L. "Nella Larsen's Spiritual Strivings." *A Companion to the Harlem Renaissance*. Ed. Cherene Sherrard-Johnson. Malden, Massachusetts: Wiley Blackwell, 2015. 171-185.
- Gloster, Hugh. *Negro Voices in American Fiction*. New York: Russell and Russell, 1948.
- Godbeer, Richard. *The Overflowing of Friendship: Love between Men and the Creation of the American Republic*. Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009.
- Goldberg, David Theo. "Liberalism's Limits: Carlyle and Mill on 'The Negro Question.'" *Philosophers on Race: Critical Essays* Eds. Julie K. Ward and Tommy L. Lott. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2002. 195-204.
- Goodman, Amy. "Remembering 'Big Floyd': Houston Friends of George Floyd Describe Him as a 'Man of Peace.'" *Democracy Now* (3 June 2020): www.democracynow.org/2020/6/3/houston_memorial_george_floyd. Accessed 3 June 2020.
- Gorton, Kristyn. "Theorizing Emotion and Affect" Feminist Engagements." *Feminist Theory* 8.3 (2007): 333-348.
- Gosciak, Josh. *The Shadowed Country: Claude McKay and the Romance of the Victorians*. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2006.
- Griffis, Rachel B. "Sentimentality and Grace: Marilynne Robinson and Nineteenth-Century Prodigal Son Narratives." *This Life, This World: New Essays on Marilynne Robinson's Housekeeping, Gilead, and Home*. Ed. Jason W. Stevens. Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill/Rodopi, 2016. 131-147.
- Gramsci, Antonio. *Letters from Prison*. Vols. 1 and 2, Ed. Frank Rosengarten. Trans. Raymond Rosenthal. New York: Columbia University Press, 1994.
- . *Prison Notebooks, Volume 2*. Ed. Joseph A. Buttigieg. New York: Columbia University Press, 1996.

- Grandin, Greg. "Who Ain't a Slave? Historical Fact and Fiction of *Benito Cereno*." *The Chronicle of Higher Education* 16 December 2013.
- Greiner, Rae. *Sympathetic Realism in Nineteenth-Century British Fiction*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012.
- Gregg, Melissa, and Gregory J. Seigworth. *The Affect Theory Reader*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2010.
- Halpern, Faye. *Sentimental Readers: The Rise, Fall, and Revival of a Disparaged Rhetoric*. Iowa City, Iowa: University of Iowa Press, 2013.
- Harkin, Maureen. "Mackenzie's *Man of Feeling*: Embalming Sensibility." *ELH* 61.2 (Summer 1994): 317-340.
- Harris, Michael R. *Five Counterrevolutionists in Higher Education: Irving Babbitt, Albert Jay Nock, Abraham Flexner, Robert Maynard Hutchins, Alexander Meiklejohn*. Corvallis: Oregon State University Press, 1970.
- Hartley, Gemma. "Women Aren't Nags—We're Just Fed Up." *Harper's Bazaar*, 27 September 2017, www.harpersbazaar.com/culture/features/a12063822/emotional-labor-gender-equality. Accessed 2 October 2017.
- Hartman, Geoffrey H. "Sincerity and Authenticity." *The New York Times* (Feb. 4, 1973): 323.
- Haviland, Beverly. "Passing from Paranoia to Plagiarism: The Abject Authorship of Nella Larsen." *Modern Fiction Studies* 43.2 (1997): 295-318.
- Hayot, Eric. *The Hypothetical Mandarin: Sympathy, Modernity, and Chinese Pain*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009.
- Hoeller, Hildegard. "From Agony to Ecstasy: The New Studies of American Sentimentality." *ESQ: A Journal of the American Renaissance* 52.4 (2006): 339-369.
- Hofstadter, Richard. *Social Darwinism in American Thought*. 1944. Boston: Beacon, 1983.
- Hont, István. *Politics in Commercial Society*. Ed. Béla Kapossy and Michael Sonenscher. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2015.
- hooks, bell. *All about Love*. New York: William Morrow, 2000. Hopes, David Brendan. "The Sublime Self: Whitman's Sense of the Sublime in *Song of Myself*." *The Sublime*. Eds. Harold Bloom and Blake Hobby. New York: Bloom's Literary Criticism, 2010. 245-253.
- Hinnov, Emily M. in *Encountering Chorán Community*, Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press, 2009.

- Hostetler, Ann E. "The Aesthetics of Race and Gender in Nella Larsen's *Quicksand*." *PMLA* 105 (1990): 35-46.
- Howard, June. "Sentiment." *Keywords for American Cultural Studies*. Eds. Bruce Burgett and Glenn Hendler. New York: New York University Press, 2007. 213-217.
- Huggins, Nathan Irvin. *The Harlem Renaissance*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1971.
- Hughes, Langston. *The Big Sea*. 1940. 2nd ed. New York: Hill and Wang, 1993.
- Hull, Gloria. *Color, Sex, and Poetry: Three Women Writers of the Harlem Renaissance*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987.
- Hutchinson, George. *The Harlem Renaissance in Black and White*. Cambridge: Belknap-Harvard University Press, 1995.
- . *In Search of Nella Larsen: A Biography of the Color Line*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006.
- H. W. R., "Quicksand." *Boston Evening Transcript*, 20 June 1928: part 3, p. 2.
- Jacoby, Susan. *The Age of American Unreason*. New York: Vintage, 2008.
- Jamison, Leslie. *The Empathy Exams: Essays*. Minneapolis, Minnesota: Graywolf, 2014.
- Jay, Paul. "Hybridity, Identity and Cultural Commerce in Claude McKay's *Banana Bottom*." *Callaloo* 22.1 (1999): 176-194.
- Jefferson, Margo. "Authentic American." *New York Times* 18 February 2001 late ed.
- Jefferson, Thomas. *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson*. Ed. H. A. Washington. Vol. 1. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011.
- Jehlen, Myra. "Archimedes and the Paradox of Feminist Criticism." *Signs* 6.4 (Summer 1981): 575-601.
- Jensen, Katharine Ann and Miriam L. Wallace. "Introduction: Facing Emotions." *PMLA* 130.5 (2015): 1249-1268.
- Johnson, Barbara. "The Quicksands of the Self: Nella Larsen and Heinz Kohut." *Female Subjects in Black and White: Race, Psychoanalysis, Feminism*. Eds. Elizabeth Abel, Barbara Christian, and Helene Moglen. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997. 252-265.
- Judy, R. A. T. "On the Question of Nigga Authenticity." *boundary 2* 21.3 (1994): 211-230.
- Jurecic, Ann. "Empathy and the Critic." *College English* 74.1 (September 2011): 10-27.

- Kahn, Victoria. "Panel Discussion on Minding the Modern with Thomas Pfau." Notre Dame Institute for Advanced Study. 10 April 2014, www.youtube.com/watch?v=XutNpGZlZCI. Accessed 20 April 2017.
- Kaplan, Carla. *Miss Anne in Harlem: The White Women of the Black Renaissance*. New York: HarperCollins, 2013.
- Kelleher, Paul. "If Love Were All: Reading Sedgwick Sentimentally." *Regarding Sedgwick: Essays on Queer Culture and Critical Theory*. Eds. Stephen M. Barber, David L. Clark. New York: Routledge, 2002. 143-162.
- Kelley, James. "Blossoming in Strange New Forms: Male Homosexuality and the Harlem Renaissance." *Soundings* 80 (1997): 499-517.
- Kellner, Bruce. "'Refined Racism': White Patronage in the Harlem Renaissance." *The Harlem Renaissance*. Ed. Harold Bloom. Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers, 2004. 53-66.
- Kimball, Roger. "John Calvin Got a Bad Rap." *The New York Times* 7 February 1999, www.nytimes.com/1999/02/07/books/john-calvin-got-a-bad-rap.html
- Kirschke, Amy Helene. *Aaron Douglas: Art, Race, and the Harlem Renaissance*. 1995. Jackson, Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 1999.
- Kittay, Jeffrey. "Descriptive Limits." *Yale French Studies* 61 (1981): 225-243.
- Knowles, Hannah, Ben Guarino, Alex Horton, Brent D. Griffiths, Miriam Berger, Brittany
- Shammas, and Meryl Kornfield. "The Nation Braces for Another Day of Protests." *The Washington Post*. (6 June 2020): apple.news/Am0qpKsIYQoSxAADka5hdeQ. Accessed 6 June 2020.
- Koons, Robert C. "The War of the Three Humanisms: Irving Babbitt and the Revival of Classical Learning." *Modern Age* 52 (2010): 198-207.
- Kornbluh, Anna. *Realizing Capital: Financial and Psychic Economies in Victorian Form*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2014.
- Labbé, Jessica. "'Too High a Price': The 'Terrible Honesty' of Black Women's Work in Quicksand." *Meridians: Feminism, Race, Transnationalism* 10.1 (2009): 81-110.
- Lampe, Kurt. Review of *The Routledge Handbook of the Stoic Tradition*. Ed. John Sellars. *Bryn Mawr Classical Review* 30 June 2017, bmcr.brynmawr.edu/2017/2017-06-30.html.
- Laplanche, J. and J-B. Pontalis. *The Language of Psychoanalysis*. Trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith. New York: Norton, 1973.
- Larsen, Nella. *Quicksand*. Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, 2006.

- Larson, Charles R. *Invisible Darkness: Jean Toomer and Nella Larsen*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1993.
- Latimer, Bonnie. "Reading for the Sentiment: Richardson's Novels." *The Sentimental Novel in the Eighteenth Century*. Ed. Albert J. Rivero. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019. 51-68.
- Lee, Felicia R. "New Novel of Harlem Renaissance Is Found." *New York Times* 14 September 2012, www.nytimes.com/2012/09/15/books/harlem-renaissance-novel-by-claude-mckay-is-discovered.html. Accessed 3 April 2020.
- Levinas, Emmanuel. *Totality and Infinity*. 1961. Translated by A. Lingis. Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: Duquesne University Press, 1969.
- Lewis, Rupert and Maureen Lewis. "Claude McKay's Jamaica." *Caribbean Quarterly* 23.2/3 Writers & Writings (June - September 1977): 38-53.
- "Lexical Investigations: Sentimental." *Everything After Z. Dictionary.com* Oxford University Press. 2020, www.dictionary.com/e/sentimental/. Accessed 27 March 2020.
- Little, Jonathan. "Nella Larsen's *Passing*: Irony and the Critics." *African American Review* 26.1 (1992): 173-182.
- Lively, Adam. "Continuity and Radicalism in American Black Nationalist Thought, 1914-29." *Journal of American Studies* 18 (1984): 207-35.
- Locke, Alain. "Spiritual Truancy," *New Challenge* 2.2 (Fall 1937): 63-64.
- Long, A. A., and D. N. Sedley. *The Hellenistic Philosophers*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987.
- Lowe, John Wharton. *Calypso Magnolia: The Crosscurrents of Caribbean and Southern Literature*. Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 2016.
- Lowney, John. "Haiti and Black Transnationalism: Remapping the Migrant Geography of *Home* to Harlem." *African American Review* 34.3 (2000): 413-429.
- Luciano, Dana. *Arranging Grief: Sacred Time and the Body in Nineteenth-Century America*. New York: New York University Press, 2007.
- Macleod, Christopher. "John Stuart Mill." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. 2002-2018. Ed. Edward N. Zalta. plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2018/entries/mill/. Accessed 10 April 2020.
- Maiwald, Michael. "Race, Capitalism, and the Third-Sex Ideal: Claude McKay's *Home to Harlem* and the Legacy of Edward Carpenter." *Modern Fiction Studies* 48.4 (Winter 2002): 825-857.

- Malik, Kenan. "The Haunting Grace of Marilynne Robinson." *Pandaemonium*. 21 December 2013, kenanmalik.com/2013/12/21/the-haunting-grace-of-marilynne-robinson. Accessed 2 October 2018.
- Mandeville, Barnard. *The Fable of the Bees*. Ed. Philip Harth. Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin Books, 1970.
- Mardorossian, Carine M. "Rape by Proxy in Contemporary Caribbean Women's Fiction." In *Feminism, Literature, and Rape Narratives: Violence and Violation*. Eds. Sorcha Gunne and Zoë Brigley Thompson. London and New York: Routledge, 2010; ppb 2011. 23-38.
- Mariotti, Shannon L. and Joseph H. Lane, Jr., eds. *A Political Companion to Marilynne Robinson*. Lexington, Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 2016.
- Marshall, David. *The Figure of Theater: Shaftesbury, Defoe, Adam Smith, and George Eliot*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1986.
- Maslow, A. H. "A Theory of Human Motivation." *Psychological Review* 50.4 (July 1943): 370-396.
- Massumi, Brian. *Parables of the Virtual: Movement, Affect Sensation*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2002.
- McCabe, Tracy. "The Multifaceted Politics of Primitivism in the Harlem Renaissance." *Soundings* 80 (1997): 475-497.
- McDowell, Deborah E. Introduction. *Quicksand and Passing*. Ed. Deborah E. McDowell. American Women Writers Series 10 New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1986. ix-xxxv.
- McGurn, William. "Bill Barr 'Gets' Religion." *Wall Street Journal* (14 October 2019): www.wsj.com/articles/bill-barr-gets-religion-11571094063. Accessed 21 March 2020.
- McKay, Claude. *Banana Bottom*. 1933. Orlando, Florida: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1961.
- . *Banjo*. 1929. Orlando, Florida: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1970.
- . *Home to Harlem*. 1928. Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1987.
- . *A Long Way from Home*. 1937. New York: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1970.
- McManus, Susan. "Radical Political Agency: Affective Politics in the Case of the Zapatistas in Chiapas." In *Contemporary Political Agency: Theory and Practice*, Eds. Bice Maiguashca and Raffaele Marchetti. London: Routledge, 2013.
- Meisel, Martin. *Realizations*. "Speaking Pictures: The Drama." Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1983. 38-51.

- Mill, John Stuart. "What is Poetry?" *Essays on Poetry*. Ed. F. Parvin Sharpless. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1976.
- . *On Liberty*. 1859. New York: Dover Publications, 2002.
- Monda, Kimberly. "Self-delusion and Self-sacrifice in Nella Larsen's *Quicksand*." *African American Review* 31.1 (1997): 23–39.
- Morgan, William M. *Questionable Charity: Gender, Humanitarianism, and Complicity in U.S. Literary Realism*. Lebanon: University Press of New England, 2004.
- Motooka, Wendy. *The Age of Reasons: Quixotism, Sentimentalism, and Political Economy in Eighteenth-Century Britain*. New York: Routledge, 1998.
- Murphy, Debra Dean. "Our Sentimental Poet?" *The Cresset: A Review of Literature, the Arts, and Public Affairs*. Vol. LXXXI No. 3 (2018): http://thecresset.org/2018/Lent/Murphy1_L18.html.
- Nanay, Bence. "Adam Smith's Concept of Sympathy and Its Contemporary Interpretations." *The Philosophy of Adam Smith: Essays Commemorating the 250th Anniversary of The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. Eds. Vivienne Brown and Samuel Fleischacker. Vol. 5 New York: Routledge, 2010. 85-105.
- Nazar, Hina. *The Enlightened Sentiments: Judgment and Autonomy in the Age of Sensibility*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2012.
- Ngai, Sianne. *Ugly Feelings*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2005.
- Noble, Marianne. "Making This Whole Nation Feel: The Sentimental Novel in the United States." *A Companion to the American Novel*. Ed. Alfred Bendixen. Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley and Sons, 2012. 170-186.
- Norris, Margot. "Female Transmigration in James Joyce's 'Eveline' and Nella Larsen's *Quicksand*." *Reading Texts, Reading Lives: Essays in the Tradition of Humanistic Cultural Criticism in Honor of Daniel R. Schwarz*. Eds. Helen Maxson and Daniel Morris. Lanham, Maryland: University of Delaware Press, 2012. 81-95.
- North, Joseph. *Literary Criticism: A Concise Political History*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2017.
- North, Michael. *The Dialect of Modernism: Race, Language, and Twentieth-century Literature*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994.
- Nussbaum, Martha C. *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986.
- . *Poetic Justice: Literary Imagination and Public Life*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1995.

- . *The Therapy of Desire*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1996.
- Obama, Barack and Marilynne Robinson. "President Obama & Marilynne Robinson: A Conversation in Iowa." *The New York Review of Books* 5 November 2015. Accessed 19 December 2015,
www.nybooks.com/articles/2015/11/05/president-obama-marilynne-robinson-conversation/.
- . "President Obama & Marilynne Robinson: A Conversation in Iowa." *The New York Review of Books*. 19 November 2015. Accessed 19 December 2015,
www.nybooks.com/articles/2015/11/19/president-obama-marilynne-robinson-conversation-2/.
- Onyebuchi, Tochi. "I Have No Mouth, and I Must Scream: The Duty of the Black Writer during Times of American Unrest." *Tor.com: Science Fiction. Fantasy. The Universe. And Related Subjects*. (1 June 2020): www.tor.com/2020/06/01/i-have-no-mouth-and-i-must-scream-the-duty-of-the-black-writer-during-times-of-american-unrest/. Accessed 2 June 2020.
- Page, Thomas Nelson. *The Old South: Essays Social and Political*. 1892. New York: Scribner, 1918.
- Pahl, Katrin. "The Logic of Emotionality." *PMLA* 130.5 (2015): 1457-1465.
- Pascal, Blaise. *Pensées*. Trans. A. J. Krailsheimer. Harmondsworth, United Kingdom: Penguin, 1966.
- "Passion, n." *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, March 2020,
www.oed.com/view/Entry/138504. Accessed 15 March 2020.
- Penner, Erin. "A Response to Addie Bundren: Restoring Generosity to the Language of Civil Discourse in Marilynne Robinson's *Lila*." *Studies in the Novel* 50.2 (Summer 2018): 277-298.
- Penry, Tara. "Sentimental and Romantic Masculinities in *Moby-Dick* and *Pierre*." *Sentimental Men: Masculinity and the Politics of Affect in American Culture*. Eds. Mary Chapman and Glenn Hendler. Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1999. 226-243.
- Perpich, Diane. *The Ethics of Emmanuel Levinas*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2008.
- Petit, Susan. "Finding Flannery O'Connor's 'Good Man' in Marilynne Robinson's *Gilead* and Home." *Christianity and Literature* 59.2 (2010): 301-18.
- Petrie, Paul. R. *Conscience and Purpose: Fiction and Social Consciousness in Howells, Jewett, Chesnut, and Cather*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2005.

- Pfau, Thomas. "The Letter of Judgment: Practical Reason in Aristotle, the Stoics, and Rousseau." *The Eighteenth Century* 51.3 (Fall 2010): 289-316.
- . *Minding the Modern: Human Agency, Intellectual Traditions, and Responsible Knowledge*. Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2013.
- Pierpont, Claudia Roth. "The Mother of Confusion." *The New Yorker* (11 May 1998): 80-89.
- Pitts, Jennifer. Review of *Sentimental Figures of Empire in Eighteenth-Century Britain and France*, by Lynn Festa. *American Historical Review* 113.2 (April 2008): 564-565.
- Polanyi, Karl. *The Great Transformation*. 1944. Boston: Beacon, Press, 1957.
- Potkay, Adam. "Contested Emotions: Pity and Gratitude from the Stoics to Swift and Wordsworth." *PMLA* 130.5 (October 2015): 1332-1346.
- . *Wordsworth's Ethics*. Baltimore, Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012.
- Priebe, Richard. "The Search for Community in the Novels of Claude McKay." *Studies in Black Literature* 3.2 (1972): 22-30.
- Pritchard, Elizabeth. "Minding the Other Modernities." *The Immanent Frame: Secularism, Religion, and the Public Sphere*. 28 October 2014, tif.ssrc.org/2014/10/28/minding-the-other-modernities/. Accessed September 30 2017.
- "Privacy, n." *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, March 2020, www.oed.com/view/Entry/151596. Accessed 26 March 2020.
- Purton, Valerie. *Dickens and the Sentimental Tradition: Fielding, Richardson, Sterne, Goldsmith, Sheridan, Lamb*. New York: Anthem Press, 2014.
- Rabin, Jessica G. *Surviving the Crossing: (Im)migration, Ethnicity, and Gender in Willa Cather, Gertrude Stein, and Nella Larsen*. New York: Routledge, 2004.
- Rachman, Gideon, Benedict Mander, Daniel Dombey, Sue-Lin Wong, and Heba Saleh. "Leaderless Rebellion: How Social Media Enable Global Protests." *Financial Times*, 25 October 2019, www.ft.com/content/19dc5dfe-f67b-11e9-a79c-bc9acae3b654. Accessed 27 March 2020.
- Rai, Amit. *Rule of Sympathy: Sentiment, Race, and Power, 1750-1850*. New York: Palgrave, 2002.
- Raimon, Eve Allegra. *The "Tragic Mulatta" Revisited: Race and Nationalism in Nineteenth-Century Antislavery Fiction*. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2004.
- Ramchand, Kenneth. *The West Indian Novel and its Background*. London: Faber and Faber, 1970.
- Rand, Erin J. "Bad Feelings in Public: Rhetoric, Affect, and Emotion." *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 18.1 (Spring 2015): 161-175.

Raphael, Linda Schermer. *Narrative Skepticism: Moral Agency and Representations of Consciousness in Fiction*. Farleigh Dickinson University Press, 2001.

"Reactionary, n. and adj." *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, March 2020, www.oed.com/view/Entry/158839. Accessed 4 April 2020.

Reber, Dierdra. *Coming to Our Senses: Affect and an Order of Things for Global Culture*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2016.

Recktenwald, Horst Claus. "An Adam Smith Renaissance Anno 1976? The Bicentenary Output – A Reappraisal of His Scholarship." *Journal of Economic Literature* 16.1 (March 1978): 56-83.

Redding, Saunders. *To Make a Poet Black*. Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1945.

Riffaterre, Michael. "Descriptive Imagery." *Yale French Studies* 61 (1981): 107-125.

Ritzenberg, Aaron. *The Sentimental Touch: The Language of Feeling in the Age of Managerialism*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2013.

Robbins, Bruce. *The Beneficiary*. Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2017.

---. "Modernism and Literary Realism: Response." *Realism and Representation: Essays on the Problem of Realism in Relation to Science, Literature, and Culture*. Ed. George Levine. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993. 225-31.

Robinson, Marilynne. *Absence of Mind: The Dispelling of Inwardness from the Modern Myth of the Self*. New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2010.

---. *The Death of Adam: Essays on Modern Thought*. New York: Picador, 1998.

---. *Gilead: A Novel*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2004.

---. *Home: A Novel*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008.

---. *Housekeeping: A Novel*. York: Picador, 1980.

---. *Lila: A Novel*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2014.

---. *What Are We Doing Here? Essays*. York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2018.

---. *When I Was a Child I Read Books: Essays*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2010.

Robotham, Don. *Our Struggles*. Kingston: Workers' Liberation League, 1975.

Rollert, John Paul. Rev. of *Between the World and Me*. *The Atlantic*, 28 September 2015, www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2015/09/between-the-world-and-me-empathy-is-a-privilege/407647/. Accessed 1 October 2015.

- Rosen, David and Aaron Santesso. *The Watchman in Pieces: Surveillance, Literature, and Liberal Personhood*. New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2013.
- Rosenthal, Debra J. "The Sentimental Appeal to Salvific Paternity in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and *Moby-Dick*." *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 56.2 (Summer 2014): 135-147.
- Ryn, Claes G. *Will, Imagination, and Reason: Babbitt, Croce and the Problem of Reality*. New York: Transaction Publishers, 1997.
- Sallaz, Jeffrey J. *Labor, Economy, and Society*. Cambridge: Polity, 2013.
- Sánchez-Eppler, Karen. "Bodily Bonds: The Intersecting Rhetorics of Feminism and Abolition." *Representations* No. 24 Spec. Iss. *America Reconstructed, 1840-1940* (Autumn 1988): 28-59.
- Sandweiss, Martha A. "Uptown Girls: 'Miss Anne in Harlem,' by Carla Kaplan." *New York Times* 20 September 2013. Accessed 1 February 2016.
- Satter, Beryl. *Family Properties: Race, Real Estate, and the Exploitation of Black Urban America*. New York: Metropolitan Books, 2009.
- Scheper, Jeanne. "The New Negro Flâneuse in Nella Larsen's *Quicksand*." *African American Review* 42.3/4 (2008): 679-695.
- Schjeldahl, Peter. "Mortality and the Old Masters." *The New Yorker* 6 April 2020, www.newyorker.com/magazine/2020/04/13/mortality-and-the...0c6ee7ee137361f24d0bba6b083de&esrc=Auto_Subs&utm_term=TNY_Daily. Accessed 6 April 2020.
- Schuller, Kyla. *The Biopolitics of Feeling: Race, Sex, and Science in the Nineteenth Century*. Raleigh, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2018.
- . "Specious Bedfellows: Ethnicity, Animality, and the Intimacy of Slaughter in *Moby-Dick*." *Leviathan: A Journal of Melville Studies* 12.3 (Oct. 2010): 3-20.
- Schultz, Elizabeth., "The Sentimental Subtext of *Moby-Dick*: Melville's Response to the 'World of Woe,'" *ESQ* 42 (First Quarter 1996), 29-49.
- Scott, David. "The Temporality of Generations: Dialogue, Tradition, Criticism." *New Literary History* 45.2 (2014): 157-181.
- Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. *Epistemology of the Closet*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990.
- . *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity*. Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2003.
- Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky and Adam Frank, eds. *Shame and its Sisters: A Silvan Tomkins Reader*. Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1995.

- Sen, Amartya. *On Ethics and Economics*. New York: Blackwell, 1987.
- "Sentiment, n." *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, March 2020, www.oed.com/view/Entry/176056. Accessed 15 March 2020.
- Shakespeare, William. *Hamlet*. Ed. Cyrus Hoy. New York: Norton, 1992.
- . *King Lear. The Riverside Shakespeare*. 2nd ed. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1997. 1297-1354.
- Sielke, Sabine. *Reading Rape: The Rhetoric of Sexual Violence in American Literature and Culture, 1790-1990*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002.
- Silverman, Debra B. "Nella Larsen's *Quicksand*: Untangling the Webs of Exoticism." *African American Review* 27.4 (1993): 599-614.
- Skinner, Gillian. *Sensibility and Economics in the Novel, 1740-1800: The Price of a Tear*. New York: St. Martin's, 1999.
- Slotkin, Richard. *Regeneration Through Violence*. Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1973.
- Smith, Adam. *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. 1759. New York: Penguin Books, 2009.
- . *The Wealth of Nations*. 1776. New York: Penguin Books, 1974.
- Smith, Chris "Central Park Revisited." *New York Magazine*. 21 October 2002, nymag.com/nymetro/news/crimelaw/features/n_7836/. Accessed 20 August 2017.
- Smith, Valerie. "Split Affinities: The Case of Interracial Rape." *Conflicts in Feminism*. Eds. Marianne Hirsch and Evelyn Fox Keller. New York: Routledge, 1990. 271-287.
- Smith, William S. *Democracy and Imperialism: Irving Babbitt and Warlike Democracies*. Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2019.
- Soni, Vivasvan. "A New Passion for Enlightenment." *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 48.2 (2015): 239-245.
- . *Mourning Happiness: Narrative and the Politics of Modernity*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2010.
- Soyinka, Wole. *Myth, Literature and the African World*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978.
- Spillers, Hortense J. "The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual: A Post-Date." *boundary 2* 21.3 (1994): 65-116.

- Spingarn, Adena. "When 'Uncle Tom' Became an Insult." *The Root: Black News, Opinions, Politics and Culture*. 17 May 2010, www.theroot.com/when-uncle-tom-became-an-insult-1790879561. Accessed 11 March 2020.
- Stelmach, Kathryn. "From Text to Tableau: Ekphrastic Enchantment in *Mrs. Dalloway* and *To The Lighthouse*." *Studies in the Novel* 38.3 (Fall 2006): 304-326.
- Stevens, Jason. "Introduction." *This Life, This World: New Essays on Marilynne Robinson's Housekeeping, Gilead, and Home*. 1-23.
- Stewart, Ann Marie. *Ravishing Restoration: Aphra Behn, Violence, and Comedy*. Susquehanna University Press, 2010.
- Stoff, Michael. "Claude McKay and the Cult of Primitivism." *The Harlem Renaissance Remembered*. Ed. Arna Bontemps. New York: Dodd, 1972. 124-46.
- Story, Ralph D. "Patronage and the Harlem Renaissance: You Get What You Pay For." *CLA Journal* 32 (1989): 284-295.
- Stout, Andrew. "'A Little Willingness to See': Sacramental Vision in Marilynne Robinson's *Housekeeping* and *Gilead*." *Religion and the Arts* 18 (2014): 571-590.
- Stowe, Harriet Beecher. *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. New York: Modern Library, 2001.
- Stringer, Dorothy. *Not Even Past: Race, Historical Trauma, and Subjectivity in Faulkner, Larsen, and Van Vechten*. Bronx, New York: Fordham University Press, 2009.
- Summers, Martin. *Manliness and Its Discontents: The Black Middle Class and the Transformation of Masculinity, 1900-1930*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004.
- "supplejack, n." *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, June 2017, www.oed.com/view/Entry/194622. Accessed 18 October 2017.
- Swift, Simon. "Stoicism and Romantic Literature." *The Routledge Handbook of the Stoic Tradition*. Ed. John Sellars. London: Routledge, 2016. 303-318.
- Swinth, Kirsten. *Feminism's Forgotten Fight: The Unfinished Struggle for Work and Family*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2018.
- Tagirova, Tatiana. "'What is Art?': Leo Tolstoy in the Writings of Claude McKay." *Critical Perspectives on Caribbean Literature and Culture*. Eds. Dorsía Smith, Tatiana Tagirova, and Suzanna Engman. Newcastle, United Kingdom: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010. 88-101.
- Tambe, Ashwini. "Did Trump's presidency trigger the movement against sexual harassment?" *Salon*, 30 November 2017, www.salon.com/2017/11/30/has-trumps-presidency-triggered-the-movement-against-sexual-harassment_partner/. Accessed 20 September 2017.

- Tanner, Laura E. “‘Looking Back from the Grave’: Sensory Perception and the Anticipation of Absence in Marilynne Robinson’s *Gilead*.” *Contemporary Literature*. 48.2 (Summer 2007): 227-252.
- Tate, Claudia. “Desire and Death in *Quicksand* by Nella Larsen.” *American Literary History* 7.2 (1995): 234-260.
- Taylor, Charles. *A Secular Age*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007.
- Teichgraeber III, Richard. “Rethinking Das Adam Smith Problem.” *The Journal of British Studies* 20 (1981): 106-123.
- Terrell, Mary Church. “The Progress of Colored Women.” *Black Political Thought: From David Walker to the Present*. Ed. Sherrow O. Pinder. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2020. 220-227.
- Thoreau, Henry David. *Walden*. 1854. Boston: Beacon Press, 2004.
- Todd, Janet. *Sensibility: An Introduction*. London: Methuen, 1986.
- Tóibín, Colm. “Oscar Wilde’s De Profundis – One of the Greatest Love Letters Ever Written.” *The Guardian* 26 August 2016, www.theguardian.com/books/2016/aug/26/oscar-wilde-de-profundis-greatest-love-letter.
- Tomlinson, Barbara. *Feminism and Affect at the Scene of Argument: Beyond the Trope of the Angry Feminist*. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Temple University Press, 2010.
- Tompkins, Jane. *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction, 1790–1860*. New York: Oxford UP, 1985.
- . “Sentimental Power: *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* and the Politics of Literary History.” 1978. *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. New York: Norton, 2017.
- Tocqueville, Alexis de. *Democracy in America*. 1835. Trans. Henry Reeve. Vol. 2. Urbana, Illinois: Project Gutenberg. 2006-2013. Accessed 10 April 2020, <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/816/816-h/816-h.htm>.
- Trapp, Rodney. “Whose Renaissance Was It Really: Black Patronage of the 1920s and 1930s.” *The American University Graduate Review* 5 (1993): 94-100.
- Trilling, Lionel. *Sincerity and Authenticity*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1971.
- Trouillot, Michel-Rolph. “Coffee Planters and Slaves in the Antilles: The Impact of a Secondary Crop,” in *Cultivation and Culture: Labor and the Shaping of Slave Life in the Americas*, eds. Ira Berlin and Philip D. Morgan. Richmond, Virginia: University of Virginia Press, 1993. 124-137.

- Tufekci, Zeynep. "Online Social Change: Easy to Organize, Hard to Win." TED. October 2014. Lecture, www.ted.com/talks/zeynep_tufekci_online_social_change_easy_to_organize_hard_to_win/transcript?language=en. Accessed 27 March 2020.
- Twain, Mark. *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. New York: Penguin Books, 2003.
- Ulin, David L. "Review: Marilynne Robinson's grace shines through in 'Lila.'" Reivew of Lila, by Marilynne Robinson. *Los Angeles Times*, 2 October 2014, www.latimes.com/books/jacketcopy/la-ca-jc-marilynne-robinson-20141005-story.html. Accessed 29 March 2020.
- Underwood, Ted. *Why Literary Periods Mattered: Historical Contrast and the Prestige of English Studies*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2013.
- Vanderheyden, Jennifer. *The Function of the Dream and the Body in Diderot's Work*. New York: Peter Lang, 2004.
- Van Mol, Kay R. "Primitivism and Intellect in Toomer's *Cane* and McKay's *Banana Bottom*: The Need for an Integrated Black Consciousness." *Negro American Literature Forum* 10.2 (1976): 48-52.
- Vermillion, Mary. "Reembodying the Self: Representations of Rape in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* and *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*." *biography* 15.3 (1992): 243-260.
- Virdi, Jyotika. "Reverence, Rape—and Then Revenge: Hindi Cinema's 'Woman's Film.'" *Killing Women: The Visual Culture of Gender and Violence*. Eds. Annette Burfoot and Susan Lord. Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 2006.
- Wagner, Johanna. "(Be)Longing in *Quicksand*: Framing Kinship and Desire More Queerly." *College Literature* 39.3 (2012): 129-159.
- Walker, Maxine E. "'How Do You Read It?' Rowan Williams, Marilynne Robinson and Mapping a Postmodern Reading of the Good Samaritan Parable." *Journal of Anglican Studies* 12.2 (9 September 2013): 203-225.
- Walls, Charles A. *Acts of the Imagination: Racial Sentimentalism and the Modern American Novel*. 2005. Columbia University, PhD dissertation.
- Wall, Cheryl A. "Passing for What? Aspects of Identity in Nella Larsen's Novels." *Black American Literature Forum* 20.1-2 (1986): 97-111.
- Wanzo, Rebecca. *The Suffering Will Not Be Televised: African American Women and Sentimental Political Storytelling*. Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 2009.
- Warhol, Robyn, R. *Gendered Interventions: Narrative Discourse in the Victorian Novel*. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1989.

- Warren, Kenneth W. "The Afterlife of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*." *The Cambridge Companion to Harriet Beecher Stowe*. Ed. Cindy Weinstein. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004. 219-234.
- . *Black and White Strangers: Race and American Literary Realism*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993.
- . *What Was African American Literature?* Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2011.
- Washington, Booker T. *My Larger Education*. New York: Doubleday, Page, 1911. Watt, Ian. *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957.
- Weinbaum, Alys Eve. *Wayward Reproductions: Genealogies of Race and Nation in Transatlantic Modern Thought*. Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2004.
- Weinstein, Jack Russell. "My Understanding of Smith's Impartial Spectator." *Econ Journal Watch* 13.2 (May 2016): 351-358.
- Weisenburger, Steven C. "Errant Narrative and 'The Color Purple.'" *The Journal of Narrative Technique* 19.3 (Fall 1989): 257-275.
- Wilde, Oscar. *De Profundis, The Ballad of Reading Gaol, and Other Writings*. Hertfordshire, England: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1999.
- Williams, Anne Patricia. "Description and Tableau in the Eighteenth-Century British Sentimental Novel." *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 8.4 (July 1996): 465-484.
- Williams, Jonathan C. "Deathly Sentimentalism: Sarah Fielding, Henry Mackenzie." *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 30.2 (Winter 2017-18): 175-193.
- Williams, Raymond. "Liberal." *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*. London: Fontana Press, 1983. 179-181.
- . *Marxism and Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977.
- Winston, Joe. "Emotion, Reason and Moral Engagement in Drama." *Research in Drama Education: The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance* 1.2 (1996): 189-200.
- Withun, David. "W. E. B. Du Bois and Irving Babbitt: A Comparative Evaluation of their Views on Education, Leadership, and Society." *Phylon* 54.1 (Summer 2017): 25-42.
- Woolf, Virginia. *A Room of One's Own*. 1929. Ed. Mark Hussey. New York: Harcourt, 2005.
- Wordsworth, William. "Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*." *Wordsworth and Coleridge Lyrical Ballads, 1798 and 1802*. Ed. Fiona Stafford. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.
- . "The Prelude." 1805. *Bartleby*, www.bartleby.com/236/68.html. Accessed 25 January 2020.

- . *The White Doe of Rylstone*. 1815. *Bartleby*, www.bartleby.com/221/0511.html. Accessed 25 January 2020.
- Wright, Richard. *Native Son and How "Bigger" Was Born*. 1940. New York: Harper Perennial, 1993.
- Wyman, Margaret. "The Rise of the Fallen Woman." *American Quarterly* 3.2 (Summer 1951): 167-177.
- Xavier, Silvia. "Crosstown Jakes in 1920s Manhattan: Racial Formations in John Dos Passos's *Manhattan Transfer* and Claude McKay's *Home to Harlem*." *Modern Fiction Studies* 54.4 (2008): 715-743.
- Yanacek, Holly. "Empathy." *Keywords Project*. 2011-2016. University of Pittsburgh, Jesus College, University of Cambridge, and *Critical Quarterly*, keywords.pitt.edu/keywords_defined/empathy.html. Accessed April 21, 2014.
- Yates, Ruth L. Review of *Quicksand*. *Pittsburgh Courier*, 26 May 1928, sect. 2, p. 8.
- Yeats, William Butler. "An Acre of Grass." *Collected Poems*. New York: Macmillan, 1956.
- . "Ego Dominus Tuus." *Bartleby*, www.bartleby.com/148/33.html. Accessed 1 May 2020.
- Zamalin, Alex and Daniel Skinner. "Gilead's Two Models of Action against Racial Injustice." *A Political Companion to Marilynne Robinson*. Eds. Shannon L. Mariotti and Joseph H. Lane, Jr. Lexington, Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 2016. 91-111.
- Zomorodi, Manoush. "IRL Online." *TED Radio Hour* 20 March 2020, www.npr.org/programs/ted-radio-hour/818298800/irl-online?showDate=2020-03-20. Accessed 20 March 2020.